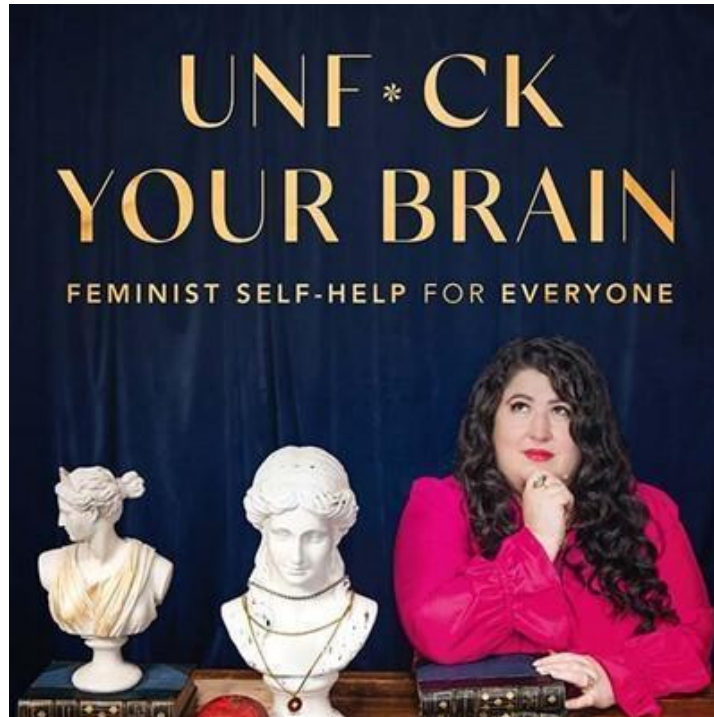


UFYB 7: How to Feel Great Naked



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

[UnF*ck Your Brain](#) with 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. I don't know why I call you guys my chickens so often, I just feel like the mother hen somehow. Because you are chickens, I should warn you that you may hear a cat in the background of this episode. I'm recording at home today and my cat just... I think he thinks I'm talking to him. I think that's what's happening. So, I'm going to try to keep him quiet, but don't be scared if you hear the cat.

All right, so today we are talking about one of my favorite topics, which is how to feel great naked, because no matter what your body looks like, you can feel great naked, I promise.

All right. Today I want to talk about how to feel great naked. And I think the holidays can create a lot of extra pressure on our relationships to eating and movement and our bodies. For those of us who are dealing with a lot of brain chatter about what to eat and how much to eat and when to eat and what kind of foods to eat, the holidays can be really challenging. There are a lot of opportunities for socializing that involve food, which means extra opportunities for self criticism and obsession. And in addition, for a lot of us, definitely here in New York, it is getting cold and dark. It was dark at like, it felt like it was 2:00 PM today. I'm sure it was actually four, but it felt like two.

It's getting cold. It's getting dark. And a lot of people's bodies naturally want to sleep more, move less and conserve energy. And finally, there's the disruption to schedule. If you happen to be someone who deals with your

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body anxiety through rigid eating or exercise, the disruptions of travel and family time and parties and events are going to really destabilize your coping mechanisms.

And honestly, even in the best of times, unfucking your body image is a challenge because society has conditioned women to accept such a high level of body dissatisfaction as normal. This has actually really been striking me in my conversations with people who are applying for the Unfuck Your Brain program, and so I've been talking to a lot of women over the past month about their body image. And I'm having conversations all the time with prospective clients and I'll ask how their body image is, and they'll say, "You know, it's really not bad. It's pretty good. I mean, I don't really like looking at myself in the mirror or in photographs and I still hate my stomach and I feel guilty if I eat too many carbs, but it's much better than it used to be." Essentially, if we are not starving ourselves or crying every day about our stomach, we think our body image is doing okay.

Most of us went through a phase where we were crying every day and starving ourselves. And we compare it to that and we think, "All right, well I'm not doing that, so things have gotten better." And the sad thing is, that's really true, compared to the average body image of a woman in America. And not just America, in lots of countries. What passes for pretty good compared to average is kind of astounding. A dissatisfaction with your body is just assumed to be part of being a woman. You almost never hear a woman say she's truly happy with her body. And if she is, you usually assume she's lying. In fact, our social conditioning has gotten us so twisted that when women just accept their bodies the way they are, we call that letting yourself go. Just think about that. If a woman is just like, "I'm not going to diet. I'm not going to dye my hair. I'm not going to try to look like I'm 20 when I'm 60. I'm not going to try to control my physicality all the time." We call that letting yourself go.

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We think it's best case, a sign of depression, and worst case, it's a personality defect. That's how ingrained it is in us that a woman should always be thinking about and working on improving her body and her appearance. And improving is obviously in scare quotes. Think about the way we talk about weight gain, too. We say someone has, "let themselves go." There's a whole religious underpinning to this, the belief that restraint and asceticism are virtuous and that gluttony and indulgence are sinful. If you pay attention, I'm not the first person to point this out, of course. A lot of our words around eating are words that have a religious connotation.

