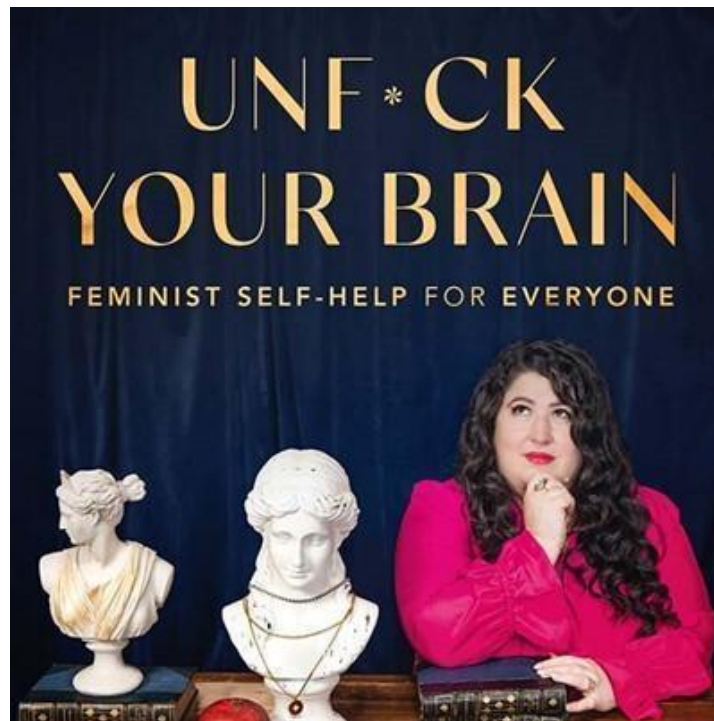


UFYB 129: A Year of Thought Work Vol. 1 - Parenting, Body Image, & COVID-19



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

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Female Announcer: 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.

Kara Loewentheil: Hello, my chickens. So, March, I think we can all agree, was approximately 37 years long. Really much longer than it needed to be, but it did finally end and with the arrival of April comes not only Taurus season, which is my birthday this month, although I feel like I've lost all track of time in our new world, but the one-year anniversary of The Clutch which I will never lose track of.

I have loved every program I have ever created as a coach, but I have to say The Clutch may be my favorite thing that I have ever done. Here's why and how it's related to this episode. You all hear me talk about my progress and change and transformation with thought work all the time. I know that for some of you and I hear from you that that's super inspiring and you see possibilities for yourself which is always my goal with talking about what I have accomplished or created in the world is to show you what's possible when you manage your mind and to inspire you to do even better things than I have done with managing my mind, or even crazier, amazing things.

But I know for some of you your brain's default is just to think that things aren't possible for you and so your brain deals with that cognitive dissonance where you kind of can see the value of thought work and you want to believe it works, but then your brain also believes you can't change and then there's this conflict between those beliefs. Some of you unconsciously resolve that by thinking that there's something special about me or that you can never do what I've done or that I don't struggle or that I

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can do it because of whatever. Your brain will come up with anything. The school I went to, what color my hair is, whatever it is.

I know that that's not true because I have so many students and clients who have used this work to change their lives in such amazing ways. So, what I want to do in honor of the anniversary of The Clutch is have some of my amazing students on the podcast to talk to you about their work, what they've learned, what they have distilled as takeaways that will be helpful to you all who are listening.

All of their lessons learned and their best thought work they've done and give you guys concrete tips on what they've learned, but also inspire you by showing you what is really possible with this work. So, these are all students of mine who joined the clutch a year ago and who have seen huge transformations in their lives.

Now, The Clutch is not a one-year coaching program, it's monthly, you sign up, I hope and so far I'm seeing some people will stay longer than a year, some people stay less than a year, but I always say that a year is a good amount of time to think about to really see full life transformation. You will 100% see progress and change much sooner than that and it's not required to stay a year, but I think in a year is where you can look around your life and be like, "Wow, this is completely different."

Because it's the anniversary it just seemed like the perfect kind of moment. So, I'm going to have them share their stories, their self-coaching, what they've worked on, how they've changed it, what thoughts have worked for them. I think these interviews are going to be so, so valuable for you guys and there's so much learning.

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You hear the way I explain things all the time, but everyone explains things a little bit differently and so I think hearing these couple, I think we're doing four, over the next couple of episodes, these four students of mine really talk in their own ways about what has changed for them and how they've evolved and transformed. What was challenging, and what was fun, and what was surprising, I think you guys are going to learn so much. I'm so grateful that they were willing to share their stories with you.

So, today we are going to hear from two of them and we're going to be talking about – we're always talking about thought work in general and the process and your relationship with yourself, but then we're also going to be diving some into body image work and parenting work and how my students are using these tools to cope with the current global situation.

So, I feel like the emcee of a talent show, but without further ado, let me introduce you to Bessie and Elizabeth and you are going to hear our conversations. I think these conversations are so rich and interesting and fun. I cannot wait for you guys to get to eavesdrop on them. So, let's take it away.

Hi, Bessie. Why don't you tell everybody just a little bit about yourself, just so we know who we're talking to?

