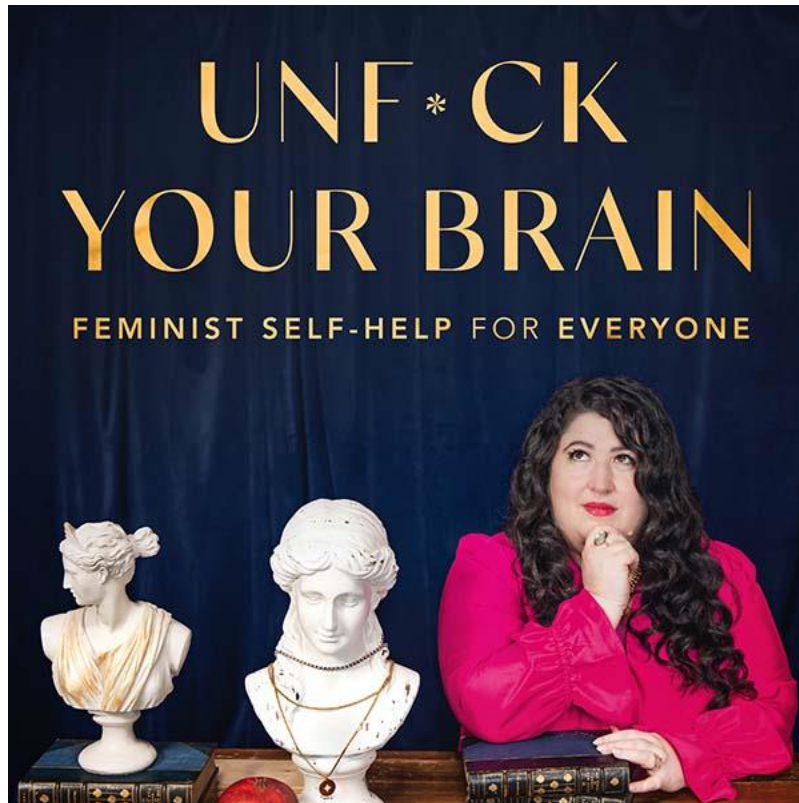


**UFYB 346: Why Rest & Pleasure Can Be Hard  
– But Are Keys to Being Happy**



**Full Episode Transcript**

**With Your Host**

**Kara Loewentheil**

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## **UFYB 346: Why Rest & Pleasure Can Be Hard – But Are Keys to Being Happy**

Have you ever looked forward to a vacation for weeks or even months and then when it arrives, you don't even really enjoy it or are you desperate to just be done with your day and put your feet up? Or when you get home and flop on the couch, you can't seem to relax? Rest seems like it should be intuitive, but it's actually very hard for some of us to do and the same is true of lots of pleasurable things that we look forward to.

On today's episode, I'm going to dive into why we find it so hard to rest or relax or enjoy ourselves and why it's crucial that we learn how to do those things if we want to experience more happiness.

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.

Welcome back to our mini-series on happiness. Last week we talked about what happiness is and what it means. And we talked about the two different types of happiness, the momentary feeling of pleasure and joy in the body versus the long term satisfaction of a life well lived and content with who you are and how you showed up for this journey.

Today, we're going to be diving into the first type of happiness more deeply, talking about why rest and pleasure are key to being able to create the feeling of happiness in our bodies. And so just to reiterate, we're talking about happiness today as an emotion, the physical sensation in our body caused by our thoughts, by its nature, it is ephemeral and fleeting. The emotion of happiness comes and goes like any other emotion, sadness, loneliness, shame, anxiety, grief, love. It depends on what we're thinking about at any given time.

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And that really bears repeating and pausing on because we are taught certainly here in America to think that we should always be happy. And so even though that's literally physically impossible, we think that we're supposed to feel that way. And then when we don't feel happy all the time we think something's gone wrong, even though we would never say, well, you're supposed to be sad all the time or you're supposed to be angry all the time, or any other emotion.

So even if you take nothing else away from this podcast, just understanding that happiness as an emotion is going to be fleeting and caused by our thinking, just like any other emotion. It's not special. It's not different. It's just an emotion. And when we are thinking thoughts that create happiness, we feel happy and when we're not, we don't and that's fine. The natural state of the human mind is not to be happy all the time.

But I do believe that many of us, especially those socialists as women, could be happier than we are in the sense of we could be experiencing more happiness in our bodies and we aren't because of the way we're socialized. Because I believe that our ability to access and experience happiness is built on a foundation of being able to access and experience rest and pleasure and essentially to tolerate much less, enjoy rest and pleasure, which right now many of us can't.

