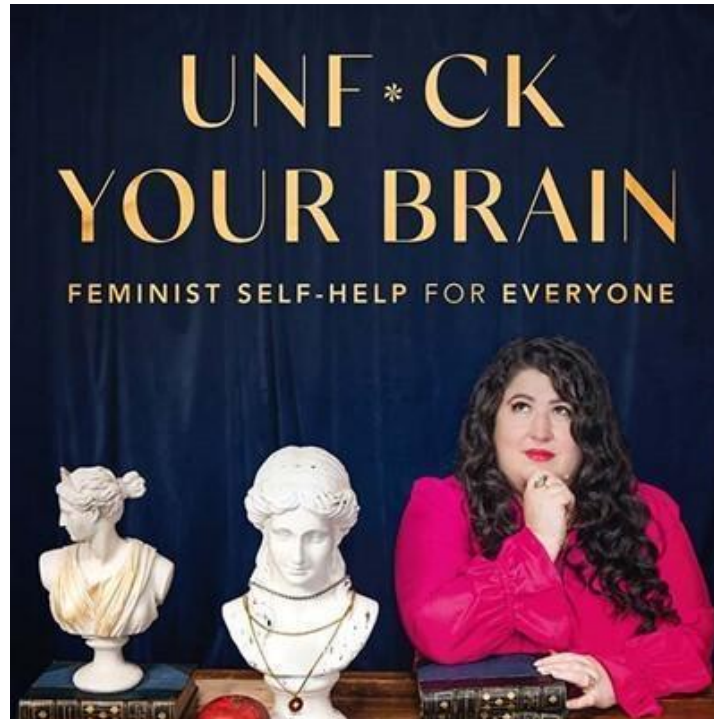


UFYB 1: Ever Feel Like a Bad Feminist?



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

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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. Are we all coping okay with the transition? I know last week's podcast might have thrown some of you for a loop. I hope we're all doing okay with our thoughts and feelings. Today I want to talk about this phrase I hear a lot from my clients and my friends and my colleagues. I hear it over coffee. I hear it on conference panels. I overhear it on the subway. Hear it everywhere. And that phrase is bad feminist. I feel like a bad feminist, but dot, dot, dot. Maybe I'm a bad feminist, but dot, dot, dot. And bad feminist is always followed by a confession that in some way or another, the speaker's feelings, actions and beliefs don't match up.

Maybe it makes me a bad feminist, but I just really want a boyfriend so I don't have to go to family functions alone. I feel like a bad feminist, but I don't want to seem too pushy if I ask for more responsibility at work. I worry I'm a bad feminist, but I never say anything when the director of my department makes sexist jokes, because I don't want to get on his bad side. Does it make me a bad feminist if I want to change my name when I get married?

There are lots of reasons that women give for not always feeling empowered to act on their beliefs and most of these are external circumstances like what other people will think or the professional consequences or the social pressure. But ultimately the real conflict comes down to two mental processes. Number one, the first one is the process that causes this disconnect. And then number two is why you feel bad about it.

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Let's go in order. See, this podcast is still written by a lawyer who likes to go very methodically through her argument. Number one, the reason that your politics and your actions don't always match up is because of the way you are thinking and feeling. It's all very well to believe that women should feel empowered to stand up to sexist comments for instance, but in the moment, whatever you're thinking and feeling about the situation will easily overpower your values. For instance, if you have the thought, I should say something about that blonde joke, it's sexist and demeaning, you'll want to say something. But if you also have the thought, if I say something it's going to be awkward and people will think I'm a bitch. It's going to create the feeling of fear and that fear is going to be what determines your actions because principles are no match for fear for most of us most of the time. Most of us are not everyday heroes before we learn to manage our minds, at least.

If you want to be able to match your beliefs and your actions more often, you have to learn how to recognize and change the thoughts that are causing the disconnect. When we say, "Well rationally I know X, but I feel Y," we're actually misunderstanding what's going on. The reason your feelings and your thoughts don't match isn't because they're different. It's not one feeling and one thought. What's really going on is you have two thoughts and they contradict each other or if not contradict each other directly, they argue for different outcomes. One thought is that joke was sexist and it's fucked up that men still make those jokes in professional settings. I should say something so they know it's not okay. But your other thought is, what if they think I'm bitchy or uptight if I say something? That second thought creates the anxiety or the fear and that anxiety or fear is stronger than the principle in the moment so you let it pass.

Remember thoughts are sentences in your mind and they create feelings which are sensations in your body. When you say, "I just feel like I'll be perceived negatively if I say something," that's not actually a feeling. In English, we put the word feeling in front of that when we talk, but it's not a

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feeling. It's a thought. It's a sentence in your mind. When you say, "I think X, but I feel Y. I think I should be empowered to bargain for a raise, but I feel afraid to ask." What's really going on is that you think X and you think Y. You think you should feel empowered to ask for a raise and you think that my boss might think I'm selfish and pushy if I do. And in the moment, the emotion that Y creates the emotion, the fear you feel when you think, my boss will think I'm pushy and selfish, that emotion is strong and it wins out over the thought you have X, that you should be empowered.

This is the most math I've done since I learned algebra. X and Y. But you see what I'm saying. When you say, "I think X, but I feel Y." No, you think X and you think Y. You have two different thoughts. They would produce two different feelings and two different outcomes but your problem is that one of those thoughts and feelings and actions is a much stronger loop than the other one. One of those was caused by years of gender socialization and your family socialization and your own self critical talk. One of those is years deep. Been going on for a long time and it's got a lot of emotional resonance. And the other one you probably came to in your teens at the earliest and it's not as deeply encoded. The regressive one, the one where you worry about what other people will think about you or you worry about fear or anxiety or stress, that one is going to be stronger.

