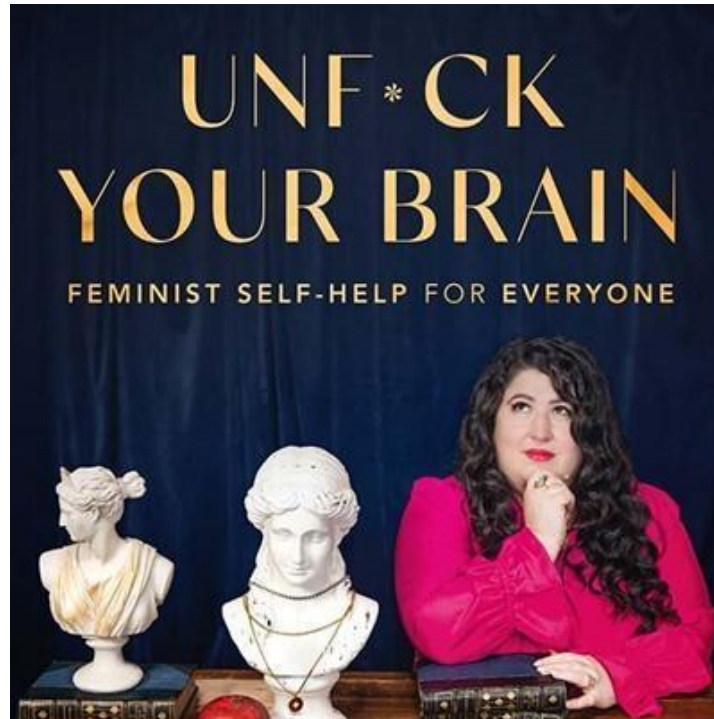


## UFYB 87: Loneliness



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Kara Loewentheil**

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## UFYB 87: Loneliness

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. Okay, so first things first, I need to clarify some things because I have been getting some panicked messages, and it's my fault. I named something similarly.

So let me break this down for you guys. What you're listening to right now is called the *Unf\*ck Your Brain* podcast. The podcast is not going anywhere. Obviously, I mean, I can't promise what will happen forever but I have no plans to end the podcast because otherwise, I wouldn't be able to talk to all of you and yell at you sometimes.

Podcast is not going anywhere. Here's what's ending. It's already full. So this is done unless you're in the group starting in July, it's over is my six month small group coaching program, which is also called *Unf\*ck Your Brain*. I think that's where the confusion came in. I should not have named those the same thing, or I should have named them the same thing but that's what's creating this confusion.

That program is what is ending. That was the way of working with me very closely and getting a lot of individual attention was *Unf\*ck Your Brain* and the groups that are going to start in July, that's it. They're the last ones. So if you are one of those people, super exciting. You're going to start next week, and everybody else, that's over. Podcast is continuing, small group coaching program in its current form is ending at the end of the year with that last group that's already been accepted.

And then the third thing is The Clutch. The Clutch is not going anywhere. The Clutch is my online feminist coaching community where you can still

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work with me and lots of your other chickens and Clutch coaches, and that's where we are like, diving into the podcast deeper, doing a podcast workbook every week, I'm teaching you the coaching model, we're having a lot of great conversations. That's The Clutch. That's not going anywhere.

You can still work with me through The Clutch. So those are the three different things and what's happening with each of them. So you don't have to be worried. The podcast is not going anywhere. That's what I've been getting the most panicked messages about. Podcast is staying. *Unf\*ck Your Brain*, the small group program is ending. The Clutch is staying and is awesome and you should come join us.

And in terms of being able to work with me and get more individual attention at a deeper level in the future, there will be more opportunities for that. *Unf\*ck Your Brain*, the group is not the end of that forever. I'm going to be doing some in-person events probably. I think I'll be doing some online master classes, but Clutch members are going to get first dibs on any of those, and they'll probably - my guess is fill up just from The Clutch before I offer them to the public.

So that's another good reason to come join The Clutch if you have been wanting to work with me more in depth, even if you want to do it in a kind of smaller group atmosphere, people in The Clutch are going to get first dibs of that kind of stuff. Okay, so hopefully that clarifies everything. No one needs to freak out about the podcast. It's not going anywhere.

Okay, another announcement. I feel like this is like, homeroom in school where they're like, detention is in the locker room. I guess detention is never in the locker room. We didn't have detention. I went to this liberal school where everybody talked about their feelings so much, and this is what happens. You turn into a life coach.

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Okay, one more announcement. I have a fun bonus for all of y'all, which is at the end of the podcast, I'm going to tell you about a free thing you can text me to get. We've done this before, the texting, but this is something new, so don't turn off the podcast before you hear about that. That's coming at the end.

Okay class, announcements are over. Soccer practice is at 4pm. Go to your first period. So, today, in more substantive topics, we are talking about loneliness. That was not even a segue, that was just a swerve. Announcements to loneliness, try to keep up people.