Bessie: All right, my name is Bessie. I live in Toronto with my partner and my daughter. I am 44 years old and I'm a recovering academic, let's say.

Kara Loewentheil: You are not alone, my friend. Me, too, and I think a lot of others. Also, you guys can't see it, but Bessie has amazing eyebrows.

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Bessie: In their natural state.

Kara Loewentheil: We're all going au natural these days, we're all in our natural state. So, tell me a little bit about why you joined The Clutch. Was there something specific that you wanted to work on or what brought you to it?

Bessie: So, I found the podcast and it clicked with me right away. I was looking to make a change. There was going to be a big change in my circumstances, but I could sense already that it was not going to change my thoughts and I wanted it to.

Kara Loewentheil: Don't we all.

Bessie: So, I was kind of primed and ready to find something to help me with that. The podcast was like I was walking around a brain exploding emoji over my head for – and I still am actually. So, then I was listening to the podcast and then I did the Creating Confidence bootcamp and then I got the news about The Clutch and I was like, yes, more. I just want more, give me more because I had a lot of issues with my self-worth is what really holding me back and what I wanted to change and be able to think about differently.

I didn't want to stay in the same place that I had been and then have this circumstance change and still being doing the same stuff in my head. So, I wanted to take advantage of a change in my external life to make a change internally, so that I could do what I wanted to do. I had been miserable in my professional life for years, so I wanted to do things differently.

Kara Loewentheil: Yeah, totally. So, tell us, what was your self-esteem or self-worth like before you joined The Clutch, that's the area you identified?

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Bessie: I probably would have identified myself as a shy and insecure and moody person for my whole life and introverted. But I had been struggling to finish my dissertation for years and I just had been talking – I was so nasty to myself. I had been really talking in a horrible way to myself for many years and I had really gotten deep into that low self-esteem area and I just was telling myself that I was worthless all the time. So, when I thought about finishing my dissertation or doing something different afterwards it wasn't super exciting.

Kara Loewentheil: When you tell yourself you're worthless it's hard to get excited about your own future, I think.

Bessie: Exactly.

Kara Loewentheil: So, tell us what did you see your experience as your biggest victory in that area or just what changes have you seen? What has the process been like for you?

Bessie: Definitely baby steps. At least that I was looking for a change, so the idea that I could actually do it myself, that I wasn't broken, I didn't have to find some deep, dark secret and reveal it and then I can fix myself.

Kara Loewentheil: You're still rooting around in there for that deep, dark secret so I can explain it all.

Bessie: Yes, yes, and if I can just find it. I was in that cycle I think a lot of chickens are familiar with, the self-judgment and then the judgment isn't helping so I just shouldn't judge myself about the judgment because that will feel better.

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Kara Loewentheil: Right, very helpful.

Bessie: The idea that the thoughts didn't mean anything and that I didn't have to figure out if they were true or not or why I was having them or any of that I was like, oh my gosh, this changes everything. So, that was the beginning. It took such a load off already, but then I had to practice a lot.

But I don't think – if you had told me when I started The Clutch even after I had done a little bit of work already, if you had told me that I would be nice to myself, and supportive of myself, and encourage myself, and not be mean to myself when I messed up, I would not have believed that that was possible.

Kara Loewentheil: I love that. What did you used to say to yourself if you made a mistake or messed up, and what do you say to yourself now?

Bessie: I was so mean, and I would go back into all the regular stuff that I was saying to myself anyway. I didn't really need an excuse, but if I messed up, it was just like, “Oh, yeah. You're right. You really are a big waste of space. I don't know why anybody loves you. Probably your family is going to leave you, and you're making them all miserable so you're ruining their lives,” and on, and on, a lot of mean stuff. I'm like, “You know what? We're all human. It's okay. What can I learn from this?”

Kara Loewentheil: Oh, my God. Even just that is everything, being able to be like, “Oh, I'm a human. It's okay to have my experience,” versus, “Not only am I a waste of space, but I'm ruining everybody else's life.” Your brain was like, “All of it. You're responsible for all the bad things in the world.” Is there anything that you can think of that surprised you about this journey? Anything unexpected you discovered through being coached or doing your own work?

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Bessie: I thought about this question. In a way, everything surprised me. It opened up a whole new way of thinking for me, and every day I was like, “What? I don't have to believe that either? Really? I get to decide myself, and I know how to do that?” So, in that way, everything was surprising, but also made so much sense. It was interesting how that works.

Something that actually did surprise me a lot was a little thing, and it's a funny thing, but it's super fun to enjoy, was how much just making a commitment to go to Clutch College, even though COVID-19. It just made me feel so proud and good about myself that I could make that investment in myself. I was like, “Whoa, nothing has happened. I just made this decision, but yet I feel like someone who invests in herself,” because I did, and I am.

Kara Loewentheil: Isn't that amazing? It's like the benefits can start. I think that happens with The Clutch too. People decide to invest themselves, and they already start taking their own lives more seriously right before they've even done it. It's almost like a placebo effect. It's like they haven't even done the work yet, but they're already like, “Oh, okay. I'm worth it.” I love that, and we are totally going to have that Clutch College.

Bessie: Or we can reschedule it.

