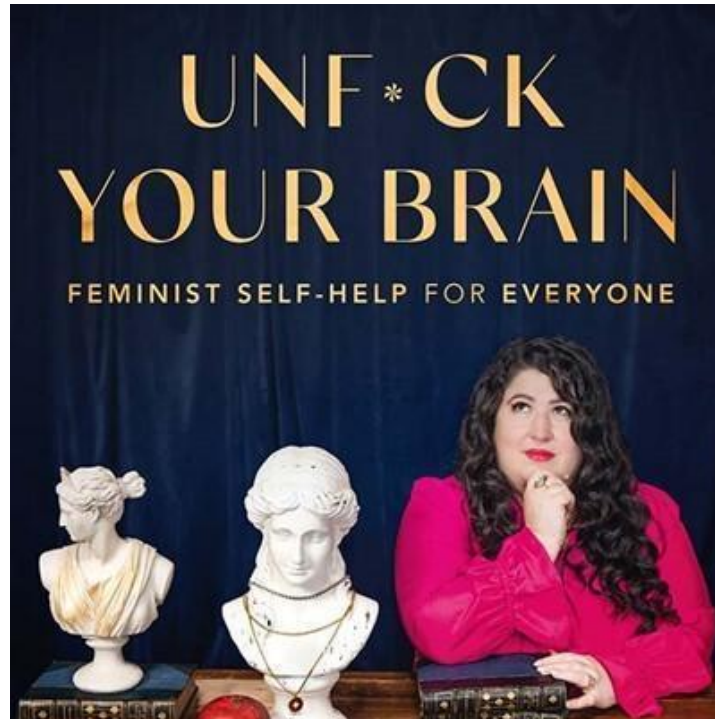


UFYB 24: CONFUSION IS A LIE



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 podcast chickens. It is finally sunny here in New York. It's still like 45 degrees, which is just really unacceptable for Monday. But the sun is out, which is amazing, and I am coming off a weekend in which I did an amazing photo shoot with one of my favorite photographers and one of my favorite other coaches.

It was so fun, we went around town and felt like, you know, temporary movie stars, except movie stars probably don't have to change in an SUV with tinted windows. But we got to kind of run around the city and take some amazing photos I can't wait to share with you guys and use on the website.

And anyway, that part is not as relevant to you as what I'm going to talk about next, but one of the things that was interesting about working with this photographer and the makeup artist and the hair person is that they don't necessarily know what coaching is or what it's like. And so one of the things I said to them over the weekend was that whenever I start working with a new client, I tell them that there's only one rule of coaching, and the one rule of coaching is you are never allowed to say, "I don't know."

I don't know is the only thing I forbid because confusion is the most useless emotion. Most of us think that confusion just happens to us, we think it's a real thing, it's like a state of being. We think confusion signifies something real about our knowing or not knowing what to do. So we wander into the cloud of confusion and then we just walk around in circles in the cloud, hoping that eventually the clouds will part and the sun of certainty will shine down on us.

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Now, you can spend days in that cloud, months, even years. Literally, people spend years of their lives being "confused" about whether to change jobs, about whether to change relationships, whether to change cities. When you're confused, you believe that there is a right answer and that you can figure it out.

If you apply enough logic, if you get enough outside opinions, if you tune into your intuition, if you ask your tarot card reader, if consult your horoscope, if you ask your therapist, if you journal, if you write down your dreams, if you consult some crystals.

If you just wait around being confused long enough, you think certainty will arrive. But here is the truth: the longer you stay confused, the more confused you get. Confusion is an indulgent emotion because it's a really comfortable place for most of us. One reason we like to stay confused is that we don't want to take responsibility for making decisions.

We are terrified of how we will think and feel if we make a decision that we later decide was the wrong decision. So we stay confused. As long as we are confused, we are not making decisions, and then we don't have to face our fears about making the wrong one.

But you know what else we don't get to do when we stay confused? Make progress, grow, evolve, have new adventures, and learn to manage our minds. And another reason we stay confused is that we are giving future circumstances the power to create our feelings. So we worry that if we make the wrong decision, we will be unhappy and feel regret.

We believe that the circumstances that may arise from our choice will create our feelings. So this creates what I call analysis paralysis. If you believe that the wrong choice means future unhappiness, you will not be able to make a decision because what you're trying to do is predict what your unmanaged future thoughts will be.

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You're like, "Alright, I got no control over my brain, what do I think my totally unmanaged brain might say to me in the future that will create a feeling I don't like?" So you're assuming you have no power to change that or to control your brain. Do you see what I'm saying?

If you tell yourself, "If I choose the wrong thing I'll be unhappy," you'll be constantly trying to predict what choice will make you happy. But that's impossible. Because number one, you can't predict the future. You can't predict what thoughts an unmanaged mind might decide to have. And number two, external circumstances don't cause our feelings.

So you can't possibly predict with any certainty which future circumstances will create which feelings because it's not a math equation. It all depends on what happens in your brain. Fundamental confusion is a sign of an unmanaged brain in two ways. Number one, you are not managing your mind because you are accepting I don't know, or I am confused as an answer, and you are believing that you can't change your confusion and that certainty will just magically arrive.

