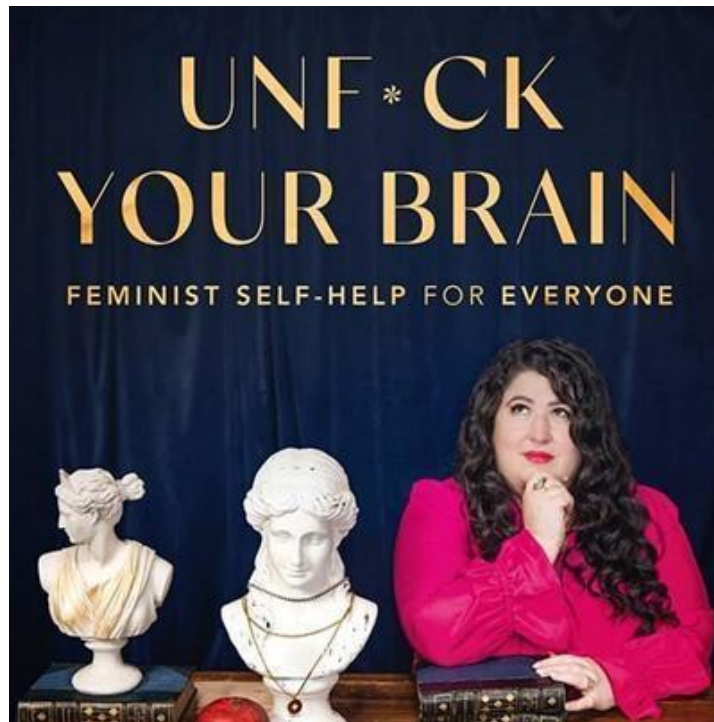


UFYB 108: When You Feel Triggered



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, my chickens. How are you all? I started to say, like, "I'm amazing," and then I realized that I then wanted to tell you a story and that I've recorded so many podcasts and I talk to you all so often in my head that I'm starting to forget what stories I've already told you.

It's like when you talk to your parents or long-term partner and they start telling you a story and you're like, "Oh my god, you've told me this story 12 times already." So if I ever tell you the same story, I apologize. I am leaving for Denver tomorrow for Clutch College. It will be over by the time you hear this. I'm super excited.

And after that, I'm going to start working on an amazing retreat that is coming up in May that I am co-hosting with my teacher Brooke Castillo of The Life Coach School. I know some of you listen to her podcast too. She already spilled the beans on her podcast, so I'm going to spill them here too.

It's going to be amazing. It's a two-day coaching intensive and we are limiting it to only 10 people. We're going to spend two full days with you in a seaside villa in Portugal, come on, basically coaching the fuck out of you. Like, either one of us can really take you through a change in a day that would take other coaches like six months or a year or might never even happen.

So both of us to be there with you in a small group over two days, so everyone is going to get multiple rounds of coaching, it's seriously going to be a once in a lifetime experience. If you've ever experienced me or Brooke

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coach, we are very similar in our styles. I mean, I learned from her so that would make sense, but not many people are like us, I think.

We're both totally non-judgmental and compassionate always, but we do not take any shit. Darwin just yowled when I said that. He was like, "That's right, you don't even take my shit."

We do not buy your bullshit. We do not believe your thoughts. And we're going to tell you that straight up. It's like, I think the best thing to call it would be transformative tough love. We were joking that we should have partnered up with somebody more soft and cheerleader-y because we don't have a good cop bad cop routine. We're both the bad cop.

I mean, not really, obviously, we are supportive and love you, but we want you to change and we love you hard and we don't love you in a way where we're like, "I just want you to feel soft and cuddly, and you think I'm so fun..." like, no, I love you so much and I want you to live up to your potential and solve your problem. And if you have to hate me for a little bit while I'm coaching you to make that happen, that's fine.

So what that means is it's going to be a really intense and rewarding experience, but you just have to really be ready for it. It's not for the faint of heart. And this is really literally a once in a lifetime opportunity because neither of us do small groups like this anymore, much less do them together. And it's just kind of a beautiful accident of timing and where we are in our businesses and our personal lives that it all came together to do this, this year.

So, we're going to be announcing all the details and info very soon. The reason I wanted to talk about it on the podcast is that it's application only and it's a very tight turnaround. We're going to announce it to our email list and you'll have 48 hours to apply once the email goes out. So it's a really short timeline.

