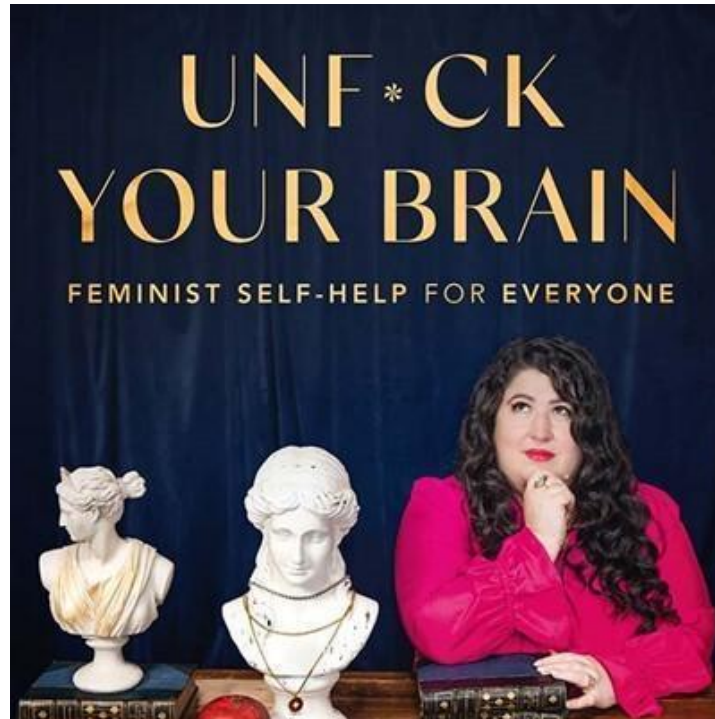


UFYB 9: Thought Work Is a Feminist Act



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, chickens. Are you roosting somewhere warm?

I am in extreme denial that it is dark at 5:00 PM right now, but I'm also really excited that the winter solstice is coming up because it's finally going to get lighter. I was actually just on a call with a new client today and I was saying to her that I totally understand why ancient people sacrificed at the solstice. I would happily trade all the sheep I have for the sun to come back right now. I mean, I don't have any sheep, but if I had them, they would be in danger. It's dark.

But that also means 2018 is almost here. So this month we're talking about what we want to create in 2018. And last week we talked about settling, why we do it and how to stop. And today we're going to talk about the number one thing you can do to ensure your success in 2018. And here's what that number one thing is, managing your mental and emotional health. In my opinion, investing in your mental and emotional health is absolutely a feminist issue. And to be clear, I am not necessarily talking about financial investment. Now, obviously I'm a coach, so I think that investing in coaching is a good way to do this, but you can do this work on your own, it just requires investing your time and energy.

So why is investing in your own emotional and mental health a feminist issue? There's a great quote from Audrey Lorde that goes, "Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation and that is an act of political warfare." Now Audrey Lorde is a black poet, and this is especially true for women of color, right, given our society and the structural racism that they experience. But I think it's true for all women and I think it's

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especially true when it comes to your mental and emotional health, right? That's what real self-care is. I like bubble baths and champagne as much as the next girl, but neither of them radically transform your life or make you more capable of accomplishing your goals and creating the life that you want. Managing your mind and your emotional life does that. That is the real self-care. When you think about it, there's enormous social pressure on women to not take their thoughts and feelings seriously, right?

Overall in our society we prioritize the wrong things, I think. We focus on material purchases or physical indulgences as the way to quote unquote, treat ourselves or make ourselves feel better. And that stuff is marketed to women, especially. And as a society, we undervalue mental health and we stigmatize emotions and introspection. And again, particularly for women. Women are constantly being taught that they're too emotional, that they overreact, that we're basically just like big clouds made a feelings, right? And the implication is that feelings are unimportant compared to rational logic, which is assumed to belong to men. So women are essentially gas lit by society constantly, right, which treats us differently, but tells us that it isn't doing so. And then when we object to being treated differently we're told that we're imagining things or we're overly emotional and we need to calm down.

If you think back, hysteria was a condition assumed to be caused by a wandering uterus. And it's still a term that is almost exclusively applied to women to this day, right? How often do you hear that a man is being hysterical? Only if it's meant to be sort of a homophobic slur. So all in all, women are taught to swallow their emotions, to think they are silly and frivolous. We're told to just snap out of it or calm down. Psychological studies show that when women express the same idea as men the women are judged to be more emotional, less rational and less believable. So is it any wonder that we tend to second guess ourselves? We tell ourselves to just get over it. We just white knuckle our way through our emotions, right? I cannot count the number of times on a consultation call where someone

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tells me, "Well, I know this is stupid," or "I know this is silly," or "I know these feelings are ridiculous." We're taught that taking our thoughts and feelings seriously is frivolous.

And the truth is, patriarchy works when women doubt themselves and defer to society, right? Women feeling inadequate, women feeling like they are not enough, women doubting themselves, that's not to women's advantage, right, that's the patriarchy's advantage. That's to the advantage of structural sexism. So taking control of your mental and emotional life is truly an act of feminist liberation. Freeing yourself from that self-doubt and that self-criticism that steals your emotional and mental and even physical energy is a revolutionary act. That is true self-care.

Here's something else that I see going on. Often when people try to counter the stigmatization of women's feelings, it goes in entirely the wrong direction. I think there's this well-meaning idea out there that the solution to women's emotions being minimized or marginalized or downplayed is to validate everyone's feelings. But I don't really think this does you any good because it means you're never challenging your thought process or learning how to change and manage your emotional life. You're just quote unquote, validating what you feel over and over and never feeling any better or learning how to change it. I don't think validity is the right question to be asking yourself about your emotions, right? Your emotions may be valid, I mean they exist, right, they happen.