So I'm being light-hearted about this because loneliness is not as serious as we think it is. I know a lot of you take loneliness very seriously, you think it's a very big problem. It's really not, so that's what we're going to talk about today. It's a feeling that a lot of my clients struggle with a lot, and I think it's one of those feelings that we think would - I mean, we always think changing a circumstance will solve our feelings, but with loneliness specifically, we really think that.

So we're going to dig into what it is, what causes it, and what you can actually do to solve it. So let's start at the beginning. Loneliness is a feeling. Sounds obvious, but I think loneliness is one of those emotions where it's really important to be careful about how you talk about experiencing it because we tend to say I'm lonely.

Now, that's not unique to loneliness of course. Grammatically, linguistically, we say I'm sad, I'm happy, I'm mad. We do that with a lot of emotions but I do think that to us, somehow lonely sounds more like a state of being. Like we'll say about someone like, oh, I just think they're lonely, and we mean their whole life is lonely.

We don't really say about someone else like, oh, did you talk to Sam? Yeah, I think he's really mad. Right? We think mad is kind of like a

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time-limited emotion you might have, but lonely, we talk about it like it's a way of life or like it's an emotional meta state. It's like a state of being that's just ongoing. It's like the kind of person we are or just the kind of life we have.

But it isn't any of those things, and you're not a lonely person. You're not having a lonely time in your life. You're not lonely, full stop. You're a person who's having thoughts that are creating a set of physical sensations in your body that you are calling loneliness, that we all call loneliness. That's what an emotion is. It's a set of sensations in your body.

And those sensations may differ from person to person. I think loneliness is mostly a form of sadness. I think it feels kind of similar to sadness, it kind of can be heavy or aching. But yours might be different and that's fine. So loneliness is a feeling. It's not a state of being or a way you are. It's just a set of physical sensations in your body.

And what causes loneliness - all together now, class - whatever causes a feeling are thoughts. And this is one of the places where I think we're most apt to get it wrong. We think that loneliness is caused by not having enough friends or the right kind of friends, or not having a partner or the right kind of partner. We're not having a family or the right kind of family.

But it's not caused by any of that. It's a feeling caused by our thoughts. I think the most common thought we have that creates loneliness is I'm alone. Pretty obvious. What I think is fascinating about loneliness is that people who are physically alone can feel loneliness, but so can people who are physically around other people.

We often think loneliness has to do with having other people around us, but it doesn't. Many of us have experienced the loneliness of being right next to someone, but believing that that person doesn't understand us or doesn't love us, and then we feel totally lonely because we're thinking we're alone.

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When you're in a relationship, let's say, romantic or friendship or family, where you're creating feelings of alienation with your own thoughts, you may feel extremely lonely even while you're near another person, even if you live with them and you're around them all the time.

I think that because humans evolved in tribal societies, we don't like to feel lonely, and I think that's because we usually associate it with rejection, and that's why I think we find loneliness so painful is that we often have it mixed up with rejection that we have manufactured in our own brain. And if it's not rejection by someone specific, we make it just sort of this blanket rejection of us by the world or community in general.

And I think our brains think loneliness is going to kill us because in primitive times, hunter-gatherer tribes, being left alone was actually pretty dangerous. You were probably not going to survive on your own. And so the same way that our brains are susceptible to rejection and to taking rejection very painfully, I think we have the same thing with loneliness.

But that doesn't mean that we are fated to have to feel terrible. It just is a way of understanding why our brains may think that something is dangerous when it's not. And I think society encourages this. There's all this social science talking about how loneliness is such a public health problem and is caused by social isolation and people who are lonely and isolated have worse health outcomes.

And I'm going to talk in a minute about how I think we should understand that work, that research because I think that it misunderstands the problem with loneliness. I think we all misunderstand loneliness. Loneliness is not about not being able to be with other people. Loneliness is about not being able to be alone with yourself.

The reason that we experience loneliness so intensely is that we believe we need other people to provide our feelings of connection and love and

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belonging, and that feels so desperate to us because most of us are not creating that connection and that love and that belonging with ourselves. I always like to think about how throughout history, there have been religions and there still are where people go into seclusion for months or even years of meditative worship on their own.

Christians in the desert, there are Buddhist monks who do this, people do silent retreats, sometimes together but sometimes in isolation now, even for years. If being alone were fatal, why would this be such a consistent part of human society? I think that the differences that people who undertake those periods don't feel alone because they're communing with something. They might call it god or they might call it awareness, and I might call it themselves, but the concept is the same.

And I'm not saying that we should all go live in the mountains alone. In fact, the separation from society is such a big part of that kind of meditative practice because it's not for most people. And also, you need to be able to listen to the podcast. They don't have that when you're in a cave by yourself.

But my point is just that living alone or living separately is not necessarily a bad thing and has not always been linked to feeling lonely or desperate, or to it being a bad thing or a problem. And I do think it would benefit us to think less about why other people aren't connecting with us and think more about why we aren't connecting with ourselves.

When we feel lonely and we try to get other people to solve it for us, it's only a Band-Aid. And it may distract us from our lack of connection with ourselves, but as soon as we're alone again, we'll feel lonely again. And sometimes we'll feel lonely even when we're with those people we try to connect with because we're relying on people outside of ourselves to make us feel okay about ourselves, and that doesn't last.