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So keep an eye out. If you are not on my email list, meaning if you don't get emails from me already – if you already get emails from me, you will get an email about this, I promise. If you don't get emails from me but you want to know about this opportunity, then you need to get on my email list. Like, when I'm doing something and I have a longer lead time, sometimes I throw up a podcast about it, but we're not going to have time to do that for this. So you need to be on my email list.

And the good news is, I have a giveaway for you that will get you on my email list and enter you for a fun prize. I'll tell you about that at the end of the episode. So, it's a win-win for you on that.

But one of the other reasons I'm leading with this part of it is just timing. Once this comes out, we're going to be taking the application process a few weeks after this episode comes out. But also, the topic today really came up for me when Brooke and I were talking about who we wanted to have at this retreat and what kind of experience we wanted to create.

One of the things that we were talking about is that we agreed that we really want people who are really ready to get coached and go deep and who are willing to lean into how painful and uncomfortable that experience can sometimes be. I love it when people are like, "You can sell anything." And I'm like, "What I do is tell you that it will feel terrible."

There's that – what's her name, I think it's Emily Dowell. She does those inspirational graphics on Instagram. Anyway, she has one that's like, "we call it self-development because if we called it 'you'll feel like your skin is on inside out or you're dying,' nobody would do it." Which is funny. This is how I sell things, like it's going to feel really intense and you might want to die but at the end it's going to be great.

But anyway, we were talking about how that's who we want for this because it's only two days, we are going to go very deep very quickly, very intense. We need people there who are ready for that. And so today's topic

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for the podcast is kind of one of the biggest barriers that comes up to transformation for all of us in our own self-coaching and that kind of gets in the way of what we can learn as a human in this world, and that is our reactivity.

So before I want to dig into this topic, I want to be really clear, because I get a lot of emails from you people sometimes. I am not talking about triggering in the PTSD sense. So when someone has experienced trauma and has post-traumatic stress disorder, which by the way, some people experience trauma and do not develop PTSD.

PTSD does not mean you had trauma. It's not one to one. PTSD is a specific diagnosis for a specific syndrome that some people experience after trauma. There's so much misinformation and misuse of these terms, especially in the faux-empowerment world kind of. So I really like to try to be clear about this.

PTSD is a diagnosis. It is a syndrome, a disorder, whatever you want to call it, it is a cluster of mental health symptoms that we have given a name to that some people develop after trauma, not everyone. So, if you do have PTSD, certain things can trigger your trauma response to reactivate.

Now, people are also very confused about this because a lot of people assume and talk about triggers as though they are very predictable. But one of the hallmarks of trauma reactivation is that triggers can be unpredictable. So some might be predictable. I'm not saying they never are. But some are very unpredictable. That's why PTSD can be so challenging for people.

So the non-trauma educated public tends to talk about it in just a lot of incorrect ways. So, in any case, that is not what this episode is about. So I am not talking about people who have PTSD and experience trauma reactivation from PTSD triggers. When I use the word triggering in this

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episode, that's not what I'm talking about. I can't be any clearer than that; that's not what I'm talking about.

When I talk about, "Triggering" in this episode and I'm usually going to say quote, en quote, I'm talking about the tendency that some of us have to use this word to stand in for any strong emotion that we feel when we experience something or hear something or see something or even think something that creates negative emotion for us. And the conflation with actual PTSD and post-traumatic triggers is not helpful, so I'm trying to be really clear about it.

Now, this podcast is not about PTSD triggers. I'm not saying that if you do have PTSD, this podcast won't be helpful for you, even if you do have PTSD, you also just probably have some strong negative emotions as a human that are not related to your PTSD, and this episode totally applies to those. So I'm not saying turn this off if you have PTSD because nothing in here applies to you. I'm just saying this episode isn't about PTSD triggers and when I use the word triggering, that's not what I'm talking about.

It's really about the way that we misuse what is a technical term and apply it to any time we have a strong emotion that is nothing to do with PTSD or PTSD triggers. So if we don't have PTSD, what we're describing when we say we feel triggered is that we are having a strong negative emotion and we want to get away from it.

Sometimes we use it to mean that something is sort of "Activating" sensitive points or touchy areas for us or hitting on thought and feeling patterns that we have from past experiences. But it's so important not to invent too many categories for your thoughts and feelings because it mystifies your own brain to you. It's just thoughts and feeling; that's it.