And number two, you are believing that in the future you will not be able to manage your mind either, which when you're indulging in this thought pattern is a good prediction because you're not doing it right now. So rather than know that you can decide how to think and feel no matter what circumstances or results arise from making a choice, you are abandoning yourself to the mercy of your unmanaged mind in the future.

You're like, "In the future, I might have a thought and feeling I don't like, and I won't be able to change that so I can't make a decision now." Ironically of course, you don't like the part where you don't make a decision now either, that also feels terrible. That's what having an unmanaged mind is all about. It feels terrible now and in the imagined future.

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So here's how to stop being confused. You just make a decision. Now, I know that you just listened to everything I just said and you're probably like nodding vigorously and thinking like, "Wow, that's so interesting," and then the minute I said just make a decision, your brain yelled, "But what if I make the wrong one?" So go back and listen to the first half of the podcast again if necessary before you proceed. Might take one time, it might take 10.

Here's how you make a decision. You stop taking I don't know as an answer from yourself. If I let my clients say I don't know, I would literally never be able to coach them. Your brain will always prefer to say I don't know because knowing requires some attention and some effort, and your brain would rather take a nap.

I don't know is safe, and your lizard brain likes feeling safe, even though you're not growing and not achieving and you're not learning to manage your mind and you're not creating the life you want, it's safe inside the cave. I don't know is in the cave. I don't know what's out there, I don't know whether I should leave or not, I'll just stay here.

Now notice, by not making a decision, you are making a decision. You're choosing the status quo. So it's not even like you're not, you're holding off making a decision. Not making a decision is making a decision to choose where you are right now.

So first thing you can do is make I don't know unacceptable as an answer to yourself. Don't accept it as a reason not to make a decision, whereas an answer when you ask your brain what it is thinking. Take I don't know out of your vocabulary. Often, I'll say to clients, "Okay, well, if you had to guess," right?

The thought is always under there. If you had to know or if you had to guess, what would you say? So when your brain says to you, "I don't know,

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"I'm confused," you can say, okay, if I had to guess, what is it? What's the thought?

The second thing you can do is stop believing the thought I am confused as a description of some kind of objective state that you have nothing to do with. You only feel confused because you're having the thought, "I am confused." Stay with me. You don't feel confused because there's a lot of different options out there. That's what you think now.

You think the existence of multiple options and the difficulty of predicting the future is what creates my confusion. No. What creates your confusion is literally the words in your brain, "I'm confused." The thought, "I am confused," or, "This is confusing," will always produce confused as an emotion.

That equation never fails. Confusion exists in the space before you make a decision, and in some cases, you just stay there forever. So you cure confusion by replacing the thought, "I am confused," or the thought, "This is confusing." You don't accept those as somehow true indications of a real state you're in or a natural byproduct of having options.

They're not. They're literally just thoughts in your mind. When you think the thought, "I am confused," when you say those words to yourself, you'll produce the feeling of confusion. So you can cure confusion by replacing that thought.

Now, when you're just starting to work on this thought, you can start with neutral thoughts like, "I am figuring this out." "I'm going to figure this out." "As soon as I make a decision I won't be confused anymore." There is no right or wrong answer. I don't need to be confused because I can manage my mind no matter what I decide and no matter what happens.

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So that would be the sort of first baby step. The deepest level of eliminating confusion in your life comes from understanding and eliminating the source of the confusion. The source of confusion is always a distortive thought. So it's the thought, "I'm confused," or, "This is confusing," but that thought comes from a sort of distorted baseline thought.

And there are two real categories of confusion with two different baseline distortive thoughts or ideas underlying them. So one is confusion about what someone else is doing or saying or thinking. So the distorted belief that underlies this kind of confusion is the idea that you need to understand someone else's thoughts or words or actions. That's not true. You don't.

There is no truth in them that you need to know. First of all, the other person probably doesn't know why they're acting or speaking the way they are either. There's no one on earth who knows the "truth" of why they're doing whatever they're doing. More importantly, it doesn't matter. You only think you need to know that so you can decide what to think and feel.

You think, "Well, I'm confused, I don't know what to think and feel because I don't understand this other person's thoughts or behaviors." You don't need to understand their thoughts and behaviors. They could be acting the way they are because they're a sociopath or because they have a brain tumor, or because they're an angel in disguise. It really doesn't matter.

You can decide what to think and feel for yourself no matter what someone else is thinking or saying or doing. So the distortion here is believing you need to understand why other people are acting the way they are in order to make your own decisions. You do not. All you need to know is what you want to think, how you want to feel, and what actions you want to take or results you want to create. Then you come up with thoughts to achieve those.

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So let me give you a couple of examples for this one. This can come up at work. Let's say you're trying to figure out how to move forward an objective you have, and you can't make a decision about what to do because you're fixated on trying to understand why your colleagues are thinking and acting a certain way, and you just keep telling yourself, "Well, I don't understand. Sometimes this person seems like they support the project and then sometimes they don't, and why are they doing that, and why don't they understand what I want to do, and why are they opposing me, and why are they getting in my way? And I need to understand why they're doing that and I need to change them so I can move my project forward."