Kara Loewentheil: I'm actually interested. Have I ever coached you live? I don't think so.

Bessie: You coached me live once, but the camera didn't work.

Kara Loewentheil: Oh, that's why. Okay.

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Bessie: It was a Clutch Silver call.

Kara Loewentheil: Yeah, but I bring that up because I think it's amazing. You've done all of this work over the year. You've only been coached live by me once. It's like all the work that you did on your own is what has created this change along, obviously, with the tools and the support of other coaches.

People think that I have the answer, and that however much progress they can get is in direct correlation to how much they can speak to me, and of course, that has nothing to do with it. Of course, it's the tools, and the learning, and getting coaching, and written coaching.

Bessie: Yeah, seeing the coaching is always amazing and it helps me so much figure out like, "Oh, yes, I'm doing that too," and other questions that I can ask myself.

Kara Loewentheil: Yeah, everybody's brains are the same. I know you've done some thought work on your parenting. I don't know if you could tell us a little bit about that.

Bessie: Yeah. Like you said, things in one area are the same in other areas, but so with parenting, I was all invested that my kid's behavior reflected on me, and I couldn't get her to do what I wanted or what I thought was best for her. She was unhappy, and I thought I was a bad mom, and that is not a good feeling.

Kara Loewentheil: No, it's not. Children are so easily controllable. It's so easy to make children do exactly what you want. So, it's a great system.

Bessie: It's super, super, super effective. Also, I really was bad at holding

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space for her to have the full range of human emotions. I was like, “Oh, my gosh. You're struggling. This is terrible. We have to fix this right away,” and that was a super ineffective and uncomfortable way to parent.

Also, I had a sense. It wasn't like we were always at loggerheads and screaming at each other, but I didn't really know how to deal with conflict. As I said, I was just uncomfortable with her full range of emotions and how to be there for her.

So, as soon as I started to see how I was making things personal and move away from that, big changes happened already because I was like, “Oh, this is just okay. How can I focus on you? What's going on with you? Why is this happening in your mind?” Not, “You're not doing what I want. I'm a bad person. This has to stop.” It was a huge, huge difference. So, I'm much less reactive. I'm much less rigid. I'm much more curious about her experience, and then just much more comfortable with emotions.

Kara Loewentheil: I was going to say, I think that goes together, right? It's like the more that we learn to be willing to have the full range of emotions ourselves, the more we're like, “Oh, it's okay for other humans to do that also.”

It's like when we think a negative emotion is a disaster, that's when we're like, “Oh, my God. No one else could have one either. I need to make sure no one ever has one.” Totally. So, we are recording this in the era of COVID-19, and so I'm curious how, if at all, you feel like The Clutch and this work has helped you navigate or process current events?”

Bessie: Definitely. I have been thinking a lot about what would be going on if I did not have this work in my life.

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Kara Loewentheil: I cannot even imagine. I'm still needing to manage my mind because I'm a human, but I think about people who don't have these tools, and I'm like, "How are they even getting up in the morning? What's happening?"

Bessie: Yeah, like curled up in a ball.

Kara Loewentheil: I just don't know how you get through this kind of thing without thought work.

Bessie: So, first, the processing of emotions is key, and I definitely have been spending time because I'm like, "Okay, I'm feeling panicked right now," or, "I'm feeling sad," or, "I'm feeling a lot of fear." I notice it, and I sit with it, and then I can move on with whatever I want to do after I spent the time doing that. Structure has never been a big thing with our family. Sometimes it's a bit of a struggle, so we're all working with that, but also there, I'm like, "Okay, so today is the day where we didn't go outside today. Whatever, it doesn't mean that we're bad people, and unhealthy, and that our lives are ruined. We can figure out how to spend our time in a good way."

Kara Loewentheil: We can go outside tomorrow if we want to.

Bessie: Yes.

Kara Loewentheil: Well, I love that because one of the things I see happening a lot right now around the COVID stuff is that, of course, people are on extreme. So, they're either being like, "Everything has to be super productive, and you need to be basically running a school, and doing your best work, and writing the great American novel, and learning, running a

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marathon, or whatever at home.” Then the contrary response is like, “No, you don't need to do anything.” I'm like, “Maybe there's something in between where we don't just descend into a structureless, shapeless void of screaming and I scream,” but also, we have grace for ourselves under unusual conditions. It's the exact thing.

I feel like we work on so much in The Clutch because everybody with my kind of brain, which is all my students, are like all or nothing. It's like, “I had the perfect schedule, and we didn't follow it. It's a disaster. Now, I'm not doing anything for a week,” as opposed to like, “How can we create some moderation,” which doesn't sound exciting and sexy, but it's actually the only way to live your life without losing your mind.

Bessie: Then the black and white thinking was such was such a huge thing for me before the COVID-19, and now, it's such a gift to be able to be like, “Okay, these things are happening, but we still don't have to go there. There's still many options.”

Kara Loewentheil: Yeah, it's such a strong factor. My boyfriend calls me an absolutist now, and I'm like, “You have no idea. I have done so much work on this. This is so much better.” So, I just have a couple more questions I'd like to hear from you about. Tell me a little bit how your perception of yourself has changed. We talked about how you talk to yourself, but what's your concept of yourself? How has that changed?