Something is sinfully delicious or something is indulgent. If you know your religious history, you know that an indulgence used to be something you would purchase from the Catholic church as forgiveness for your sins. You could commit your sin and then you would purchase an indulgence and your sin would be wiped away. It was basically just paying the church to tell you that your sin was gone.

I mean, we talk about being bad. We talk about being good with our food, bad with our food, good with our food, with our eating. Clean eating. Dirty eating. So, when your eating and your movement and your body becomes such a focus for moralizing and judgment, is it any wonder that most women don't feel comfortable naked? We want to have sex with the lights off, with our clothes on, preferably both. Maybe if our partner has never even looked at us, that would be even better. I think most women I find have carefully curated outfits or makeup or shoes or hairstyles that help them feel confident or sexy. And when they aren't wearing that armor, they feel vulnerable and ashamed just for having a human body. And this doesn't mean that you curl your hair and wear red lipstick and wear a fancy dress. It might be that your armor is the right pair of jeans and a button-down. But I find that most women have a set of clothing or ways of presenting themselves that feel safe, and then a set that feels attractive, and then a set that doesn't.

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One of the most common concerns I hear my clients express if they sleep with someone who doesn't end up wanting to see them again, or doesn't seem that excited about them, is that their body must have disgusted their partner. This is related to the armor, I promise, I'm bringing them together. What I find really fascinating about this idea that if you sleep with someone and they don't want to see you again, it must be because your body turned them off, is that it presupposes that the partner had no idea what they would see when the clothes came off, like it was just a big surprise, like they were expecting an octopus. There were like, "Thought you'd have eight arms and you only had two," or vice versa. We think as though it's like what they see as naked is going to be drastically different from what they saw when your clothes were on.

Now, the truth is, anyone who regularly fucks women, knows what a naked woman's body looks like. Especially in this age of internet porn, anyone 21 and over has probably seen literally hundreds, if not thousands, of naked bodies. But I think that this idea comes to women, this idea that if someone doesn't want to see them again, there was something wrong with their body, partly because the psychic difference is so important to us, as women, as people socialize as women. The feeling of protection we have on wearing the outfit we feel sexy in, compares to the vulnerability and shame that so many of us have about our bodies. So, we feel like there's this enormous gap or this huge difference between the states of being clothed and being naked, even though the actual physical difference in reality to someone else is not even close to the enormous emotional difference that we feel.

I will never forget an experience I had with a partner right around the time I was starting to do this body image coaching work on myself. This partner wanted me to stand in front of him undressed, so he could see me, and he asked me to turn around so that he could see all sides of me. I was incredibly uncomfortable, which he picked up on, and he asked me what

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was wrong. And I said, "I really don't like the feeling that my body is being evaluated," because that's what I assumed he was doing. I evaluated my own body all the time and I was taught by society that men would always be evaluating my body, as would other women. I was taught by society that my body would always be found wanting, so when he wanted to look at me, I assumed he was evaluating me. I assumed that he was thinking that my breasts should be higher, my stomach should be smaller, my legs should be longer. And so, what he said next has really burned into my memory. He looked me in the eyes and he said, "I'm not evaluating it. I'm appreciating it." I'm not evaluating it, I'm appreciating it. And he was totally baffled that I would even think he was evaluating it.

And that moment blew my fucking mind because it had literally never occurred to me that someone could look at my body and be enthused by it. This happened to me, I was probably 30. This was not so long ago. Even when I was intimate with someone for months or years, which I had been before then, I'd been in long-term relationships, I assumed that they were settling or making do. That they had an internal list of ways they wanted my body to be different. Who knows why they were putting up with what it was. But of course, the reason I thought that, was that I had that internal list. I was the one who was constantly evaluating my body and finding it wanting.

When you really think about it, how deranged is it that someone can be actively sexually aroused in our presence, and we still think that that is not any evidence that should cause us to doubt our belief that our bodies are disgusting and unacceptable and unattractive? It's a perfect example of how external validation never solves your problem. If you don't change your thoughts about your body, no number of lovers will solve it for you. You will always excuse, discount or devalue the attraction. So, if you want to feel great naked, you have to unfuck your body image, and that starts with unfucking your brain. The single best thing you can do for your body image is to change the way you talk to yourself about your body. This is an area

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where using neutral baby step thoughts is so important, you guys. All the positive thinking affirmations you have tried, have not worked because you don't believe them.

Looking in the mirror and telling yourself that you're beautiful when you don't believe it is worse than useless. It doesn't help, and then it makes me feel frustrated and hopeless that nothing will help. And that you're so far from believing that seems impossible. And I do a lot of work with my clients on body image. It's one of the core areas we work on in Unfuck Your Brain. And I always, always, have them focus on tiny baby step thoughts. I'm going to give you some examples of the thoughts I used when I was doing this work on myself. Neither of these thoughts make an inspirational Pinterest board. Nobody would cross stitch these on a pillow and get a million Instagram likes. These are not rainbow happy thoughts. These are the real thoughts that I used to shift my body image, starting with a tiny baby step.