You will just stay in that confusion forever because there's no way for you to really know what or why they're doing what they're doing and what their thought process is. But you don't need to. If you stopped being confused, telling yourself you were confused about how to move forward because of them, you would see how to move forward if you asked yourself a better question like, "How can I move this project forward no matter what Sheila says or does? How can I move this project forward even if Bob is never on board?"

That is a question that will lead you to take decisions and action. Thinking, "Bob's behavior is just so confusing, I'm so confused, I need to understand why he's acting this way, it's so confusing, I don't know how to move this forward if Bob isn't on board," those kinds of thoughts that create confusion keep you stuck.

Another place I see this come up a lot is in romantic relationships, especially kind of early on. Somebody is not showing up in the way you're interested in having a relationship, like they're not responding to your messages or they - sometimes they want to hang out a lot and then they disappear or whatever else.

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And you say to yourself, "Well, I just don't know whether to - what to do, I'm confused. Why are they doing this? Why are they showing up inconsistently? Why are they hot and cold? Why do they think this? Why do they think that? Why are they doing this? Why are they doing that? I can't decide what to do about this relationship until I understand why they're being the way they are."

You don't need to understand it. You honestly do not. All you need to know is what's your objective. What kind of relationship do you want to have? Is this person available to have it? If not, doesn't really matter at all why they are the way they are, right? So if you change your thoughts from, "I'm so confused, this behavior is so confusing, this behavior's so inconsistent, do they like me or not? Why are they doing this? I'm just really confused about whether they like me, I'm just really confused about what they want."

None of that shit matters. You ask yourself, "What do I want? Is this person showing up to offer it?" That's a much simpler question and you make a decision much more quickly. So the first distortion is believing that you need to understand what somebody else is thinking, what they're doing, why they're doing it, that you need to understand somebody else's thought process or actions in order to be able to take your own actions, make your own decisions. That's always a life.

You only need to know what you want to think, how you want to feel, and what actions you want to take or results you want to create. Then you come up with thoughts to achieve those. The other thought distortion that underlies confusion is the idea that it's possible to make a right or wrong decision.

There is no such thing as a right or wrong decision. How do you know if a decision's right or wrong? Only by having a thought about it, only by deciding in the future that the decision was wrong. Both of those things are thoughts, right? Really sit with that.

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The only way you know if a decision is right or wrong is if your brain looks at whatever results you have or new circumstances you're in and thinks, "Well, I don't like these, I'm going to blame it on that decision. That was a bad decision." Right? It's like two series of thoughts.

Number one, you decide you don't like whatever's going on, which is just an optional thought, and then number two, you decide to blame it on a decision you made in the past. So it's like a two-step thought. Either way, it's just a thought in your mind. It's not an objective reality.

Your brain has to analyze what it sees and judge it to even know if something is right or wrong. So believing a decision was right or wrong is just a thought. And whatever your thoughts are, you can manage them. You get to be in charge of them. That is what this work is all about.

If you tell yourself that you're going to be the victim of your own unmanaged mind in the future, you are going to create analysis paralysis. Whether you're deciding what to eat for lunch or whether to get divorced, it doesn't matter. You can get paralyzed by either one if you believe there's a right decision.

And the scope of the decision or scale of the impact is really irrelevant, which is actually great proof that it's all about your thoughts. If your brain can get as paralyzed about what to eat for lunch versus whether to get divorced, that's a pretty good sign that has nothing to do with the scope of the decision and it only has to do with your brain believing there's a right or wrong decision.

And let's really be clear. Most of the time when you are worried about how you'll feel if you make a wrong decision, you are mostly worried about what you're going to say to yourself, that you're going to feel regret, that you're going to criticize yourself, that you're going to shame and blame yourself.

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If you knew you wouldn't do that, there would be so much less pressure on making a decision. So if you want to stop being confused, you just need to make a decision and you have to commit to not shaming or blaming or criticizing yourself in the future for that decision. If you truly internalize that you can feel good and achieve what you want no matter what decision you make, you can make a decision instantly.

Analysis paralysis and confusion are caused by believing that one decision is right and the other is wrong and believing that your happiness or success depends on choosing the right one. But they don't. Your happiness and success depend on your thoughts. And when you understand that, you can always choose how you want to think and feel.

So there's no reason to fear the future. Confusion and analysis paralysis about life decisions from honestly, whether to send an email to whether to switch careers is something that all my clients have in common. Honestly, it is such a product of perfectionism and self-criticism, plus the human discomfort with uncertainty that everybody has to deal with. Undoing the perfectionist right wrong thinking and the fear of decision making is one of the big things we work on in the program.

And if you take anything away from today's episode, I want it to be these three things. Confusion is a lie your brain tells you. It is simply created by your thought that you are confused. The antidote to confusion is making a decision. And no decision is right or wrong. It is all about your thoughts.

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