But what does that even mean, right? I'm much more interested in, are they skillful? Are they helpful? Are they the emotions you want to be having? What actions are they driving? And what results are you creating? Those are better questions to ask yourself than, are my feelings valid? Who cares? Sure, they're valid because you have them. That's not the end of the inquiry, that's the beginning, right? Asking yourself useful questions, learning how to change your thought patterns so you can manage your emotional life, that's the opposite of frivolous. It is the best investment of

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your time, energy and money you can make because your thoughts and feelings aren't just experiential, right, they're also practical.

And I mean, here's what I mean by that. It's two different concepts. Number one, your emotions are important because they make up your experience day-to-day in this world, right? They just inform. Every minute you're awake, right, is basically you having feelings. And for some reason women often think... Well, not for some reason, because they're taught to think this way, right? We think that isn't important or it doesn't matter, or isn't worth spending resources on, right? We'll spend thousands of dollars a year on the physical upkeep that helps us conform to society's beauty norms, but we don't invest that same amount in actually improving our daily experience of the world. And that's not because we're vain or selfish, it's because we've been taught that no matter what, what matters is how we look, not how we feel. We've been taught from a young age to prioritize how we look to other people over our internal experience. So we'll spend hundreds or thousands of dollars on clothing and haircuts, and blowouts, and nails and everything else, right, because we've been taught that that's what matters.

And we don't spend nearly that much on our own mental and emotional health, which determines our entire experience of the world because we've been taught to focus, not on what we want in life, but on whether others want us. Choosing to invest your time and your energy, and maybe your money in learning to manage your mental and emotional life is taking back that priority, right? It's prioritizing your actual life, your internal experience and everything you want to create outside of yourself in the world. Both those things are determined by your mental and emotional life and knowing how to manage them.

And it's like, what could be more stark of a contrast between how we value our outsides and how they look to the rest of the world and how we value our insides and what it's like to live in our own brains day after day. And again, it's not because we're vain, it's not because we're frivolous, it's

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because that's what we've been taught to prioritize. But now we're adults and we're allowed to have our own priorities and to change them. So that's the first thing. Your emotions are important because that's basically what you experienced all day every day. And that would be enough reason to care about them. Your internal experience of the world matters. You not being anxious all the time is a worthy goal in and of itself.

But your emotions, aren't just sort of experiential like that, they're also responsible for your actions and your results. So your emotional life isn't just a matter of how you feel, it is the direct motivator of how you act and what results you want in your life, right? My education, I went to Yale and I went to Harvard Law School, overall that cost hundreds of thousands of dollars when all was said and done. But what good is that to me if I don't have the basic emotional management skills to use it to achieve what I want? Managing your emotional life is the most important thing you can do. It makes you a better partner. It makes you a better parent. It makes you a better friend. It makes you a better worker for someone else. But more importantly, it makes you a better friend and motivator to yourself.

Knowing how to create the emotions that you want to feel on purpose so that you can act how you want is truly the secret to life. And that starts with understanding the fact that the reason that you are anxious and stressed out, and insecure and guilty, and maybe even angry so much of the time is not because there's anything wrong with you, and it's not a small matter, right, it is your life. It is the emotional content of this one life you have. And you're taught not to value that. And you're taught not to care about it and not to take it seriously, and to think that you should just get over it or not care or white knuckle through it. And that caring about your own emotional state, prioritizing your own mental and emotional health is frivolous or selfish.

But nothing could be less frivolous. Nothing could be less silly. Nothing could be less selfish and nothing could be less of a waste of time. It is the

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best use of your resources that you can have because it solves every single problem in your life. And we don't learn it at home and we don't learn it at school. No one teaches us this most important life skill, so we have to teach ourselves.

I've talked about why it's not frivolous and why it's not silly, but I also want to talk about why it's not selfish, because women are socialized to care more about other people, right, and to think that prioritizing ourselves is selfish. So number one, I think that's bullshit. Why shouldn't you be your number one priority. But number two, okay, if you don't want to be your number one priority, learning to manage your mental and emotional life is the best way to show up and serve others, right? That is 100% true. When you are consumed with anxiety and guilt and fear, your brain is making it all about you. You're worried about yourself and how you're doing, and what do other people think about you, and are you good enough? It's actually incredibly inner and self-oriented. When you spend the time and the energy on learning, how to manage your thinking and your emotions, you have so much more to give other people.

First of all, you just have more energy because you're not exhausted from being anxious and guilty and insecure and angry all the time, which is very physically draining. So you have more energy to actually give to something else, right? You have more resources to share with other people. And once you just like yourself and believe in yourself, you have all of this mental energy to actually think about what other people need, rather than it all actually being about you and your own insecurity. So I think being your number one priority is a great idea in and of itself, but even if you don't believe you should be, learning to manage your mental and emotional life is like putting on your own oxygen mask before you try to put one on your companion.

So if I have a 2018 wish for you it's this, take yourself seriously, take your life seriously, take your emotional world seriously. Spend the time and the

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energy to learn how to manage your emotional life, because it determines everything else that happens to you. Your daily experience of life matters and what you're here to create in the world matters. They aren't negligible. They aren't just beside the point. They aren't second best. Learning to manage your emotional life is the secret to creating your own liberation.

Have a beautiful week and I will talk to you all 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.

It's my favorite place on Earth and it will change your life, I guarantee it. Come join us at www.unfuckyourbrain.com/society. I can't wait to see you there.