Bessie: I just think I have so much more to offer now than I used to have. I used to think about it. It's interesting because I used to get defensive because I took everything personally. So, I was like, “Oh, well, I'm good at this, and I can do this,” but it didn't feel good. Now, I just feel just open with possibility. I'm comfortable talking about myself and what I have to offer with people.

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When I was a teenager, I had a little bout with depression, and I had this moment where I heard a Maya Angelou quote about giving yourself permission to live, and it always stuck with me. I was like, “Why can't I just figure that out? How can I give myself permission to live?”

Now, I feel like I give myself full permission, and I also support myself, and I then can give so much to others, and that, I don't think I had before. The idea of contributing was important, but I didn't know what I had to contribute, and now, I feel like I have a lot to contribute.

Kara Loewentheil: Yeah, it's like we were trying to pour from an empty cup and also not believing the cup had anything valuable in it. So, it was very hard. You're like, “I have three drops of rusty water. Does anybody want it? That's what's in my cup.” You can't really contribute. I love that.

Bessie: Why don't you want it?

Kara Loewentheil: What? Say that again.

Bessie: But why don't you want it?

Kara Loewentheil: Right, but also, I'm very offended that you don't want what I just told you was three drops of rusty water. Yeah, totally. That feeling of open possibilities in the future, I think, is so powerful. I have people in their 70s saying it, and then people in their 30s because they're like, “Well, I already know what my life is going to be, and it's over now. It's too late to change anything.” You know?

Obviously, this current disruption we're going through, we're not all excited

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about it. We didn't necessarily wish for it, but in some ways, it's such a symbol of how quickly things can change. The whole world can change incredibly quickly, and maybe this isn't the change we would have ordered from the menu if we were allowed to select, but so much change is possible.

Because we want to feel secure, we massively underestimate how much things can change including in ourselves. I remember that feeling too. After I got about a year maybe into my journey, which is where you are, a year and a half, I was like, "Oh, wow. I just feel like the options are endless, but I no longer find that paralyzing."

It used to be if I have more than two options, now I'm paralyzed because I can't pick the right one. Now, it's more in the sense of who knows what kind of amazing shit I'm going to be able to come up with and do.

Bessie: Yeah, and I'm a limitless resource. I don't have to rely on any one thing, but like, "Okay, well I can do this, and that's okay. Whatever happens, I can handle it."

Kara Loewentheil: Yes.

Bessie: That is magic.

Kara Loewentheil: Right, that's the only security. That's the only emotional security that exists, is, "Whatever comes, I know I can handle it. I know I can trust myself to handle it." I love what you just said about how it's all in you. It's all our brain. Of all the things in the world that you can invest your time, and energy, and resources in, your brain is the answer to all of it. Totally.

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So, one last question, although it's kind of a compound. I'm curious what you would say to someone who is where you started, like to your past self or someone who's where you are? What would you want to say to them?

Bessie: Baby steps. Just take little baby steps, the littlest ones you can, and any move you can make away from the negativity towards compassion and acceptance is so powerful and meaningful, and it's just going to point you towards who you want to be.

Kara Loewentheil: I love that. I'm curious, actually, since I think people have different learning styles. What were the parts of The Clutch that you found the most helpful for your journey?

Bessie: Oh, for sure the coaching calls. I have been re-watching them a lot lately. Maybe a little bit of buffering.

Kara Loewentheil: Of all the things to buffer with, that's pretty harmless.

Bessie: There's so much. Then every time I watch that, I get something new out of the coaching, and I was like, "Whoa, I didn't quite see that before." So, the coaching calls are amazing. The community of The Clutch, I think, is just really beautiful. I really love the way people support each other, and the way people ask good questions of each other, and that I definitely use the Facebook group a lot, and spend time reading it, and just really appreciate what goes on in there. The intro course. I'll go through all of them.

Kara Loewentheil: All the elements.

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Bessie: I love all the parts of it, just all of it, but the intro course for sure. There was some of the same material presented a little bit different. We learned the model in the creating confidence, but just to go through it in that way and take time to do it, I think, is so, so valuable. Really, all of them. Every single piece.

Kara Loewentheil: I love that. I was just thinking about the Facebook group. Obviously, I love coaching you guys because I'm in another Facebook group where I just was reading a post someone made about what happened in their relationship, this is not in The Clutch, and all the comments just 100% validating that the other person was totally terrible, and awful, and this person was perfect and genius.

It's like candy. It's going to feel good for that person for a minute, but they learn nothing from that. There's no option to change or grow from that. It's just this echo chamber of people just validating that all your thoughts are true and everything else in the world is terrible. I was like, "This is awful. I'm going back to The Clutch. I don't want to see any of this."

Having that community, I created it because that's what I wanted. It's like where can I go to talk about thought work and talk about all the things in my life with other people who are going to actually ask me good questions that make me think? Not just be like, "Yes, magically, everything in your life is everybody else's fault, and there's nothing that you should ever think about changing or reflecting on." Not helpful.

Bessie: Yeah, it's interesting how little I talk about stuff that I do thought work on with people who are not in The Clutch.