That's why you experience this. Now, why do you feel bad about it? Why do you find yourself feeling guilty and wondering if you're a good enough feminist? The answer is that the same part of your brain that makes you afraid to speak up in the moment, also criticizes you for not doing so, because brains are super fun. They're always out to get you. People of all genders act in ways that aren't always in concordance with their beliefs. It's just part of being a human. But high achieving feminist women tend to hold themselves to unrealistic standards and then they beat themselves up when they don't meet them. We've talked about this dynamic before in your work life on the podcast and it's true in every area of your life. The guilt you

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feel about maybe being a bad feminist quote unquote is self-imposed and it comes from two different sources.

Number one, having an unrealistic standard of perfection for yourself and sort of ideological purity. And number two, not understanding how the thoughts and feeling process that I just explained in the podcast works. When you don't understand what's actually causing your conflict, it's easy for your brain to make it mean something about you like you're not really principled or you're weak or you're selfish. When you have that self-critical soundtrack we talked about a few weeks ago, your brain is always ready to rush in with that soundtrack to explain anything you do by attributing it to a negative part of your personality. Your brain tells you're not principled, you're weak, you're selfish. Then on top of feeling this disconnect between your beliefs and your actions, you also criticize yourself for it and you make it mean something negative about you as a person.

And listen, maybe you've never said you feel like a bad feminist, but have you ever found yourself saying, "I know rationally I shouldn't feel this way, but I do." If so, that's the exact same issue. When you think one way and feel another, what's happening is actually that you have a second thought. What you're calling the way you feel is actually a second way you're thinking and those thoughts are in conflict. And not only are they in conflict, but one of them is winning.

What's the solution to feeling like a bad feminist? You're going to be shocked people, it's managing your mind. I know, who could have guessed that? But there are a couple of different ways to do it. Number one, start by noticing the ways you are judging yourself for having conflicting thoughts and feelings. It's natural that your feminist principles conflict sometimes with the social conditioning that has taught you to go along, to not ruffle feathers, not to seem too assertive, not to upset men, especially men in power. And when you think about it, the fact that those social norms exist

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are the very reason that we had to develop feminist principles so it's not surprising that those social norms are really embedded in your psyche.

The good news is they aren't some mysterious force you can't escape. They're just thoughts. You have thoughts that you came up with about equality and respect and then you have thoughts that society taught you to think about subordination and not rocking the boat. It's just two sets of thoughts. You still have the old ones because you added the feminist thoughts on top without ever actually excavating and discarding the old set of thoughts. First things first, give yourself a break. You're not a bad feminist. You're not weak or unprincipled. There's nothing wrong with you. You just have two competing sets of thoughts and no one has ever taught you how to stop thinking the old thoughts and think new ones on purpose instead and actually believe the new ones and practice them enough so that the old ones disappear. Give yourself a break.

In addition, you always get to decide which kinds of thoughts you want to work on. To start, you could always choose to work on your thoughts about being bothered by the sexist joke if you wanted to, that's an option that's available to you. And I actually think it's a good first step in the sense that you can work on releasing your anger and outrage while keeping your principled objection. I'll talk more about this in future podcasts, but it's often useful to get to a calm and neutral emotional state so you can strategize. Managing your mind does not mean that you give up caring about whether someone makes sexist jokes, but it does mean you learn to manage your thoughts so that you don't feel outraged, disempowered or attacked, all of which are really stressful feelings and create confusion and distraction in your brain. They do not lead to clear thinking or good maneuvering.

Whether you go through step one or not, whether you decide to work on your thoughts to get yourself to a neutral feeling state, step two is to work on the thoughts that make you feel anxious and scared about speaking up. I think this is the most powerful work you can do. Learning to manage your

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mind doesn't mean you have to give up your values or just accept what anyone else says or does. You can actually use thought work to retrain your brain so that you're not so scared of speaking up when something sexist is happening around you. The way you do that is the way you work on any thought.

First, you figure out exactly what you're thinking. You need to get the precise words your brain is saying down on paper. Then you have to figure out what you'd like to believe instead. If your thought is that people might not like you if you speak up, it probably won't work to just think it's important to stand up for my beliefs. You've already been thinking that and it didn't trump the fear so it's not going to help you. But what if you could believe something like out of the other people there, I bet at least half of them are also uncomfortable and would be grateful that I spoke up. That thought actually responds to the fear creating thought and it redirects your brain's attention to the good that you do by speaking up in more concrete terms. And it directs your brain's attention away from the danger that your brain thinks you need to be protected from, which is someone thinking something bad about you. That's what your brain is always trying to protect you from.

Obviously I cannot teach this entire process to each of you personally on this podcast, but that example should give you an idea of what I'm talking about when I say that the way to bridge the gap between how you think and how you feel, what you want to believe and how you end up feeling and acting is to learn to think a different way on purpose. And that is the kind of work that we do in Unf*ck Your Brain. Unf*ck Your Brain is a feminist blueprint to mastering your mind and getting the life you want. Learning how to bridge the gap between your beliefs and your actions is one of the most important tools to learn if you want to actually create the life of your dreams, if you want to go out and get that life that you have thought about.

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All right, my loved ones, my lovely chickens. I will talk to you guys next week.

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.