I had two favorites, and you can try using either or both of these. Number one was, "That's a human blank. That's a human stomach. That's a human chin. That's a human body." Whatever body part I was mentally criticizing to myself, when I noticed I was doing it, I would practice the thought, "That's a human X," whatever the thing was. If it's my stomach, "That's a human stomach." If it was my chin, "That's a human chin." I didn't tell myself it was a beautiful stomach. I didn't tell myself it was a gorgeous stomach. I didn't tell myself that no one else would notice my stomach. I didn't tell myself anything I couldn't believe. I just told myself that it was a human stomach over and over again, because that thought took the place of, "My stomach is disgusting." "That's a human stomach," doesn't feel amazing, but it feels better than, "My stomach is disgusting." And eventually, "That's a human stomach," became my default thought and then I was able to work my way up.

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Here's the other thought that I used all the time, and this is also just a great story, because I think if this internal monologue had been out loud, I either would possibly have been institutionalized or I might have attracted a cult following. I'm not sure which. Here's how I came up with it. When I was really deep in diet brain, I was convinced, as we all are, that if I just looked a certain way, my life would be perfect. I live in Manhattan. It is home to more than fashionable women than probably anywhere else in the world per square foot. Half the people you see on the street are literally models or Broadway actresses. So, I was constantly seeing thin, conventionally beautiful women everywhere I went. And because I hated myself, I was obsessed with them, of course. I was constantly comparing myself to them and thinking about how great their lives would be.

It's actually hard for me to even remember what this used to be like, because I don't do this anymore, but I used to just walk down the street and constantly be evaluating everybody else I saw and thinking about how were they my size or bigger or smaller? If I went into a room, it was like, "Am I the biggest one here? Am I the smallest one here? Am I in the middle? Who's bigger or smaller than me?" I was just constantly comparing myself to every other woman I saw. And I almost always came up wanting. It's almost like a weird fuzzy dream to me now because that's not how I think anymore. But I know that I used to and nevermind that half the women I saw were smoking and crying on the street, fighting with their boyfriends. None of that evidence permeated my certainty that if I were just five inches taller and 50 pounds smaller, my life would be perfect.

To combat this belief, I spent an entire summer wandering around Manhattan. And every time I saw a thin woman, I would repeat to myself the mantra, "All beings suffer. All beings suffer." Every single fucking time. In the course of an ordinary day in New York, you see a tall thin woman every 2.3 seconds. So, every 2.3 seconds, I would repeat, "All beings suffer." Occasionally, I would vary it with, "Even Christie Brinkley gets

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cheated on." Now, half of you listening to this podcast are too young to know who Christie Brinkley is, which is another whole problem, but she was a supermodel and she got married and her husband cheated on her. Because of course, being beautiful, actually has fucking nothing to do with whether you have a happy life or not, but we're taught that it does. So, while we may have the intellectual thought that it doesn't, we have a much deeper thought that obviously it does.

So, occasionally I would go with, "Even Christie Brinkley gets cheated on," but usually I went with, "All beings suffer." I just walked around all the time, thinking, "All beings suffer." Now listen, no one is going to sell you a self-help book called All Beings Suffer. Nobody is going to make a pretty graphic and post it on Facebook that says All Beings Suffer, with a hashtag blessed. But it is that thought that I really credit with making the biggest change in unfucking my body image, because repeating that thought over and over retrained my brain to stop assuming that how someone looked had any relationship to how happy their life was. And once I did that, there was really no reason to wish that I was thinner, because that's the thing. We only want to be taller, we only want to be thinner, we only want to be blonder, or whatever it is, because we think it will make us happy.

I'm going to say that again because I know a lot of you just nodded and did not understand what I just said. You only want to be different, physically, because you think it will make you happier. You think that if you lose 10 pounds, if your nose is smaller, if your hair isn't frizzy, you think you will be happier. That is all we ever want. We just want to be happy. And we think that we can't be happy until we lose 10 pounds, or we have a thigh gap, or we get rid of the double chin. But the truth is, none of that shit makes you happy. Your thoughts are what create happiness, just like any other emotion. You can choose to believe you're beautiful now, and you'll feel just as good as you think you'd feel if you lost 10 pounds and look different.

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And if you're not there yet, you can just start with believing that there are women at your goal weight, or there are women with a [phone 00:19:09] structure you want to have, or there are women with the hair you wish you had, who feel like they aren't good enough yet too. Don't you have friends you think, "Well, if I just looked like her, I'd be so happy." Is your friend happy with how she looks? No she is not, because it has nothing to do with how she looks. We are all taught to think that if we need to look different, to be happy. And if you're not ready to believe you're beautiful now, which a lot of you won't be and that's okay, you can just start with believing that there are people who look the way you wish you looked and they're not happy either.

They don't feel like they're good enough either, but they are good enough and you are good enough. And it has nothing to do with the size of your jeans. So, this holiday season, cut yourself some slack. Remember, all you want is to be happy and happiness is created by your thoughts. And when all else fails, remember that all beings suffer, regardless of their size.

All right? So, I hope to talk to some of y'all on Monday, and I'll talk to all of y'all next week.

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