Kara Loewentheil: Right, you stop wanting that feedback. Totally. You're

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like, "Please don't tell me that yes, everybody else is an asshole, and I'm perfect." I already think that, and it doesn't feel good, and I'm not getting results I want. I think those are the questions I had, but is there anything you think I should've asked you or anything else you would want to share with someone who's considering joining The Clutch or thinking about taking this work deeper?

Bessie: Just go for it. Honestly, I can't say enough. I really did not think that this of change was possible for me. I could not have imagined it, and I said that from the very beginning. Like, "Whoa." So, right away, but still every day, I'm like, "Oh, my gosh. This is amazing. I did not know that I could be this for myself. I did not know that I could make decisions in this way."

The idea of taking responsibility for myself, it was like, "Ugh, I have to do it. Eww, gross." I know how now. There's no messing up. I just have to keep trying and working. It's such a load off, I feel like my mind is so much freer to think about things I want to think about. The amount of time I used to spend worrying and second guessing. My brain was busy with that 99% of the time.

Kara Loewentheil: I think about the amount of time I spent either thinking about food in my body or thinking about worrying if other people were mad at me. It's actually amazing that I even got through elementary school, much less everything else I did, but I could never have created The Clutch and everything I've done without having done the thought work to clean that up. I just literally would not have had brain space to do it.

Bessie: Yeah, it's amazing what room there is when you stop doing those habits. I think I had a kind of like, "I know this is not serving me to worry, but I don't know what to do instead."

Kara Loewentheil: Totally. Yeah, that knowledge, that insight that it's not

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helping you, you're like, "Great. So, I'm still punching myself in the face. I know it hurts, but if someone doesn't teach me how to stop, how am I going to stop?" Totally. I love that. It's like cleaning out an addict. You get rid of three quarters of the stuff up there, and then you're like, "Oh, look at that. There's so much room here."

I think I had that same experience of I just thought I couldn't be this kind of person. That it was like this is something that other people can be. It must just be genetic, or they had better parents, or whatever, but I can't be that kind of person.

So, it's such a gift to be like, "Oh, I can be any kind of person I want like," and that you can't even imagine how amazing you and your life can be. It's like you start out just wanting to be like, "Maybe I could be 10% less mean to myself about how terrible I truly am." That's your goal. Then a year later, you're like, "Oh, my God. I can actually like myself and think I'm amazing. What?" The best thing in the world. All right. Well, thank you for sharing your experience with us. So helpful.

Bessie: Thank you so much for everything.

Kara Loewentheil: Yeah, and I cannot wait to hug you in person at Clutch College when we are allowed within six feet of each other. I don't know how the world has coped with this. All right.

Bessie: And it's a better place. I believe we're going to do good things. At least a lot of us are going to do good things to make a change out of this.

Kara Loewentheil: Yeah, that's our only option. We get to decide what to think about it no matter what. away.

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Hi, Elizabeth. I'm so excited to get to chat with you and share your story. Why don't you just tell us, well I just said your name, but where you live, a little bit about you, and what brought you to this work into The Clutch in the first place.

Elizabeth: So, I'm Elizabeth. I live in Arizona right now, and right now I am a body acceptance coach. The thing that brought me to this work and The Clutch, for a year before you opened The Clutch, I had been trying to coach myself on my own, and it worked to a certain extent, and I realized I need eyes on my problems.

When you opened it, it was perfect timing because I had listened to your podcast about body image, and how to love your body, how to love how you look naked, and all that stuff. I was drawn to you because you yourself are plus size. I was like, "Okay, I know I want to work on my body image. I want to learn it from someone who actually represents a body that I have."

So, yeah. I'm like, "Okay. I'm just going to join for a month, see how it goes, let's do the body image stuff," and of course, a year later, I'm like, "Yeah, I needed the whole time. I needed to keep getting coached ongoing." So, that's what led me to you, just relating to you and your work pretty much.

Kara Loewentheil: I totally remember when I was doing this work that I felt like I was like, "Okay, there's people talking about body image." Obviously, people have body image any size. Of course, as a coach, I know that, but at the same time, I was like, "Well, I'd like to see some proof that you can change your thoughts to be confident in a body that the rest of society is not constantly validating also."

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So, tell us a little bit about what your body image was like before. I love you said, “I need eyes on my problem.” We all need eyes on our brains because I get coached too. I’m like, “My brain can’t always coach itself.” So, tell us a little bit about what your body image and body thoughts were before you joined The Clutch.

Elizabeth: So, before I joined The Clutch, I was in this cycle of shame and self-loathing. I had regained because I had lost like 90 pounds, and I had regained everything back. I was in so much disappointment because I had even told myself, “I’m not going to regain the weight. This time, it’s for real. I’m never regaining the weight.” Of course, what happens with all diets is you end up regaining the weight.

Kara Loewentheil: 99% of people regain the weight. Yup.

Elizabeth: Yeah, and I was obviously disappointed, and I couldn’t even look at myself in the mirror. I would go in the bathroom with the lights off. I would leave the door slightly open so there was some light.

Kara Loewentheil: You’re in the dark so you can’t see yourself.

