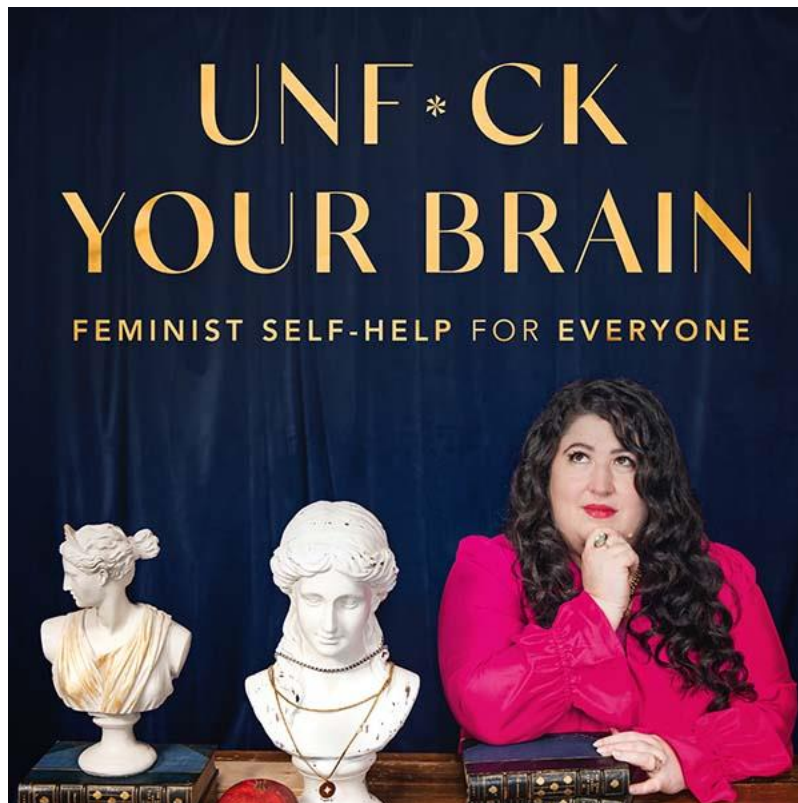


UFYB 338: Why It Doesn't Matter If Your Thoughts Are True (Feminist Mindset Principles Series Ep 4)



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

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UFYB 338: Why It Doesn't Matter If Your Thoughts Are True (Feminist Mindset Principles Series Ep 4)

You've probably heard of the idea that not all of your thoughts are true or that you don't have to believe everything you think. But I want to take it one step further. I want to flip the assumption that any of our thoughts are true. And we're thinking, what if they might all be lies or they might all be wrong? And if so, then how do we decide what to think? That's what I'm going to get into in this episode. Hold on to your metaphorical hats because it is a wild existential ride.

Welcome to *UnF*ck Your Brain*. I'm your host, Kara Loewentheil, Master Certified Coach and Founder of the *School of New Feminist Thought*. I'm here to help you turn down your anxiety, turn up your confidence and create a life on your own terms, one that you're truly excited to live. Let's go.

Hello my fine feathered friends and welcome to episode four of the Feminist Mindset Principles series. In the last few episodes, we've set the stage for why it's important to do this mindset work in our own lives and in the context of our current world. We also reviewed the three key premises that the rest of this work builds on, that thoughts create feelings, which drive actions, that thoughts do not have moral value. And that self-compassion is the only way to change thoughts, feelings and behaviors.

If you skipped episode three of the series last week, go back and listen. It's possibly the most important episode of the entire podcast, the whole podcast, all 338 plus episodes.

So today we're going to start moving into actually breaking down how our minds work and how the coaching model can help us change them. So let's start off with a premise that absolutely blew my mind when I really let it sink in. There is actually no reason to assume that any thought you have is true. Some people will say things like, "Don't believe everything you think." You

[UnF*ck Your Brain with Kara Loewentheil](#)

UFYB 338: Why It Doesn't Matter If Your Thoughts Are True (Feminist Mindset Principles Series Ep 4)

see that on Instagram a lot, or, "Not all your thoughts are true." That's all correct.

But I really prefer to formulate it this way because it flips the presumption. Saying, "Not everything you think is true", implies that most of what you think is true, or that the default assumption should be that your thoughts are true. But I think it's so much more powerful to flip that assumption and assume that any given thought is quite possibly not true. What if all your thoughts were up for debate? What if none of them had presumptive legitimacy just because they exist in your brains?

