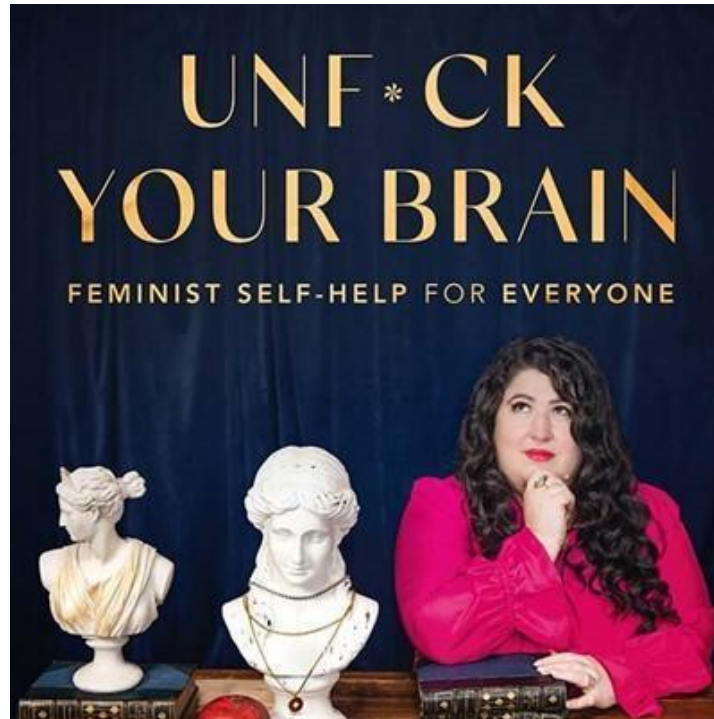


UFYB 128: Boredom



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 chickens. How are you all doing today? I am actually recording this episode about three or four days into the voluntary self-quarantine, social distancing period a lot of us are experiencing, or did experience. And so it's kind of perfect that the topic I had already scheduled for this podcast is boredom.

Because boredom is something that a lot of us are going to experience quite a bit during this pandemic period. And I think because we are so bad at handling boredom, we're going to be trying to escape it in a variety of ways that aren't great for us, like buffering with food or booze or Netflix, or buffering with the news.

I think our brains sometimes would rather be anxious than be bored because if we make ourselves anxious enough, we have a problem to solve. So today I want to talk about boredom, what boredom is even, whether it is or isn't a problem, and how you can handle it.

So the first thing to know that is going to surprise you, some of you, is that boredom is a thought. It's not a circumstance. It's not something that happens to you. It's not just the case that you are bored, the same way you are awake or are sleeping. Boredom is not a circumstance. It's a thought that you have.

You have the thought that you are bored. And that may give rise to a feeling and we could call whatever that physical sensation is boredom, but for me, I don't find it so much a physical sensation. If you feel physical sensation when you think I'm bored, then that's the feeling you've got, that's fine.

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When I think I'm bored, I don't find a big physical response in myself. It's different from person to person, but the important thing to know is that boredom is not just happening to you. You are actually creating it for yourself with your own thoughts.

Otherwise, if that weren't the case, if boredom could just happen to you, then we'd all be bored at the same time, in the same circumstances, while doing or not doing the same things. And we know that that isn't the case. I can be bored watching a football game while someone else is having an incredibly engaged experience.

How can that be? It's because our thoughts are different. My thought is, "This is boring or who cares?" And their thought is, "I want my team to win, or this is so exciting, or I love being part of this group of fans, can you believe that call?" Whatever they're thinking.

Nothing is intrinsically boring. Even doing nothing is not intrinsically boring. It's only your own thoughts that make something boring or not boring to you. So that's the first thing to understand. If you're bored, you have only yourself to blame. You are choosing to think and believe that you are bored or have nothing to do, and then you're creating that experience for yourself.

As long as you have a human mind, you do not have to be bored. There is always interesting stuff to think about. Or you can use your human mind to practice being present in the world and just using your awareness to experience where you are. You can actively think or you can work on your meditative presence.

