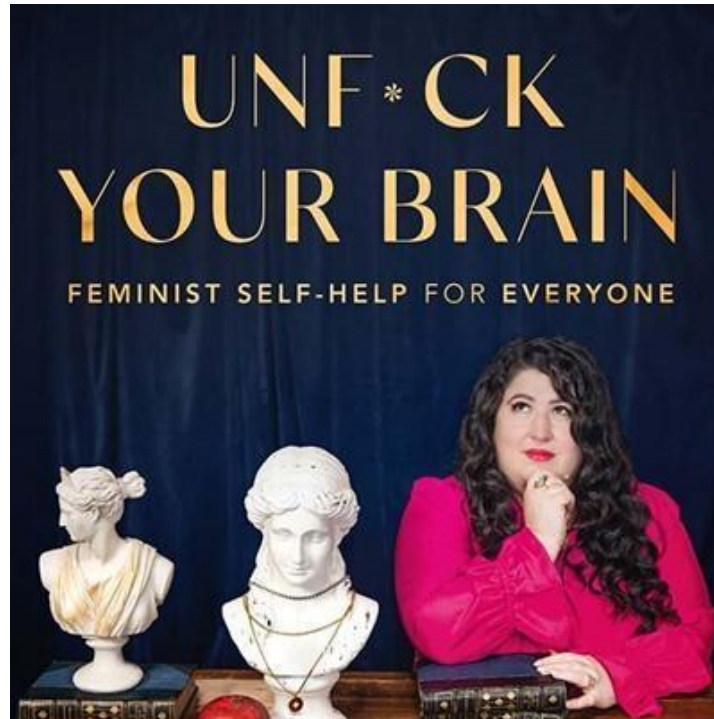


## UFYB 55: Social Anxiety



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Kara Loewentheil**

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

## UFYB 55: Social Anxiety

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 chickens. So, if I sound a little weird, it's because I got a coughing fit of some kind right after I ate dinner, as if I was allergic to something, and I've been coughing for like an hour.

But I'm telling you this because, number one, if I sound weird then that's why. Number two, because I'm scheduled to record the podcast now, and I'm doing it, even though I've been coughing for an hour and it's late at night and I would like to be done with my day, because that's what constraint and commitment means.

It's not about pushing yourself to work all night and feel miserable and burnt out. If I were seriously ill, I, of course, would not do this right now. But a cough is not a reason to not show up and not do the things that I have committed to. So that's what it means to respect your calendar and respect that commitment and constraint that you've created for yourself.

So that's the first thing. The other thing I want to do is I want to ask you guys for a favor. So here's the thing; most of you probably found the podcast by searching for it. Some of you, a friend might have given it to you, but a lot of you searched something, possibly in iTunes or Spotify, or somewhere else. Like, you searched insecurity or anxiety or CBT or feminist or confidence, or whatever you might have searched.

And it used to be that you could put keywords in your iTunes descriptions and they would be searchable. So people could search and find podcasts that were related to their interests. So for whatever reasons, in their infinite

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wisdom, iTunes has changed this, and so now you can have just the title of your podcast and just your name. Those are the only searchable fields.

That means that unless someone's searching *Unf\*ck Your Brain*, which why would anyone search that if they didn't know the name of the podcast or they already know my name, they can't really search and find the podcast. So y'all know this podcast is a labor of love and I do it for free.

Because it's so important to me to reach as many women as possible and teach them that true liberation starts within and that the antidote to patriarchy, in addition to all the social change we want to make, also comes from getting sexist and misogynistic and self-critical thoughts out of our heads by rewiring our brains. That's basically what I teach all the time.

It's so important to me that as many women as possible learn this stuff, and I can't like pay iTunes to mention me more. Like, I can't pay to be higher in the rankings or something, so if people can't search, that's a problem for spreading this work.

And I know that all of you who listen know how powerful it is and want other women to benefit. So I have two requests of you. Number one is to share the podcast. You could send it directly to someone who you think would benefit, or just share it on social media if you don't want to target someone specifically. But share it, let other people know about it, because they're not going to find it just by searching anymore.