Really let that sink in. Right now you probably assume your thoughts are true. And then you try to argue with or convince your brain logically to let go of some of those beliefs. And one reason that's so hard is that the default assumption is still that your thoughts in general are mostly true or probably true, or the default assumption is they are true. And you just want to pick out some of the bad apples.

But this really works against you in thought work because it means you're fighting this uphill battle of trying to convince yourself that a certain thought is one of the bad ones or the exceptions. And then your brain tells you all of its evidence for why, no, no, this is one of the good ones. This is one of the true thoughts. We should keep this one. It's sort of like if somebody has a huge collection of knickknacks and you start trying to argue with them that they should just throw out three or four, they're going to fight for those.

It really changes the game if you decide to believe that actually, it's possible that none of your thoughts are true, that all of your thoughts are up for questioning, debate, consideration, being kept or being discarded. I know that's a radical statement. So to support it, let me back up and

[UnF*ck Your Brain with Kara Loewentheil](#)

UFYB 338: Why It Doesn't Matter If Your Thoughts Are True (Feminist Mindset Principles Series Ep 4)

explain how your brain comes up with thoughts in the first place. There are two important things to understand here.

First, your brain is not an objective observer. Your brain is not just reporting the weather. All the info your brain gets from the world comes in through different senses, your eyes, your ears, your nose, your touch, all your different senses. And then your brain decides what to do with it. All the information that you have from the world got filtered through your brain. And your brain looked at each and every piece and decided whether to bring into conscious awareness, whether to ignore it, whether to file it away for later, etc.

We have a set of known cognitive biases like confirmation bias, where we literally only see or acknowledge information that supports our existing beliefs. This is well studied and well documented. Your brain literally rejects any evidence or information from the world that doesn't match its pre-existing beliefs. So what are those pre-existing beliefs, where do they come from? You learn them from society as you're growing up. When you're born all you know how to do is cry and nurse more or less and everything else you have to learn.

So I talk about this all the time so I'm not going to belabor it here. But you learn everything you know from society, what food is safe to eat, how clothes work. What genders there are and what kind of people those genders are supposed to be, who can marry who, what is a parent like, what is a child like, everything. You learn everything from society. What are the holidays? What matters in the society? What does social status and rank come from? Everything.

And I talk on the podcast all the time about the many beliefs that society has socialized people who are socialized as women to believe about

[UnF*ck Your Brain with Kara Loewentheil](#)

UFYB 338: Why It Doesn't Matter If Your Thoughts Are True (Feminist Mindset Principles Series Ep 4)

themselves in the world, that are problematic and that get in our way. So that means that socialization sets the belief filters on your brain. Those are the default parameters that your brain assumes to be true, the premises it assumes to be true. Beliefs, like women, should always be kind and nice and helpful, or men are better at money, or if you are not married, there's something wrong with you.

Your brain has these kinds of belief filters. And then your brain is always filtering reality to match those premises, to match the beliefs you have. Some of them came from society. Some of them came from your family. As you get older, you may replace some of the filters on purpose with what you want to believe. But your brain is always filtering reality to match those premises. Your brain is not objectively observing reality and just giving you information.

So I have a thought experiment for you to prove this. But first a quick announcement. Okay, so let's talk about this thought experiment. Let's think about a society very different from ours. Let's imagine you grew up in ancient Greece. And growing up, you were taught that there were multiple different gods and each of them were responsible for what happened to you in different areas of your life.

So you were taught to believe that these gods were the reason that everything in the world happens. That sickness or disability could be signs of the gods being angry with you, that wealth or beauty or good fortune were signs of the gods being in favor of you. That the weather was an indication of the gods' moods. That you could impact the outcomes in your life through rituals and sacrifices at the various temples of the different gods.

UFYB 338: Why It Doesn't Matter If Your Thoughts Are True (Feminist Mindset Principles Series Ep 4)

If that was your belief system, that's your belief filter, then your brain would have interpreted everything that happened through that belief system. Anything that happened to you, your brain would interpret as being a sign of a god's favor or disfavor. And you would spend all your time obsessing about what the gods thought of you and how to implore or persuade or bribe them to intervene in your favor. This seems like a silly belief system now to many of us, but that's the exact point. To most of us now, that entire world view is just wrong, it was a lie, it was made-up, it was incorrect.

And yet that world view dictated every experience those people had and how they interpreted everything. Someone they love getting sick and dying, falling in love, a battle that didn't work out, a flood. Anything that happened to them, they processed through that filter and they believed that it was giving them information about their relationship with the gods, about themselves and what the gods thought about them.

