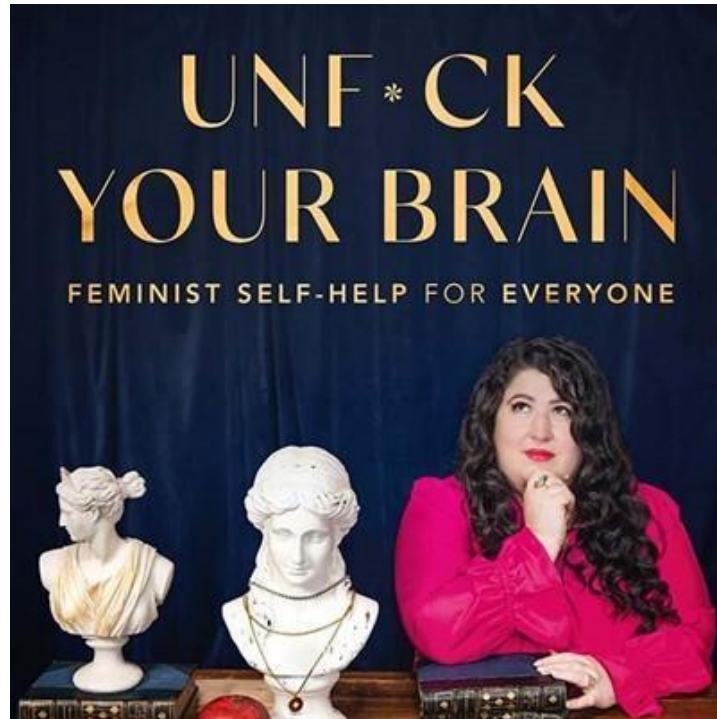


UFYB 148: Intuition



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. So I do not usually take reader requests, and that's partly because before you know how to manage your mind, you're usually misidentifying your actual problem. You're usually asking the wrong question.

And you'll notice this if you listen to any of the listener Q&A episodes, often what's happening is that I'm explaining to the person who wrote in why they're asking themselves or me the wrong question. That has nothing to do with like, not being a good student of the podcast or any kind of intelligence issue or anything like that.

I spent 30 years of my life asking all the wrong questions. It's totally normal. But when we don't understand how the brain actually works, we're constantly misunderstanding what's actually going on or what's at stake, which is why coaching is so powerful. Because it helps you learn to ask the better questions, the correct questions that actually help you zero in on what the issue is.

If you've ever asked yourself a question and then been confused about how to answer it, that's a good sign that you don't know how to manage your mind and you're asking the wrong question. And one place that this comes up a lot is the topic that I get asked about a lot, which is intuition.

And I get questions like, how does intuition square with thought work? How do I know when to listen to my intuition? How can I distinguish between my intuition and anxiety? And similar versions of those questions.

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So today I'm going to teach you how to think about intuition and how I think about it in the context of thought work and managing your mind. So the first thing we have to do is even define intuition because people mean wildly different things when they talk about intuition.

And often, people don't even know what they mean at all when they're talking about intuition. I often tell my students when they start thought work, like right when you join The Clutch or you start listening to the podcast, don't worry about intuition in the beginning because most of us conflate anxiety and conditioned thought patterns and mental habits with intuition, and I'm going to go into that more in this episode.

So if you look it up, the basic definition of intuition is generally that it's something that gives us the ability to know something directly without analytically reasoning our way to it. So it's a way of knowing that is outside of logic.

So it may present as a knowing that arrives suddenly or a sense that you can't really articulate or explain. Here's the problem with this definition. You know what else shows up in your brain without you thinking about it rationally? Every anxious, paranoid, or fearful subconscious thought pattern you've ever had in your life.

Intuition does not tell you that someone is not texting you back because they're reconnecting with their ex-girlfriend based on a comment that you saw on Twitter. That's not intuition. That's a thought. All of our thoughts, a lot of our anxieties, our unconscious patterning, our thought habits, all that shit shows up in our mind without us being rational about it, without us reasoning to it.

And so it's very easy, especially in the beginning, to conflate those thoughts with intuition. We also completely misremember reality and how we have reacted to or what we think is our intuition, and we use that to confirm our

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beliefs. And then cognitive bias kicks in. And so we only remember the times that we were right in our predictions or our “intuitions,” and we ignore all the times we were wrong.

So think about all the times you’ve been so sure that you were about to get fired or your boss hated you, or your friend was mad at you, or there was something wrong in your romantic relationship, and then actually, everything was totally fine. That happens all the time.

But your brain ignores the million times that happens in a row and focuses only and remembers only the two times it was right. And then you tell yourself a story that you have amazing intuition about when something is wrong. And the reason that’s a problem is that then every time you have anxiety or a thought, you tell yourself I just have really good intuition, so something must be wrong.

99% of the time it’s not wrong, but then your brain immediately forgets that, and you just believe the whole story all over again the next time. And so you just keep reconfirming for yourself that your intuition, which is often really just anxiety is “always right,” when actually, it’s almost always been wrong way more often than it’s been right.