The other thing is, you can leave me a rating and a review. This is iTunes-specific. So if you listen on Spotify, don't worry about it; you can still search there. But iTunes is obviously one of the major podcast centers. Like, a lot of people get their podcasts from iTunes, more than half of my downloads are there.

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So if you leave a rating and a review on iTunes, that helps bump the podcast up, so it's more likely that someone will see it. It will just hang out in the suggested category, or the other categories where iTunes tells you about a podcast if you didn't search for it.

So we're at 91 reviews right now. I want to get to 200. So I'm going to keep asking until we get to 200, and then maybe we'll raise the goal next year. But for right now, that's only 110 of you. That's a tiny, tiny fraction of the people listening need to just go leave a rating and a review.

Just think about it like, if you listen to national public radio, any kind of public radio, you know they do pledge drives where they spend a whole day talking about nothing but the pledge and they're like, "If you just pledge, we'll stop talking about it." That's what it's going to be like with the reviews for a little bit. But it's all for a good cause because we want other women to know about this.

Okay, so that's what you've got to do. Here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to teach you about social anxiety. So I'm writing these podcast notes actually, and when I wrote the notes, I was on a work-date with a friend of mine, who is a writer.

And we've been friends online for a while and so we decided to meet in person to have a work-date. And that's totally unremarkable to me, no big deal, but in the past, this would have been a big deal to me.

I would have been really worried and anxious about whether she would like me. I would have been really worried about whether I would like her. I would have been worried that it will be boring or awkward or I would have to stay longer than I wanted. I would have been worried about what she was thinking, about how I looked and what I do for work and how I sound and what I ate around her.

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I would have had so many thoughts creating social anxiety. I just would have had a ton of anxiety. And I know that I'm not alone because so many of you write me emails asking for help with your thoughts and feelings and fears about social gatherings.

And it might be family holidays or cocktail parties or a low-key night at the local bar. No matter what, it has nothing to do with the circumstance. So many of us spend so much of our time in social settings just excruciatingly aware of ourselves and paranoid about how we're being perceived.

So that's what I want to talk about today. So let's start with the basics; social anxiety, the way I'm using it in this podcast, is anxiety you feel before, during, or after socializing. And, like any anxiety, it's caused by your thoughts. And specifically, it's caused by your thoughts about what the other people at the social event are going to think about you.

Even just knowing that can be revelatory for some people. Social anxiety is not mysterious or inexplicable. It's caused by your thoughts and it is almost always caused by thoughts about what other people at the event will think or feel about you. So you are projecting thoughts and imagining that other people at the event will think those thoughts about you, and that creates anxiety for you.

You know, I talk about this a lot on the podcast; that humans are especially primed to worry about social rejection because we evolved in small hunter-gatherer tribes. So if you were an early human, it actually was life or death if other people in the tribe liked you. If they wouldn't share their food with you or they left camp while you were sleeping, you were probably going to die.

So the humans who survived were mostly humans whose brains were very focused on what other people thought of them. So we are all descended from people who spent a lot of time thinking about what other people

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thought about them. We are mostly not descended from the people who didn't give a shit what anyone thought about them.

And this is exacerbated for women because we're taught, from a very young age, that the most important thing for a woman is to be pretty and likable. It's all about what other people think about us. We're taught that women are judged on their social appearance and their social graces and that our value comes from what other people think of us and that it's our job to make other people feel comfortable and enjoy their time and feel good.

This is a lot of responsibility that we take on, right? So it's no surprise that so many women experience social anxiety. But just because we can understand evolutionarily and sociologically why we're taught to think that way, that doesn't mean it's unavoidable.

It's still caused by thoughts. Just because there's an evolutionary or a social predisposition to certain kinds of thoughts, just because you're taught to think that way or your default is to think that way, doesn't mean that your thoughts are unchangeable or that they're necessary or have to happen. It just means we need to understand them in order to change them.

I kind of think that social anxiety, fundamentally, comes down to a version toddler brain. So if you've ever spent time with a toddler, you know they don't totally grasp the concept of separation between themselves and other people.

A toddler thinks that if they cover their eyes, you can't see them because they can't see you, so they think they're invisible. And I think with social anxiety, we are so critical of ourselves that we assume everyone else is thinking about us with the same level of attention and scrutiny and negativity.