Elizabeth: Yeah, exactly. Go to the bathroom, avoid the mirror because I just didn’t want to feel that disappointment by looking at myself. I was also really confused because logically, I knew weight loss was not the key to my happiness, but I still hated my body. I just didn’t know what other option there was. All I knew was that I was uncomfortable in my own skin. There was no trust between myself and my body. I just wanted to get out of this self-hatred.

It was just really intense, and I’m just glad when you showed up with The

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Clutch, one of the things was like, “Oh, you get this workbook for free.” I'm like, “Yes, body image. That's what I need.” I was still having the thought, “Okay, I'm going to lose weight, but I'm also going to work on this, and as soon as I dug into that, I was like, “Oh, shit. I think my journey is no longer a weight loss journey. This is a body love journey now.

Kara Loewentheil: Yeah, it was amazing to watch. I saw that happen as you went through coaching you, and watching your posts in the Facebook group, and the posts going from like, “Okay, well, let's talk about how I can love my body and change it at the same time,” to you being like, “Wait a minute. I think maybe my brain is the problem here.” It was amazing to watch you go through that in real time.

Elizabeth: Yeah, there was a cognitive dissonance.

Kara Loewentheil: Yeah, totally. And that's so common. People are like, “Well, I want to love my body so I can lose weight and have it work this time.” You want it to be instrumental. I totally went through that too, and maybe that happens for some people, but often what happens is once you love your body you're like, “Oh, that stuff doesn't matter. That was the whole point. That's all I wanted.”

Of course, we're all on ongoing journeys with this stuff, but now that your relationship to your body is so different after working on it for a year, tell us what you think either your biggest victory is there, or just what change you've seen, what your relationship is like now with your body.

Elizabeth: It relates to what you said about now once you learn the acceptance, a love for your body, you're like, “Well, then what's the point of weight loss?” Before I started the body acceptance journey, I had written an

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internal like, “Okay, what do I want from weight loss?” It had things like, “I want to be confident. I want to feel strong. I want to feel sexy. I want to wear whatever I want and not care about what people think,” the normal things we all want.

Months later, I looked at it again. I was like, “Oh, my God. I don't even have to lose weight to have that.” These are things I can just create with my own brain. Those are feelings that I want. Those are thoughts that I want to believe about myself, and that was mind blowing. Just the fact that I recognized it. I can just do that for myself. I am doing that for myself, and there's these misconceptions about when you accept your body, you're going to just not care anymore. You're going to let yourself go, whatever that means.

Kara Loewentheil: Which is so crazy. When you love a pet, you just never feed it or walk it because you don't care. That's not how we are.

Elizabeth: I've never thought about that, but yeah, that is not at all what happened for me. I actually care about my body. I actually listen now to my body. I try to eat to feel good, and even when I eat something sweet or whatever that seemed bad, I don't beat myself up for it. There's just a lot less pressure around exercise and food.

I move in ways that I want you now. It's so weird. I did a kickboxing class, and I want to do a dance workout, just things that I never thought that I would do because I was stuck in this like, “Okay, I need a run, or I need to lift weights, or the general things just to shrink my body, not to have fun in my body.”

Kara Loewentheil: Totally. I never ate more sugar than when I was telling myself I wasn't eating sugar because there'd be a period where I'd want, and then there'd be the binge. Whereas now, I'm out of town for a few months. I'm

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staying with my mother because of everything that's going on in the world right now, and I brought some dark chocolate and there's actually no sugar in the house, which I realized, and I was like, "Yeah, whatever," but if I were still in diet brain, that would've been like, "Yeah, I won't eat any," and then I would've ended up bingeing on it. It's so much more drama.

Elizabeth: Yeah, just using your willpower to not think about it.

Kara Loewentheil: Totally. So, here's the most important question. Do you turn on the light in the bathroom now?

Elizabeth: Yeah, I do. The light is on.

Kara Loewentheil: The light is on.

Elizabeth: Yeah.

Kara Loewentheil: I totally remember what that used to be like when you would walk past a mirror or a window, avert your eyes. It was so you wouldn't see yourselves so that you wouldn't be mean to yourself.

Elizabeth: Yeah, and when I started doing some of the work, especially with neutral thoughts, how to look at myself in the mirror while I was doing that, at least for me, that's what I needed, and it just changed the relationship with me and the mirror because now, the morning when I would practice my thoughts in front of the mirror, now it was this self-load pep talk. Like, "Okay, that is a human body," and just all these different thoughts that I added on top, and it turned into this I'm talking to myself in a nicer way now.

Kara Loewentheil: You have a little team meeting in the mirror in the

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morning.

Elizabeth: Yes.

Kara Loewentheil: Tell me something, if there is something, unexpected or that you discovered through this work or being coached that surprised you.

Elizabeth: Just because you have a thought doesn't mean it's true.

Kara Loewentheil: I've heard that before. I think I've heard that before. It might be the case.

Elizabeth: I remember you were like, "It's not a sign from the deep or the universe. It's just a thought." It helped because throughout the journey, I was still having thoughts of weight loss like, "Oh, God. Maybe I should shrink my arms, or tighten my arms, or maybe we should just eat less today. Maybe you should lose weight," all these weight loss thoughts.