Something happens, you have a thought, you have a feeling. You may not be aware of the thought. You might just experience this strong feeling. But the thought is always there and that's all that's happening. And part of the

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problem in correctly using words like triggered when we don't have PTSD and we're just describing intense thought and powerful feelings for us is that we sort of co-opt the real meaning of that term and we turn our own thoughts and feelings that we can learn to change into some kind of syndrome that's beyond our control.

It makes us this thing outside of ourselves that we treat with kid gloves and we think we need to build our lives around avoiding just because we have a strong emotion when it comes up. And, I mean, I have a whole episode about trauma and that attitude can be detrimental even when you do have PTSD, but it's for sure not helpful when you don't.

So when you have a very strong emotional response to something, it is natural to want to blame the thing and get away from it. Your brain thinks the threat is outside of you so it tells you, you need to protect yourself from whatever's outside of you. So your brain immediately goes into blame and avoid mode. Blame the thing outside of you and then try to avoid it.

And it can be insidious because it can even seem like self-care. We see all these memes about cutting toxic people and situations out of your life to take care of yourself. But when you avoid something or someone just because you have a strong emotion, I don't believe that's really caring for yourself. It's like using booze or drugs or food to numb out as a way of caring for yourself.

It's not that it doesn't work at all. It does help in some ways or we wouldn't keep doing it. But it's not what true self-care looks like because it's just avoiding the problem or drowning out the thought rather than working through it.

And the same is true when you avoid something that you think triggers you or you try to change it so you will feel differently because what happens when you do that is you miss so much opportunity for learning. I've been thinking about this a lot in two areas of my life recently, which is why I

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decided to do this episode about this; one where I'm being "Triggered" and one where other people think that I'm triggering them. So I'm going to give you both of those examples so you can see it from both sides.

So I had this experience very intensely the other day for myself where I had a miscommunication with someone that I don't know very well yet and it "Triggered" a lot of anxiety for me. It was like the very neutral circumstances, I sent a text that had a question mark at the end and I didn't get a response in the time that I decided I should get one and my brain lost its shit.

So I am a master coach. I know that the circumstance is completely neutral. My brain was going crazy having such intense anxiety and it was so fascinating to observe because the urge to try to fix it by trying to change the circumstance was so strong. My brain was completely convinced that the problem was that this person was not acting the way they should and that the way to feel better was to take some action to change the circumstance.

My brain wanted me to text the person a follow-up, ask them to answer the question, yell at them for not answering the question, or preemptively make some change or say something based on everything I thought about them not answering the question, there were so many actions my brain wanted me to take.

I could have done that. And hilariously, when we cleared up the miscommunication, it turned out actually nothing was wrong, the person literally thought they'd sent the response and hadn't. And they were kind of perplexed by why I didn't follow up.

They were like, "Obviously I would answer that question, just text me and say you didn't answer my question." But the reason that I hadn't followed up was exactly because I was feeling so "Triggered." I was having such intense anxiety.

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Whenever I want to act my way out of a feeling urgently, I know that means there's work for me to do. So I didn't want to just fix it by following up. And, of course following up might not have "Fixed" it or my feelings, all depending on what happened next and what I thought about it. But I didn't even want my emotional state to depend or to be linked to what happened next.

I want my emotional state to be based on my own thoughts and feelings and on digging into what's going on with me. So I didn't text them to clear it up on purpose. I took a walk, I paid attention to my thoughts. I came home. I did some thought work. I even had a coaching session. I used that to work more deeply on the issues that I was bringing up.

It was terrible, I'm not going to lie. I'm like any other human. I do not love the feelings of intense anxiety and dread. And I had a full day of work I needed to do on top of all this self-work on this topic, which I did. I did both because I keep my calendar.

But I am so glad it happened because, in the end, while everything was totally fine with the person, I was able to get to a place before we spoke where I knew it would be fine either way because I managed my own mind and I learned so much from that. I saw how my desire to know the future was causing me a lot of distress and anxiety. I got a whole podcast episode out of that, that was last week.

And because I got really present with my thoughts, later, when we resolved the miscommunication and I discovered nothing had been wrong and I learned the true story about what was going on, I was able to really see just how insane my brain had been. Like, that's the thing, when we rush to get away from a negative thought, we don't really spend time with it and really get to see what's happening.