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Like, we are always on our own minds and our brains are always cataloging our thoughts, and so we assume that naturally, that's what everyone else is thinking about. So a toddler is like, "I can't see you, you can't see me." And we're like, "I'm thinking about myself and you must be thinking about me too. Because I'm thinking about myself, everyone else must be also."

But we're all doing that. So if there's 10 of us in a room, we're all thinking about ourselves and assuming that the other people are thinking about us. But we're all just thinking about ourselves. Other people are thinking about themselves, not you, just like you're thinking about yourself.

You may think you're thinking about them because you're thinking, "I hope they like me. What do they think about me? Or whatever, but that's not about them; that's about you. That's about what they might think about you. It's still about you.

When you imagine what you fear other people are thinking about you, it actually has nothing to do with them. It's your thoughts about you because, here's the thing, the whole reason you even come up with a thought that you imagine someone else might think about is that your brain already has that thought. It's already in the Rolodex.

Have you ever had a fight with someone and you were just astounded to hear what they thought about a situation or what they thought had happened, what they thought you meant when you said something and it was just totally bizarre and surprising because you'd never imagine that in a million years? That's because you're not actually a wizard who can read other people's minds.

The thoughts that you imagine other people having are just your own thoughts. It's not a coincidence that the thoughts you fear other people might have about you completely match up with your own self-critical

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thoughts. And it's not a coincidence that you never worry they're thinking negative things about the qualities you like about yourself, because you don't think those things are negative.

I was never worried someone would think I was too smart because I think that being smart is a good thing. But if you're someone who believes people shouldn't seem too smart, then you would worry about whether other people think you're smart.

It has nothing to do with whether either of us is truly smart or not. It's just our thoughts about it. I never worried about whether someone would think I was too feminist, and that's totally something that some people could have negative thoughts about if they don't like feminists. But because I liked being a feminist and thought it was great, and still do, I never thought, or never think now, about whether they would think I was too feminist.

So the point is that the things I liked about myself I never worried somebody else would think. And if it ever occurred to me they might think it, I was like, well that's dumb for them. But when I didn't know how to manage my mind, all my social anxiety came from my thoughts where I imagined that other people would be thinking that I was too loud or too much or too fat or too overbearing, because those were the negative thoughts I had about myself.

And the same is true for you; whatever negative thoughts you imagine other people might be having about you, those are just thoughts you already have about yourself. That's how your brain knows to think about them.

People could think anything about you, but you don't sit around thinking, like, "I hope they don't think I'm the lizard prince. I hope they don't think I'm an alien." You don't worry about that, even though someone could totally think that.



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I'm 5ft 2 and I'm never like, "I hope they don't think I'm too tall..." because I don't think I am. So it doesn't even occur to me to imagine they might. What does occur to you is to worry that they have the same negative thoughts about you that you have about you.

So here's the good news; that means that other people are nothing to fear. You have no idea what they're thinking. And even if you did, what they think means something about them, not about you. If you've ever heard the saying, you can be the most delicious peach in the world, and some people just don't like peaches.

Hilariously, both my teacher, who's a life coach, and Dita Von Teese are both credited with saying that. I'm sure other people have too. But it's so true, you could be the best peach in the world and some people don't like peaches. I know that sounds crazy, but it's true. Like my mother does not like peaches, or pears – one of those. She definitely doesn't like pears. You could be the best pear in the world and my mother would be like, "Eh, no."

Just think about someone that you and a friend disagree about. Imagine you're with your friend and you meet a third person, and your friend thinks the third person is cocky and it's too much, but you think they're confident and it's attractive, or you think they're really funny and your friend is like, "They're trying too hard."

That third person is the same person. They're just there being them. You and your friend have totally different thoughts about them. So which one of you is right? Is there any way for us to truly know whether that person is cocky or just confident or if they are funny or just trying too hard?

No, there's no way to know. That person isn't truly cocky or truly confident. They're not truly funny or truly trying too hard. We're never going to get a certified letter from the universe with a verdict on that question. The person

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just exists and you and your friend have different thoughts about them. And whatever you think about them will seem true to you.