So when I say it's all made up, I really mean that. It's all made-up. Our thoughts are all made up. Our premises and beliefs about the world makes sense to us and they seem like the height of philosophy and knowledge and science. But literally every generation has thought that. The Greeks thought that, medieval Europeans thought that. Every human era, the people in it believed that everybody in the past was silly and outdated, and now we're objectively correct.

So at a certain point, if you're being at all rational about it, you have to realize and recognize that while we may have made some factual progress on things like now we have antibiotics. It's also the height of hubris to think that we of the 12,000 generations of homo sapiens who have existed, are the ones who got it right for sure this time. And if we can be so wrong as a society about fundamental things like how the world works, then we as individuals can also be very wrong about what we think and believe.

[UnF*ck Your Brain with Kara Loewentheil](#)

UFYB 338: Why It Doesn't Matter If Your Thoughts Are True (Feminist Mindset Principles Series Ep 4)

Don't try to force yourself to believe that, it's a big ask, just let it kind of wander around your brain a little, turn it over, contemplate it. Why is this a helpful idea to contemplate? Because it shifts the presumption that your thoughts are true to a presumption that a thought is just a thought, it's just a sentence in our minds that may or may not be true. There's sometimes often really no way of even knowing whether it's true or not. No one could tell you if it was true.

If you can reset your default belief about your brain to be that it produces thoughts like a computer automatically spinning out randomly recombined words, and those string of words have no particular validity just because they came out of your brain. It completely changes your relationship to your mind. Your thoughts become something to observe and be curious about, but not something to let control your emotions or your actions or your life, and not something to default even believe.

The point of this approach is not to become obsessed with proving whether your thoughts are true or not or to second guess yourself and use, well, my thought might not be true to undercut yourself. Because I really actually want to argue something even more radical, which is that it doesn't really matter if your thoughts are true.

Think about the Greek gods example. Those people would have had so much proof for us that their beliefs were true. They would have unconsciously cherry picked the evidence to tell us all about the times that they did do the ritual and they did do the sacrifice, and then the good fortune came and that when they didn't, the bad fortune came. They would have called all of that proof. And we similarly think we have a lot of proof. But can we really, truly objectively prove that most of our thoughts are true?

UFYB 338: Why It Doesn't Matter If Your Thoughts Are True (Feminist Mindset Principles Series Ep 4)

After all, no one has been able to prove or disprove the existence of the monotheistic god a lot of people believe in today in a way that everyone accepts. Atheists accept the proof that he doesn't, religious people don't. Religious people accept the proof that he does, atheists don't.

So I want you to consider the idea that you cannot objectively prove forever and ever in a way that everyone will always agree that a given thought of yours is true or not true. Especially because these thoughts are usually not things like, hey, well, this vaccine prevents smallpox. That's something that can be proven to a pretty solid consensus using our current models.

But most of our thoughts that we are sure are true and that we cling to as true, our thoughts like I am this kind of person or that kind of person, someone else is this kind of person or that kind of person. This outcome is available to me or it isn't. My life will end up this way or that way. I have to have this or that feeling. I should be this way or that way. Other people should be this way or that way. I would feel differently if this person or circumstance would change. It's morally good or morally bad to be this way or do this thing. That person is wrong and I'm right or I am wrong and that person is right.

These are things we can never get some kind of universal objective proof of. And these are the kinds of thoughts that cause most of our emotional suffering. So I want to suggest that instead of considering whether your thoughts are true, you consider if they are helpful. Since our thoughts create our emotions, which motivate our behavior and our behavior influences the outcomes in our life, there's actually a pretty clear method you can use to see if a thought is producing a helpful outcome.

We don't just want to ask your brain, "Hey, is this all good and helpful?" Your brain thinks everything it does is helpful. And it still thinks everything it

UFYB 338: Why It Doesn't Matter If Your Thoughts Are True (Feminist Mindset Principles Series Ep 4)

says is true. So instead, we want to apply a test, a calculation, an analytic process that helps us figure that out. And that's what I'll be teaching you how to do over the next few episodes so stay tuned.

If you're loving what you're learning on the podcast, you have got to come check out the Feminist Self Help Society. It's our newly revamped community and classroom where you get individual help to better apply these concepts to your life, along with a library of next level blow your mind, coaching tools and concepts that I just can't fit in a podcast episode.

It's also where you can hang out, get coached, and nerd out about all things thought work and feminist mindset with other podcast listeners just like you and me. It's my favorite place on Earth and it will change your life, I guarantee it. Come join us at www.unfuckyourbrain.com/society. I can't wait to see you there.