Without the ability to rest or feel pleasure, I don't think we can experience the emotion of happiness in the same way. I think we're less likely to have the thoughts that cause happiness because we're less likely to slow down and notice what is good, which is what we need to do to feel happy. And even if we do, I think that the impact of these thoughts on our body is kind of blunted because if we can't relax or experience pleasure, we're going to have a hard time experiencing happiness.

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And I'm going to really lay that out for you in today's episode, with my argument about why I think that's the case and point you in the right direction of what you need to do about it. So, we're going to talk about why rest and pleasure are so central to the ability to experience happiness, especially for women.

So first, let's talk about rest. Rest is essential to be able to produce and experience the emotion of happiness, because if you are not resting then you are usually operating in a state of chronic stress and possibly even burnout. Women have a hard time resting because of the socialization we get that teaches us that our worth and value come from our productivity, especially doing things for others and doing things that are part of our social roles.

So, we find it hard to relax if there's laundry to be done or if we think that someone else might be mad at us or if we could be using that time to perform some kind of obligation. Those thoughts that keep driving us to prove our worth are really stressful and so frequently we're putting our nervous system into fight or flight because our brain is constantly perceiving danger around us from not being constantly productive. And we are kind of running around trying to perform our goodness and our virtue in order to keep our brain at bay.

When you are in fight or flight, it's hard to experience happiness, and that makes sense. If you need to run away from an elephant stampede in the wild, that's not the time to slow down and smell the flowers, literally or figuratively. So, if you're not able to rest, it's going to be a lot harder to experience happiness. I think that you can't really break through that nervous system activation that's keeping you stressed out.

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And not being able to rest doesn't always look like frenetic activity, sometimes it does. Sometimes it looks like you're constantly doing things, you're not able to relax, you're always feeling guilty about all the other things you could be doing. And so, you are taking a ton of action and not able to kind of relax unless everything is done which almost never happens.

But not being able to rest can also weirdly look like paralysis or over-resting or over-indulgence. Because sometimes what happens is we want to rest, we're tired, but we're unable to be still and present with ourselves to actually rest. And our reaction to those thoughts that are hounding us instead of doing a lot of things, for some of us the reaction is numbing out.

So, if you're numbing yourself out, if you're using booze or food or drugs or shopping or whatever to cope, it's not a moral issue. You're not doing something wrong or morally bad, but you are acclimating your brain to a kind of false concentrated pleasure that tends to come with a hangover of some kind. And it's a pleasure that is more about blitzing out your brain and disconnecting than about being physically dropped into your body to experience pleasure. And that is the big distinction for me between these different kinds of pleasure.

Whether you are using whatever you're using to produce dopamine, but in a way that kind of has you spaced out and disconnected from your body and zoned out or whether you are physically in your body present for the pleasure. So, socialization makes it hard for us to rest and it keeps us either running around or numbing ourselves out. And neither of those states are conducive to the emotion of happiness. The emotion of happiness is created by our thoughts about what's happening, something that is beautiful or meaningful or pleasurable to us.

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And when you are in fight or flight, you're not able to access those kinds of thinking, and your body is not rested or relaxed enough to experience those sensations, that physical emotion in your body. So that is the first thing that we need to be able to get better at, being able to rest, being able to access rest, being able to change the way we're thinking so that we can rest if we want to have more happiness in our lives. And I'm going to tell you about the second thing right after this.

So, rest is that first thing we need to be able to access. The second thing is pleasure and not just sexual pleasure, I mean, it might be sexual pleasure. Sexual pleasure is a great kind of pleasure. But I'm talking about any experience of physical sensations that bring joy and delight and are pleasing, sound, smell, taste, touch, hearing, whatever.

Pleasure is a physical experience and I think that happiness is a pleasurable feeling in our body. It's an emotion that manifests as a set of sensations that feel good, it's not the same exactly as pleasure necessarily. But if we are not willing to feel pleasure in the body or feel physically good, if we are the victim of our socialization, that has really alienated us from our body and from our ability to feel physical pleasure, I think it's harder to feel happy.

And women are socialized in ways that make it hard to experience and accept pleasure. We're socialized to believe that pleasure is something to be suspicious of, that it's inherently suspect and probably kind of bad. That if we're going to have pleasure, we need to earn it and deserve it. And notice that your brain often, well, really always will almost never admit that you actually did earn and deserve it, or almost never lets you actually enjoy it. And even if you've earned and deserved it, we're taught to believe that you still shouldn't enjoy it too much.