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And what is so fascinating is that even though it seems like the obvious solution, most people actually don't react to loneliness by reaching out to create connection. If other people did solve loneliness, if loneliness really was a problem created by lack of social interaction, then it would be simple for most people to deal with. You call a friend, you could meet an acquaintance for a drink, you could talk to a stranger at the grocery store if you had to.

But that's not what happens. When we feel lonely, a lot of us just sit around, and usually we buffer or we wallow by ourselves because in our brains, we've already decided that we are alone. We're already lonely, we're already alone. And so why would we reach out to anyone? And that's because that same thought pattern that gives rise to loneliness is also the thought pattern that prevents connection from other people, because it's the same thing.

When you don't connect to yourself, you can't connect to other people. The thought that creates the thoughts - it could be more than one - that create loneliness don't actually motivate connection to other people. They just produce more loneliness because if you don't like being alone, it's because you don't like being alone with yourself. And if you don't like yourself, you can't connect to other people either.

So even though there are two thought patterns I see that create loneliness, they both boil down to that same problem. The first is that you may not want to be alone because you feel sad or lonely when you're alone with your own thoughts, because your own thoughts about yourself or life are so negative. So obviously if that's your thinking, being around other people is just a temporary distraction.

If you don't like yourself and you don't like your life and you don't think that being with yourself is okay, then being with other people is not going to feel that great and it's going to be temporary. And then the other option is when

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you make being alone itself mean something bad about you. You believe that your loneliness comes from the belief that other people don't like you or you aren't good enough.

And that's the same problem in disguise. You assume that other people are rejecting you because you're rejecting yourself. You already don't think you're good enough and you project that onto other people. So the upshot is the same. You feel lonely because you don't like your own company and because you don't like yourself, and that's the same reason you can feel lonely, whether you're alone or surrounded by other people.

If you are rejecting yourself, if you don't love yourself, if you aren't connecting to yourself, it doesn't matter how often you socialize or who's around you. You will feel lonely because it's all your thoughts. And like, my clients will say things like I feel fine on weekday nights, but if I'm home on a weekend night alone, I'm really lonely.

Weekdays and weekends are an entirely arbitrary human invention that we completely made up. It's basically only existed in this way since factories were introduced in the labor movement. But they feel different because you're giving them different meanings in your mind. You're thinking different thoughts about yourself and whether it's okay or normal or good enough to be home one night versus another, and what it means about you and if other people like you.

I used to feel lonely fairly frequently and it was interesting to put together this podcast because now I truly cannot remember the last time that I felt lonely. It has been several years. I spend a lot of time alone, but I never feel lonely anymore. And you know, feeling lonely is okay. It's just a feeling. It's not something to terribly avoid. I'm totally willing to feel lonely, but it really doesn't happen because number one, I love myself and I'm connected to myself.

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I like my own company. I like hanging out with myself, the same way I would like hanging out with a friend. I'm connected to myself and so being alone with myself is like hanging out with a friend. It feels connected. I don't feel lonely.

And number two, I know that if I do want to feel connected to someone else, if I want to feel part of a social community or part of a relationship with someone else, I just have to think about that. Because when you are hanging out with someone and you're feeling connected to them, it's only caused by your own thoughts. It's not caused by them.

That's why you can be around lots of different people and feel lonely, or you can be around lots of people and feel really connected and energized. It just depends on what you're thinking. So you remember, I mentioned that there are these studies showing that loneliness could be a health risk, and I'm sure that that's true, but I think that these studies misunderstand or don't take into account what causes loneliness.

It's not lack of kind of superficial human interaction. It's your thoughts. The thoughts that cause loneliness actually make you less likely to go seek out human interaction because you've already decided you're alone, and the human brain will always make its thoughts come true. You will always produce more of what you think.

So if you think that you're alone, if you think that you're lonely, if you think that you're isolated, if you think you don't have connections, if you think that no one likes you, if you think no one wants to be around you, you will just make more of that come true, and you won't like being around yourself.

So if we actually wanted to reduce the instance of loneliness or isolation, teaching thought work would be one of the best things we can do, along with whatever - I'm not saying if older people are isolated because there's no working public transportation, we should also have public transportation

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but thought work and learning how to connect to ourselves is always, I believe, going to be the first line of defense against loneliness.

It's not even a line of defense again because loneliness is not a problem. It's just a feeling created by your thoughts, but the ultimate cause is not being willing to be with yourself and not knowing how to like and connect to yourself. Something most people don't know how to do.

So the next time you're feeling lonely, that's the answer. How can you enjoy your own company? How can you connect to yourself? And as a baby step, how can you think about a relationship in your life that you feel good about, even if that person isn't around? Doesn't matter who it is. Focus on those thoughts of connection and you'll be surprised how quickly loneliness can fade, and that will help you see that it's all a product of your thoughts. It has nothing to do with what's going on around you.

Don't be lonely. Or be lonely if you want, but just remember, it's always created by your thoughts. See 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 thought work and feminist mindset with other podcast listeners just like you and me.

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