I really thought that I was doing something wrong because of it, and I wasn't actually getting anywhere. Then I think I posted something, and you were like, "Okay, I still have those thoughts too, but I don't see them as a problem." It's like, "What? Oh, okay. So, then I can just redirect my mind to what I want to think," and yeah, that just blew my mind because I really thought I was doing something wrong.

Kara Loewentheil: Totally. We have that black and white thinking where we're like, "Well, now I'm going to think positive thoughts about my body. So, if any of those old negative ones come up, something's gone wrong." No, it's just an old train track or something that a train occasionally goes down accidentally. It's like, "Nope, Nope. Come back over here. Wrong train tracks."

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Elizabeth: Yeah, and you've been thinking that since you were what, like 12? Of course.

Kara Loewentheil: Of course it's still there. Yeah, exactly.

Elizabeth: I even now question it like, “Okay, Liz. What is this really about? What do you think losing weight is going to solve?” It's always something that I can just give to myself.

Kara Loewentheil: It's always a feeling.

Elizabeth: Yeah.

Kara Loewentheil: It's such a good question because all of our restrictive behaviors also are attempts to solve a feeling. That's why they don't make any sense. It's like, “Oh, I got bad feedback at work, but I'll feel better about myself if I don't eat dinner.” Those things have nothing to do with each other. It's just a way of trying to exert control.

So, I'm curious, I don't know where you are, how much there's been an impact from COVID and the current situation, but I'm just curious to hear how, if there has been, thought work and even either in general or just eating and food is coming up for a lot of people who are sitting at home. I'm curious how you found thought work has impacted your experience of the current moment.

Elizabeth: Okay. So, the first week, I was completely anxious. I didn't realize that I could have anxiety so days in a row. I think I got coached by one of the coaches, and I realized, “Okay, this is just something I have to

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feel.” I'm very good at avoiding my feelings.

So, I just let whatever come up, come up, and I think it was maybe one of your free coaching bonus calls that you did, but I think you said something that made me think about 100 years ago when this happened how different it is because how amazing is it that we can self-quarantine with the internet, and TV, and Netflix, and being able to see someone who lives in another state still during a pandemic. You wouldn't have been able to do that a 100 years ago.

Kara Loewentheil: I love that because I think part of what you're saying is sometimes people have the idea that if you learn to coach yourself, then it's sort of what you were talking about before, you'll never have negative emotion again. No, no, no.

The benefit of coaching and having a coaching community and support is, of course, you're still going to lose your mind sometimes. It's less often, and then when it happens after three or four days, you're like, “Oh, I should get coached maybe. Maybe I should use these resources. That might help.” Then you have someone there to be like, “Let's reset your brain a little bit.”

That's the same for me. I might spin out for a day, and then be like, “I should maybe coach myself or get some coaching.” Then every time, it's like, “Oh, that shockingly helped a lot. Who knew? It was just my thoughts all along.”

Elizabeth: Yeah, and then in the workbook you created, the first step is, I think, create neutral thoughts for yourself. The thought that helps is like, “I am safe. I am in my home. I am healthy right now,” and just leaning towards gratefulness has helped me a lot through this pandemic.

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Kara Loewentheil: I love that. You're talking about the resiliency workbook that we have for the pandemic in The Clutch starting with that line of like, "Okay, let me just decide one thought I'm going to think today," is a good place to start.

I think a lot of people who come into this work, their relationship with themselves is not awesome. Obviously, we're all very mean to ourselves, and like you said, you had no trust with yourself and your body, and there's so much self-criticism. So, I'm curious, how do you think your perception of yourself or your relationship with yourself has changed?

Elizabeth: I used to think that something was inherently wrong with me because I have this perfectionist fantasy of who I was supposed to be, what I was supposed to look like, and because I wasn't doing everything that my fantasy said I should be doing, there was something wrong with me. There was a flaw. If I'm not organized enough, if I'm not following my schedule enough, if I'm not working out enough, something is definitely wrong with me. I have no discipline. I'm lazy. I have no motivation. I really thought that meant something about me.

Kara Loewentheil: Totally.

Elizabeth: I didn't realize those things are just skills, in a way, that you create with your own thinking. I also pondered with the idea of if my weight doesn't mean anything about me, if my size doesn't mean that I'm unworthy, then may be having dirty dishes also doesn't mean that you suck as a human.

Kara Loewentheil: Totally.

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Elizabeth: So. I realized, “Oh, okay. I'm worthy now. In this moment, I don't have to do anything at all. Following a schedule perfectly doesn't make me any better. Not following it doesn't make me worse.” The worthiness just is, and obviously, I still am working through different areas in my life, but I remember that when I'm feeling the pressure of doing everything perfectly, it's coming from you think that on the other side of that means that you're better, that you're doing a good job, but no, I can feel good now. I can be proud of myself now.

Kara Loewentheil: We have to be because then the rare occasion we do everything perfectly, we still don't really feel good about ourselves for very long. So, it's just a total waste of time. So, I'm curious because people have such different learning and engagement styles, and there's so many resources in The Clutch. I'm just curious in doing this work, what parts of it, what forms of coaching, or resources, or whatever, did you like the most or find the most helpful?