So what all this means is that most of the time, what you are calling intuition or a gut feeling is not intuition. So, so often I find that when women talk about their intuition, they’re talking about their anxiety. We’re taught that intuition manifests as a gut feeling. You know what else you feel in your gut? Anxiety.

A lot of people have the physical symptoms of anxiety in their belly. There’s a way of defining things by saying what they are and then there’s a way of defining something by saying what it’s not. It’s like the process of elimination. Intuition is not anxiety.

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If you are feeling anxious, that's not intuition. Anxiety is a feeling caused by your thoughts. And in my experience, the difference between anxiety and intuition is the emotional quality of the experience and the specificity of the thought.

So let me unpack what that means. The emotional quality of anxiety is that it is generally unpleasant. We feel anxious, we feel agitated, we feel in a rush to find out more information or get reassurance or take some action. Anxiety is often urging us to act our way out of the emotional state we're in.

The emotional quality of intuition is a quiet knowing. There's no rush, there's no agitation. Nothing has gone wrong. Intuition is not identifying a problem because intuition doesn't categorize things as good or bad. Intuition is just an observation that your brain has created unconsciously from information that you don't even recognize that comes to you consciously.

It comes from the unconscious into the conscious. This isn't an exact analogy, but I think it may be a helpful way to think about it. I talk a lot on the podcast about how a circumstance is a thing outside of yourself in the world that is inherently neutral. The human mind is what decides if anything is good or bad.

Goodness, badness are subjective human thoughts. If there were no human brains around to think about whether things were good or bad, the natural world would not have any determination about that. Anxiety is the feeling caused by the evaluation and the meaning-making, by the story we create in our minds.

Intuition may be the perception of a circumstance without any story or meaning attached to it. Intuition notices, but it doesn't hypothesize or make meaning. So let me give you an example. I see women worry a lot about when to listen to their gut, especially in dating because so many of my

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clients see it as a high-risk situation where they are trying to obtain or avoid a certain outcome and they're trying to decode the behavior of someone they don't know that well to try to feel like they can predict or control that.

All of that of course is a set of thought patterns that creates enormous anxiety. So let's say you start to feel like something is up, something is changed in someone's communication with you. Intuition may notice that change without any feeling or story attached to it.

It is a noticing where you didn't set out and say to yourself, "Hey, has anything changed here?" Your brain has been processing whatever information it gets below the surface, and then it arises into your consciousness that oh, I notice a change.

Anxiety is noticing the change, hypothesizing various reasons it might be happening, stressing out about it, making it mean something about you or them, creating anxiety and rejection and shame and fear for yourself, all with your thoughts about it.

Anxiety feels like fear. Intuition feels like curiosity without attachment to the outcome. Here is where we have to now take this work even one level deeper. Let's say, as lawyers would say, let's stipulate that intuition is a real thing. Let's say yes, intuition is a separate thing, it is different from anxiety, but it can be sometimes confused with anxiety.

So let's say we are going to say for the sake of argument that they are two separate things that can be confused with each other. My clients believe this subconsciously. A lot of you do too. And so they're constantly asking themselves, well, how do I know if it's intuition or anxiety? Or how do I know when to listen to my intuition?

Which is also just a hilarious kind of concept if you think about it because if you really believe it's intuition and that intuition tells you something

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important, then why would you not listen to it? Even the question, when should I listen to my intuition, or is this my intuition just shows we're not really sure when it's our intuition or not.

These questions presuppose not only that intuition is a thing that exists and that you can differentiate it from other thoughts and feelings and how they work, but that it's important to do so. See what I'm saying?

When we ask how do I know when to listen to my intuition, how do I know if it is my intuition, how do I tell the difference between intuition or anxiety, we're assuming without articulating to ourselves that this distinction should be the basis for decision making, that it matters if it's intuition or not, that knowing if it's intuition or not should impact how we're going to act.

And the problem is that framing it like this keeps you hung up on trying to categorize the experience you're having and going back and forth on how to know whether it's intuition or not, which you can never know. We're not going to get a signed letter from the universe about it.

I think that assumption is really - what we're really saying is if it's intuition, then I just should believe it and act on it. But if it's just thoughts that are somehow different from intuition, then I would want to coach myself on them.

And my question is why would you ever want to not coach yourself on purpose and act on your unconscious thoughts whether we call them intuition or not? Again, why would we ever want to have an option where because we've labeled something as being a special kind of thought, we don't ever look at it or coach ourselves on it?

That does not sound like a good plan to me. Coaching yourself doesn't always mean that you change your thought. It just means you clarify yourself for yourself, what is the true circumstance, what is the thought,

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what is the feeling, and that you know what you want to choose to think and feel and do and why.

So I think we really need to dig into our assumption that if something is intuition, that means we should just obey it without any further thought or reflection, or we should just act on it without looking at it or coaching ourselves.

That's a thought we can choose to have, that intuition is special and so when I have intuition, I should just act and not look at my thoughts. So we could choose that thought. I don't personally choose that thought, but you could choose that thought. But let's make sure that you're choosing it on purpose, and you know why.

We need to question this assumption that you're "intuiting" something, then you should act on it. And this is why it's useful to think of intuition as actually just being a perception of a circumstance. Maybe it's a circumstance that isn't super obvious. Let's think about your intuition as, let's say it exists and it's a sixth sense.