But you don't have to be bored. And I love using time that I have to do nothing else but think to ask myself powerful questions, to try to think about my future self, what my future self is doing, what she thinks, how she believes, how she feels, what kind of results she's created. It's almost like having a mental penpal.

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Or to think about my business, to think about how I can grow my business, how I can serve and support my clients more, how I can bring more teaching to the world, what my clients are struggling with that I can help them with, how I can solve my own thought work problems. So many powerful, interesting questions to give your brain.

All that being said, the second important thing to understand is that there's nothing wrong with boredom or being bored. They're not a problem. It's just a thought creating an experience for you. But that's okay. It's okay to be bored. It's not fatal.

The biggest problem with boredom is that we're so intolerant of it. I think this is exacerbated by our current society and all of our technology. It used to be that as a human, you had to experience boredom sometimes and you had to figure out how to amuse yourself.

You didn't have computers at home and on the subway and in your pocket at all times, to always be able to stream music or news or play games or read social media. Our attention spans are actually getting shorter because of how much technology we use. And so our ability to tolerate boredom is getting very low.

Your primitive brain always wants a hit of dopamine, so it's always going to choose to poke the buttons on the game or go on Facebook or whatever else. And your brain is also wired for social connection, and social media gives you the illusion of connecting to other people.

And sometimes of course, you really are connecting, but often you're just scrolling and passively viewing, which is not the same as connecting. So I do think that we have a harder time tolerating boredom than previous generations. We just have not had to do it.

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And the problem is that on the other side of boredom are a lot of good things. On the other side of boredom is creativity, it's true relaxation, learning, and growth. Everything that humans can create is on the other side of boredom. Because to think deeply, to reflect, to let your mind wander, to access your creativity, you have to be willing to spend time where you're not distracting yourself with external stimulation.

If you are staring at a screen in your hand and trying to capture the - I don't know what happens in Candy Crush. I don't play games on my phone. Whatever you're trying to do, when you're just giving yourself lots of little hits of dopamine and constantly scrolling or pinging or texting or whatever, you never have any space in your mind.

Your brain is just bouncing all over the place. Boredom and space in your mind is essential because it's on the other side of boredom that you will come up with new insights, you will have new ideas, you'll brainstorm new projects, you'll gain insight into yourself.

If you are constantly distracting yourself, you never get to actually know your own brain or your body. You can't find out what your thoughts are if you're never willing to just sit around and pay attention to them. You have to be willing to sometimes take away all of that addictive stimuli and let your mind wander.

We are so afraid of boredom or being alone with our own thoughts that we try to drown them out with Netflix and food and shopping and booze and Instagram and all the other things we do to distract ourselves. I think that's one of the reasons we avoid non-stimulated time so much is that we're afraid of our own minds, our own thoughts and feelings.

But your thoughts are harmless if you aren't acting on them. They're just sentences in your mind. You can learn to observe and detach from them. But - and this is the crucial point - if you won't ever stop and allow yourself

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to be alone with them, if you aren't willing to go through the part where you're a little bit bored at first, you will never be able to learn or practice that skill.

When we talk about boredom, I think we think of it as being kind of low grade, but sometimes stopping that kind of stimuli can actually be very uncomfortable. Being bored can feel like your brain is having an addict fit about wanting to look at your phone. And we have to be willing to get through that period.

Boredom is like allowing a negative emotion. We resist it so much and we go to such extreme lengths to avoid our own emotions, but if we're able to relax and allow them, they're often over in a few moments and we get through to the other side just fine.

So what if you were willing to be bored? It will be very uncomfortable at first. You won't know what to do and you'll have the urge to distract yourself. You will reach for your phone. Just let the urge come up. Let it pass. Stay where you are. Stare out the window. Let your mind wander.

Let your brain do some thinking. Don't just replay your own self-critical thoughts, but ask yourself interesting questions. Create some mental space for yourself. Allow the discomfort of being bored and then pass through to the other side.

Boredom won't kill you, and depending on what happens outside in the world, we may all have a lot of time to practice being bored. So I want you to give it a try. See what is on the other side. I think you will be amazed at what you find.

Alright my chickens, short and sweet for this week. Give you plenty of time to think your thoughts and be bored.

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