Your thoughts about that person will have nothing to do with that person. They have to do with you and your own brain and all your own biases and preconceptions and all of that. The same is true for other people's opinions of you.

So in the first part of this podcast, I talked about the ways in which we just project our own thoughts and imagine other people are thinking them, even though other people are all thinking about themselves. But even if someone has an opinion of you that they think is negative, you don't actually control or cause that opinion. That's the good news.

You don't control other people's thoughts. Their opinions of you are actually kind of none of your business. Just today, I had this hilarious thing happen where, in the space of like 10 minutes, I got two emails from people who had applied to work with me and I'd invited to work with me, and one of them was like, "Oh my god, I thought it was going to be so much more expensive than this. This is so great, I can't wait. What a great bargain. What a great value to work with you."

And the other person was so angry and, like, wanted to yell at me for charging too much and had a lot of opinions about how terrible that was. It's the same me, it's the same money, what's different? Their thoughts about me.

Are we ever going to know if I'm truly an amazing bargain or truly a terrible over-expensive – you know, I choose to think the first one, but we're never going to know for sure. No one can ever run a scan of me and be like, "Okay, we have the true diagnosis."

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Those people's thoughts determine their experience of me, and the same is true for you. Someone else's thoughts about you are what create their opinions about you. It comes out of their brain. It has nothing to do with you.

So that's the good news. Here's the bad news; as I've said before, the call is coming from inside the house. Your own thoughts about you are the problem. Other people are not the problem at all. That's why avoiding social situations doesn't fix social anxiety. It doesn't solve your problem.

For sure, it will be less intense. When you imagine going to a social situation, you have a lot of anxiety thinking about it. If you decide you don't have to go, you do get some, like, immediate relief because your brain is basically like, "Oh, we're going to run straight into a lion's mouth?" And then you're like, "Alright, we don't have to go into the lion's mouth." And your brain is like, "Oh phew, this feels great."

But, if you have negative thoughts about yourself, you're going to have those negative thoughts whether you go to a party or not. The reason you want to stay home is that at home, there aren't as many other people around for your brain to project your self-critical thoughts onto.

When you stay home alone, you can just numb out from your thoughts the way you probably normally do to avoid being alone with them. So you can like get on your phone or watch Netflix or drink or eat or do whatever you do when you're alone to avoid thinking those thoughts about yourself.

When you're at a party, you don't have that escape – or it doesn't have to be a party, whatever social event – you don't have that escape, and so those thoughts feel so present to you. That's why it seems like it would solve your social anxiety to just not go out, but it doesn't really solve the problem because the thoughts are still about you and they're still in your own brain.

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And, by the way, if you notice that you overdrink or you overeat at parties or at social events, it's usually because you're trying to numb out your social anxiety. So if you want to cure your social anxiety, you have to start with your brain.

Avoiding social occasions or drinking, or drinking until you blackout, neither of those are going to solve the problem. And that seems obvious, but it's worth stating anyway.

So here's what I want you to try the next time you're anxious about a social occasion. I want you to write down all the reasons you're nervous. Project ahead, what are you afraid you will think or feel?

And then, I want you to notice if you're attributing any of those thoughts to the other people there, and I want you to take ownership of them. So if you write down, "I'm just afraid that they're going to think that I'm too chubby and I don't dress well and I'm awkward and I'm not interesting and I'm boring and my husband could do better than me..." if those are all your thoughts, notice you're attributing those all to the other people.

And I want you to take ownership of them. Those are your own thoughts about you. They have nothing to do with the other people. And that's actually good news, because you can't control other people's brains, but you can control your brain. You can learn to manage your own mind.

So when you write down all those things you're afraid you'll feel or think, those are all your own thoughts. And now you know what your thoughts about yourself are, and now you can work on shifting them. The more you work on those thoughts and the more you come up with neutral or positive replacement thoughts to think about yourself, the more you'll be able to navigate any social situation with ease.

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It's especially important with all those holiday parties coming up. So don't forget to leave an iTunes rating and review. Alright, talk to you guys soon.

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](http://www.unfuckyourbrain.com/society). I can't wait to see you there.