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It's much more praiseworthy in a woman, according to society, to be restrained and disciplined and turn away pleasure than it is for a woman to be deeply interested in pleasure, deeply in body and wanting to feel pleasure. Having a deeply pleasurable experience that is frowned upon by society, that is dangerous. And women are praised for restraint in food, in sex, in any kind of physical pleasure especially.

And so, our fearful relationship with pleasure makes it hard to be in our bodies to receive it and enjoy it and that keeps us up in our heads with all of our thoughts. But happiness is a physical sensation. It's an emotion manifested in the body. It's the body that knows when you are happy and happiness is only something that happens in the present moment, if we are able to be in the present moment, not in flight or fright, not up in our heads. Both rest and pleasure require the ability to be present in the moment, and happiness requires the ability to be present in the moment.

Remember, we're talking about that emotion of happiness that comes and goes. In order to experience it when it comes, you have to be able to be physically present in your body. But precisely because we are socialized with these two conflating, conflicting definitions of happiness, and we are socialized not to rest and not to feel pleasure, we're not feeling as much happiness as we might want to.

And our brain then tells us, well, that's because these circumstances are wrong. I would feel happier if I were in different circumstances. I would feel happier if I was in a different job or with a different partner or I lived in a different place and my body looked a different way. Our brain then tries to tell us that the reason that we're not feeling even the transient notion of happiness as much as we want is because there's something wrong with our circumstances. Because our brain is in that mode of there's a problem, this is wrong, it's inactivation and it wants to take action to try to change how you feel.

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But actually, the ability to be happy is the exact opposite of that. In order to be happy, to experience happiness, that emotion, you have to be able to be where you are. You have to be able to be physically present in your body in a not activated way, in a way where you are able to experience pleasure and be in the present moment and not up in your head.

If we don't know how to do those things and we don't know how to access those states, then we can't feel that happiness. And then our brain keeps us running on the cognitive level and keeps trying to tell us to take action and to change our circumstances. Or we might even try changing our thoughts but it's not 'working' because if you're not able to be present in the present moment in your body, you can't experience that happiness.

So, I really believe that if we want to be able to access and create more happiness with our thinking, we have to be able to rest and to receive pleasure. So, it's almost like we have to solve our thought problems around resting and pleasure first and then happiness comes much more naturally. Feeling that sensation to feel your body requires that ability to be in your body and be present.

But I don't think it's that helpful to tell people to learn to be present more, because nobody really knows how to do that. I mean, we're told that meditation will help, which it will if that works for you. But just learn to be present is not really a thing your brain knows how to do. So that's why I really think it's helpful to break this down. What does it mean to be able to be present? It means being able to be physically in your body, meaning not up in your head. It means changing your thinking, cleaning up your thinking so that you are able to be physically present in the moment.

If you have an unmanaged mind, you're never going to feel physically present. So, if you want to learn how to be present, these are the

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foundational building blocks that allow you to be present in the moment in your body, which is what will allow you to feel happiness. So, these building blocks of being able to rest, being able to relax, being able to receive pleasure, these are things your body can naturally do. It's your brain that gets in the way.

All that socialization, all those thoughts you've learned to think that block you from resting and from experiencing pleasure. So, I think when we think about it as, oh, these are the concrete things I need to work on. I need to work on my thoughts that keep me from resting. I need to work on my thoughts that are so painful and self-critical that I numb out instead of rest and be with them, that I run around doing things instead of being able to rest.

I need to work on these thoughts I have about pleasure. I need to change my belief system about pleasure and about what it means and whether it's good or bad and whether I'm allowed to have it. If I change my thoughts, my beliefs about rest and pleasure then I'm going to be much more physically in my body. I'm going to be able to be present. I'm going to feel better anyway because I'm rested and I've had some pleasure. And I'm going to be much more able to create the thoughts that create that emotion of happiness and really be able to enjoy it and make the most of it.

So, if you want more happiness in your life, that emotion of happiness, yes, it comes and goes. No, you're not supposed to feel happy all the time. But yes, you can feel happy more than you do now, especially if you are socialized as a woman. I really recommend that you start by working on the ability to rest and the ability to experience pleasure. And working on all the thoughts that get in the way of you being able to allow and experience those two things and if you do that, happiness will follow.

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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.