Elizabeth: I think through the year that I've been in there, it has shifted every couple of months. In the beginning, it was the Facebook group that I really needed. I really needed a lot of other women doing the same thing or similar things. We're just all working through it together. Then you added Ask A Coach, and that is something that I was really like, “Okay, now this is a component of it that is helping me right now and what I need.”

Of course, also watching other people get coached is really helpful because I have moments where I'm like, “Yeah, this does not apply to me. I don't have children,” but then in the end you're like, “Oh.” You say one sentence. I'm like, “Oh, my God. That definitely applies to me.” I'm like, “Oh, God. Yeah.”

Kara Loewentheil: Isn't that funny? We're like, “Well, I don't have the same

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circumstance, so the coaching won't apply." It's never the circumstance. It's always our thoughts.

Elizabeth: Yeah. So, all of it. I love all of it, but you have something for everyone in there. If you need one thing at one point, and then you need a different thing, it's there.

Kara Loewentheil: Yeah, I love that actually. I hadn't thought of it that way, but it's different resources. You need different things at different times in your journey. I love that. So, what would you say to someone who is where you started a year ago, having those thoughts about themselves, stuck in that really painful place where they're constantly thinking shitty thoughts about themselves, and ruminating about their body, and obsessed with weight loss, and never can do it? What would you say to someone in that place?

Elizabeth: It may seem like accepting your body or even loving your body is light years away, and it's this big, impossible thing, and I believed that too. There was a moment where I was sitting down, and I was like, "Will I ever actually love my body?" There was a thought that came up which could help whoever listening.

I realized learning to love my body or even just accept it is an act of love in and of itself. So, I'm already one step closer, and our brains tend to focus on how far you have to go and what's not working, but with that thought, it seemed like what was far away wasn't as far anymore. So, whatever small thing you do to try to improve your relationship with your body is an act of love, and you're already that much closer.

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Kara Loewentheil: I love that so much, and I think that's what thought work is too. It's an act of love. Investing in yourself is an act of love because part of what we're all doing is constantly diminishing and dismissing ourselves, and thinking that we can't change, or we're not worth it, or we should care about other things. Focusing on that relationship with yourself, what's more an act of love than getting to know yourself and caring about your own experience, and making the most of your one life that you have?

Elizabeth: Yeah, and I think with that thought, it helped me believe like, "Oh, I am already loving myself. I am in it. The possibility is there."

Kara Loewentheil: I love that. It's like it's already happening. It's not just a future thing.

Elizabeth: Yeah, some distant thing.

Kara Loewentheil: It's a practice. Loving ourselves is a practice. It's not like we ascend to heaven at a certain point. Like, "Hate, hate, hate," and then we love it. It's a practice and loving it every day or learning. First accepting, then liking, then loving, however we have to do it.

Elizabeth: Yes.

Kara Loewentheil: I love that. You're such a beautiful example of how that's possible when you're willing to put in the work and keep going, and sometimes be confused, and sometimes forget you're supposed to be doing the work, and then come back to it.

Elizabeth: All the time

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Kara Loewentheil: All of us, all of us. That's what's so beautiful about the practice. It's like coming yoga and thinking like, "Should be able to do the most complicated things right away." No, it's a practice over time.

Elizabeth: Yeah, I've had to revisit the same things so many times until it really sunk in.

Kara Loewentheil: Yeah, and it feels like one little step, but then when you look back, you're like, "Oh, my God. Each of those little steps, look how far I am from where I started." So beautiful. Thank you for sharing your journey with us.

Elizabeth: Well, thank you for this work. It has truly been life changing, and loving my body at its highest weight with something I never even thought it was in the realm of possibility. It never even seemed like an option.

Kara Loewentheil: Totally.

Elizabeth: So, now, it's like, "Wow, I really did something that I believed was impossible at one point."

Kara Loewentheil: Doesn't that feels good?

Elizabeth: Yeah.

Kara Loewentheil: Blow your own mind. That's what it's all about.

Elizabeth: Yeah, and I used to think I had to do that with money or something, but no, I can do it on my relationship with my body, with myself.

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It's amazing.

Kara Loewentheil: That's so good. All right. Thank you.

Elizabeth: Thank you.

Kara Loewentheil: All right, you all. How amazing were those interviews, and how inspiring are Bessie and Elizabeth? I think such examples of what is possible with thought work, and what I love about both of them is how much their relationship with themselves has changed. Not just their parenting, not just their body image, but the way that they talk to themselves, the way that they are able to show up for themselves, and the way that they are able to have their own back.

I think they are both examples of my whole purpose in creating The Clutch and creating a group where women learn to coach themselves, and then are all allowed to coach each other, which some of you may have participated in other coaching programs or communities. It's pretty unusual, actually, to just let everyone coach each other because it's glorious, messy chaos, but to me, especially from my feminist background, that's everything.

Teaching women how to coach themselves so that they can go out and support and coach each other, and their children, and their partners, and their friends, and their employees or their managers. All the people in their lives that they can hold space better and be an example of what's possible, spread this work. That is my mission. That's what I think thought work is about. It's about liberation from the inside out, and so the more widely that my students are able to share this work, the better.

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