I spent the whole day with my own crazy and so I just got so rampant. It was unpleasant, but I stayed with it, and that meant, when I did resolve it,

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when I did find out what was really going on, I had such an amazing history of what my brain had come up with that day. Whereas if I had rushed to get the answer right away, I would have missed out on all of that.

Yeah, I might have skipped some of the suffering, although, when your brain's acting crazy, we all know you can reach out or get a response or whatever and you'll still feel crazy.

But I wouldn't have gotten to know, like I wouldn't have gotten the power of seeing how elaborate my thought process had been at creating nothing, like creating everything out of nothing, like how many insane ideas I had made up. But because I was willing to sit with it, I got to experience that and see from that.

And I got this podcast episode out of it too. I've gotten so much learning for myself and to teach out of being willing to be with those thoughts and feelings and to not try to act to change them even though I felt very "Triggered" and it would have been easy to reach out to try to fix it, or to be like, "This person doesn't act the way I want. It's triggering for me. I feel terrible. I can't experience this. I'm going to cut them out."

I got so much out of it because I was willing to get curious with myself rather than assume my thoughts were true and act my way into feeling better. So much thinking and learning and growth happened all because when I felt "Triggered" I didn't reach out to change my circumstance. I reached in to learn more about what was going on with me.

I didn't try to manage the other person's behavior and tell them how they had to act and badger them until I got some resolution for myself from the outside. I went inwards instead to see what was going on with me.

I have also experienced this from the other side, which is equally fascinating. Well, I'm sure I've been on the other side of some texts that have made people crazy, that their thoughts made them crazy about. But

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that's not what I mean here. This is a different example of being the "Triggering" thing to someone else, again, not in the PTSD sense.

People frequently write me or comment on social media posts about things that they don't like that I do. And I'm so fascinated by that thought process and what thought and feeling creates that action. But I see this come up a lot and I think it's another great example of what you miss out on when you just go with that triggered feeling and take action to try to change it instead of getting curious.

So, for example, I'm actually going to give you two examples of this; one where I'm the "Triggering" thing and then vice versa, an experience I have had with my teacher. So, for instance, I see this come up a lot where I'm the teacher with listeners or followers or even students who get upset that I talk about The Clutch on the podcast, which again, I think is so fascinating.

Because, what happens is, someone hears me talk about The Clutch and then they have a negative feeling about it and then they think, if they come tell me about their negative thought and feeling, that they'll feel better. They think if they just get it – it's like we want to spit out the emotion onto someone else.

We think if we get it out of ourselves and onto the other person then we'll feel better. I guess maybe they think I'll change my behavior to change their feelings, which of course I won't because, number one, that's not my style, and number two, it won't work because I don't cause anybody's thoughts and feelings except for my own. Or they don't even think that but they just think somehow they'll feel better, again, if they spit out that emotion.

We just have such a bias towards thinking, if I just take action – like think about the word trigger. Like, what does a trigger do? It, like, pulls something back and then releases it. We get triggered to act. We think if we act then we will feel better.

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And what's so interesting is that when they take that action of, like, sending me the email or commenting on the social media post, whatever it is, where they're trying to act their way out of that feeling, they're missing out on such powerful questions to ask themselves about why they're feeling that way.

Let's just stick with this example of me talking about The Clutch on the podcast. Why is that so upsetting? If I didn't have a coaching business and I just took advertising, like from Blue Apron or Brooklinen or something – whatever podcast I listen to, all I heard is Blue Apron or Brooklinen, it's very well-targeted to me. Not Blue Apron, but I have Brooklinen sheets.

Anyway, if I just took advertising, nobody would bat an eye, right, podcasts do that all the time. We all understand that nobody can create and put out free educational or entertainment under conditions of capitalism, which we live in, without getting paid somehow, so people take advertising. And I could totally have done that. I get approached to take advertising all the time, by big companies. And I never do it because I don't want to advertise anything to my listeners that I don't know 100% for sure will benefit you and change your life.

I like nice sheets, but I'm not sure they change your life. But coaching does. It's only my own coaching work that I can be that sure about. But this is such an interesting question, right, such an interesting learning opportunity. Why does it bother someone to hear me sell The Clutch but it wouldn't bother them to hear me sell Blue Apron to sponsor the podcast?