Your eyes see some circumstances, your ears hear some circumstances, your nose smells some circumstances, and your intuition perceives some circumstances. Let's say the intuition is demonstrably true, it is a circumstance. Let's go back to my texting example.

Someone is texting you less or someone's told you a lie, or your boss's communication with you has changed, whatever. If it's true, if it's just a fact, then it goes in the circumstance line. We talk about the self-coaching model that you learn in The Clutch. It goes in the circumstance line. It's just a circumstance.

And then you still need to decide on purpose what you want to think and how you want to feel before you get to deciding how you want to act. So

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you see what I'm saying? This is a perfect example of how without coaching, we ask ourselves the wrong questions.

I don't think the question "is this anxiety or intuition so I know whether to act on it or not" is a useful question. The useful question is what's the actual circumstance that can be determined here, how do I want to think about it?

Whether you read the circumstance in the news or you see it with your eyes or you hear it or your intuition tells you about it, you still need to confirm and discern what is the actual circumstance that exists and then coach yourself around what you want to think and feel about it.

I think the reason we want to know if something is intuition is because just like any other decision, we're believing that there's a right or wrong choice to be made, and we're predicting that if we decide wrongly, we are later going to be mean to ourselves. I think that's what we really fear.

If I ignore my intuition, then later, if it turns out things don't work out or something goes wrong, I'm going to tell myself that I should have listened to myself and I knew better. That's what we're really afraid of, which really means if in the future I have negative thoughts about something, because something going wrong or not working out is an optional thought.

So if in the future my brain has a negative thought, my brain gives me an optional negative thought, if in the future my brain says mean shit to me, what we're worried is well, I'm going to believe that's true and then I'll be mean to myself on top of that for not correctly predicting and avoiding this thing my brain is saying is bad, even though whatever my brain is saying is bad is not actually bad. It's just a neutral circumstance.

In the future, my brain is going to say mean shit, I'm going to believe that and then blame myself for not having prevented it. And this is why the

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question isn't should I listen to or ignore my intuition. I think the answer is neither. Just coach yourself the way you always do.

Put whatever you can determine is true in the C line, in the circumstance line and see what your thought is and decide if you want to keep it. You're always allowed to choose and keep whatever thought you want. You can totally choose to think I have no actual evidence but I just think this person's lying to me and I'm going to stop hanging out with them, or I'm going to ask them about it or whatever.

You're allowed to choose that thought. Your self-coaching is not a court of law. You don't have to prove things are true beyond a reasonable doubt to be allowed to think them. Or else we would never be able to accomplish anything.

The point is just to get as much perspective as you can by putting what is actually a knowable circumstance in the circumstance line, and then deciding how to think and feel about it on purpose. And I recommend that you just think about that, whether it came from intuition or the internet, or your sense of touch, any way that you perceived or became aware of a circumstance.

The circumstance goes in the C line. It doesn't matter. Think about your intuition like that sixth sense that may give you information about the world, but you still got to decide what to think and feel about it.

I think that this comes up so much because women believe that we need a reason or an excuse to think what we want to think or choose what we want to do. It's like we think that if we call it our intuition, then that's validating us. And somehow, it makes it more acceptable to just think the thought that we want to think or act on it.

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You don't need permission. You can just not go out with someone because you just don't really like them. You don't need to have an intuition that there's something wrong with them. You just quit a job because you want to quit your job. You can just fire a client because you would prefer firing them to coaching yourself about it. You don't have to have an intuition that they're going to be difficult. That's just a thought, but you don't have to change that thought. If you want to keep it, keep it.

You don't need a justification. You don't have to call it intuition or blame it on intuition. And determining whether something is intuition or not will not save you from future pain. Even if we could prove intuition exists, and when you're using it, that's not a guarantee that those decisions are right or good, and that is for sure not a guarantee that your brain won't say mean shit to you in the future about how you made the wrong decision.

Your future is always going to involve pain because you're a human and life is 50/50. And you always get to decide if self-recrimination or self-blame is how you're going to respond to that. So ask yourself this. If I didn't think intuition had magical power to tell me the right decision and I was never going to be mean to myself or regret my choices in the future, if every choice and experience was just a way to grow and learn and evolve and I couldn't do it wrong, would it even matter if intuition exists or not?

The paradox of all self-coaching is that the more you let go of something having to be a certain way, the easier it becomes. So in my own life, the less I judge myself and the more I just allow myself to make whatever choices I choose on purpose to make, as long as I know my reason, I like my reason, and sometimes that I means I coach myself and sometimes that means I don't, the more I find my intuition actually communicates more with me.

I'm able to perceive more circumstances. The more I leave it alone and stop trying to control it or interrogate it or make it mean something, the

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more it points me towards whatever it notices and observes, and that gives me a chance to coach myself on those noticings.

Intuition does not tell you what to do. It just helps you perceive what is. You still have to coach yourself. So just start there. Always just start with coaching yourself regardless and let your intuition come to you if it wants to. Have a beautiful week, my chickens. I will speak to you soon.

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