Just that one question can open up so many interesting thoughts that person has about who should help people and what does help look like and how are people allowed to make money and when is it okay to promote yourself and when is it okay to promote your business and what are people allowed or owed or entitled and how do we respond to our own thoughts and why are they uncomfortable with me promoting my own work?

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There's like so many interesting thoughts there, all of which is just cut off when you just act to stop the thing that you think is triggering you. Similarly to when people are upset that I curse on the podcast. I hear that a lot too, that if I would just stop cursing then they could feel better, they wouldn't feel triggered and they could learn from the podcast.

And all that possible learning for you gets cut off when you just act to try to stop the thing you think is triggering you. Just like if I had sent a text to be like, "Hey, hey, hey answer my question," I would have missed all that learning. Maybe it would have been successful. Maybe I would have gotten an answer but what would I have missed out on?

One of the recent comments I got about talking about The Clutch, the person said they fast forward whenever I mention The Clutch so they don't have to listen to it. And I was just like, that's so amazing. I see how that seems like an action that will solve your problem. It's totally rational in that sense. But it's literally the exact opposite of thought work.

It's avoiding a circumstance because you don't like the feeling you have when you encounter it and it's like the opposite of taking responsibility for your own thoughts. This came up for me a lot when I got certified as a coach because – I mean, my coach and teacher also talks about things she sells on her podcast, but that didn't bother me because I didn't have thoughts about that.

But, my teacher is a weight loss coach. She's not just a weight loss coach, but she does coach a lot on weight loss. And especially in the beginning, when I first met her, she was doing I would say even more of that. And even when I went to get certified with her, there was like a whole day on weight loss. And I don't teach weight loss.

And I was at the beginning of my body positivity journey and my thoughts and feelings were actually much less secure about it than they are now. So it was very "Triggering" right? Like, meaning I had a lot of thoughts and

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feelings come up being in that room and listening to these ideas and these teachings that I didn't agree with.

And I am so fucking grateful to myself that I leaned into that discomfort and I was willing to have it because, number one, I actually got so much more than I – well, I didn't lose anything, but I got so much out of that training, my whole life has changed because I got certified as a coach and learned this work so it was so worth it.

And I actually got much more clear on what I believed by engaging with those ideas. And by engaging, most importantly, with my own thoughts and feelings about them, by going inside. I could have gone to get certified somewhere else or not gotten certified at all or left the room during that day. And I didn't do any of that because I never want my own emotional stability or peace of mind to depend on what other people are thinking or saying or doing, right? I never want that to be the determining factor.

If there's one thing that I know for sure, it's that the reason that I have created such a successful business and I have had such personal transformation is because I committed early on to leaning into that discomfort. In the beginning of this journey, so many things "Triggered" me, meaning I had a lot of negative emotion around them. Like, I don't put it in quotes to mean it's not an intense experience. It is. But it's always your own thoughts.

My commitment was always to move towards that emotion, not away from it. I used to constantly think – I used this thought so much in the beginning – whatever else, I'm going to learn something from my mind about this experience. Whenever I felt an intense swing of negative emotion, whether it was something my teacher said or something someone in my family did or going to an event I was dreading or someone on Facebook saying something I didn't agree with politically, whatever it was, my thought was always, "This is going to be intense and possibly unpleasant, but whatever else, I'm going to learn something about my mind from this experience.

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And because I believed that, it was always true. I always leaned into the discomfort and the negative emotion and I got curious about it. So that is what I do when I feel “Triggered,” I lean in. I get curious. I sit on my hands, sometimes literally.

I don’t just take action to try to get out of it. I don’t change my circumstance. I don’t tell someone else to change their circumstance or their behavior. I breathe and I lean in and I commit to learning whatever the experience can bring me, no matter how it feels.

Just think about a deep tissue massage. If you have a trigger point in your body that’s painful, you have to be willing to experience the discomfort of pressure on it in order for it to release. When somebody releases a trigger point – I just had someone release one on me yesterday, and it was excruciating for like three minutes while they were doing it. Afterwards, it was so much better.

But if I had avoided it and not ever touched it myself and not let anyone else touch it because it hurt, I would never have gotten that release. It would just get tighter and tighter and tighter.

So when you are feeling” Triggered,” I want you to get curious. Don’t act out; lean in. See what you can learn.

If you’re feeling triggered by this episode, I encourage you to lean into it. I’ll talk to you 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

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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.