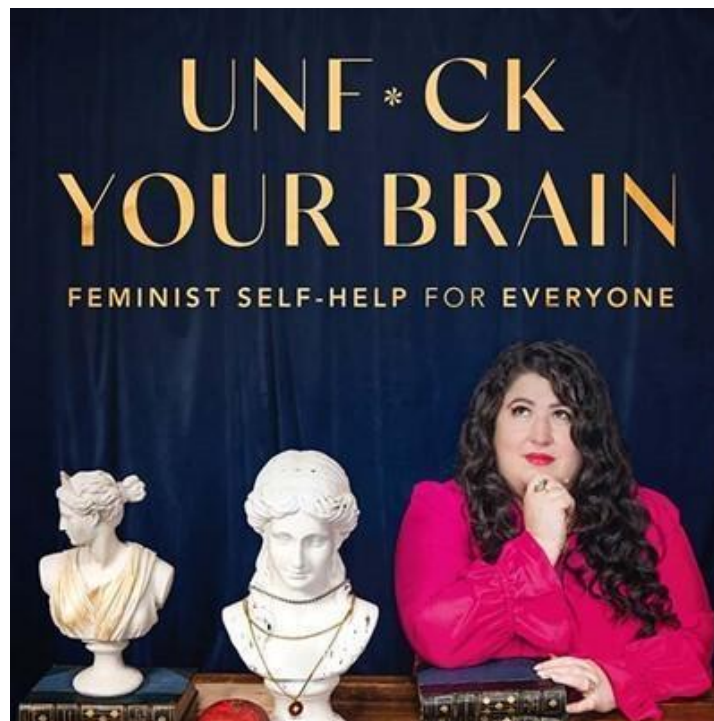


UFYB 192: An Introduction to Thought Work: A Conversation with Hannah Berner



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. So, things are going to be a little different on the podcast this week. As you all know, most of the time when I interview people or talk to people on the podcast, they are other coaches, usually trained in the same methodology I am, or just sometimes with some overlap or sympathetic to our coaching method, or they are people working in other - I've had a couple of friends in other disciplines like my friend Jessica Dore, the tarot reader, who also has a background in therapy.

So sort of just people who are in this kind of coaching, self-help, therapy, philosophy world. But once in a while, we just like to really shake it up. And as this podcast gets more and more grown up as it goes into its fifth year I think now, I'm really looking forward to having interesting conversations around coaching topics and all the things that we talk about here with a really fascinating variety of women and talking about how thought work plays into their lives and their different kind of sets of circumstances and their life experiences.

So in this special episode, I am talking to Hannah Berner who actually grew up as a competitive tennis player, which I didn't know originally. And who is now a comedian, she's a podcast host, she does standup, she's also a member of Bravo's Summer House for three seasons.

And so really coming from a very different world and lifestyle and perspective than I am. But we had what I think is a really great conversation, and I'm really excited for you all to listen to it.

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Hannah: We have a very special episode of Berning in Hell. She may be the smartest person to ever grace hell and I think I actually might learn some shit today. I'm very excited. Kara Loewentheil is here to party with the devil. Kara, welcome to hell. How are you?

Kara: I'm fine. I really like the idea that generally you don't learn anything when you interview people on your podcast. You're like, well, usually this is a waste of time but I think today I might learn something.

Hannah: Normally we hear some traumatic bullshit. No, we learn from experiences on this podcast but we've never had someone who has like - actually, I think there was one guy who maybe had Harvard somewhere on his résumé, but you're a Harvard J.D., Yale BA, Master Coach, host of UnF*ck Your brain Podcast, we love a bitch with a curse in her podcast name, creator of The Clutch, a feminist mindset revolution.

I went to your website and like, you really put it all out there, kind of what you stand for, what you educate women about, and what you do. And I can't wait to dig deep into this.

Kara: Let's do it, I'm ready. Deep is - I'm not that good at small talk so let's just go all the way in.

Hannah: Hell yeah, same. I'm like, let's go. What keeps you up at night and makes you cry? But I do think that I go to comedians' website who haven't updated their website in like, six years, but yours is updated and beautiful. It says yes, I'm a life coach, a master certified one at that, and no, that doesn't mean I'm a woo-woo divine feminine channeling goddess seer who spins law of attraction BS. I love that. Because this industry is tough. There's a lot of woo-woo shit happening.

Kara: There's a lot. There's a lot of talking about vibrations by people who have never taken a physics class. A lot.

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Hannah: And I do think that when people are definitely in search of change in their life, they are in a vulnerable place. So it is easy to go on Instagram and see a beautiful grid aesthetic of someone with perfect waves in their hair and be like, she can help my life and I'll give her a lot of money.

Kara: Yeah. I mean, I think my goal - it's so funny, when people hear I'm a coach, they're like, oh, so you give advice and you have good advice and you tell people what to do. I'm like, no, it's the opposite. I have no idea what you should do. I teach people how to think more clearly. That is really my job.

Because I think we do all know truly deep down what we want, what we need to do, what the next step is, whatever the question is. We have the answer. But there's just a lot of bullshit that gets in the way. Your brain has evolved to have a lot of bullshit, you've been socialized to think a lot of unhelpful ways. So my job is really just to teach people how to clear out all the bullshit so that they can actually hear what they want and how to go after it, which for women in particular can be such a challenge.

Hannah: I love that so much because it took me years to even understand that the voice in your head was just society or past bullying, it wasn't you. And once I discovered that, things really changed. But you're interesting too because you basically use insights from feminist theory. What the hell is feminist theory?

Kara: I mean, that is a big question. What is feminist theory? But I think - so when I sort of started learning about coaching, it was like okay, so we know traditional talk therapy, it's a lot about your childhood, your formative relationships, that's kind of what you go back to to understand yourself, right?

And then there's some more modern branches of psychology are kind of more behavioral focused, like we have cognitive behavioral theory, that's sort of about your brain, your cognition. And then when I discovered

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coaching, it was like there was a lot of that kind of cognitive stuff, there was a lot of talk about how evolution had impacted our brains to be a certain way, so evolutionary biology.

And then you have that - we all grow up immersed in a society where we are kind of in that therapy narrative of our families cause everything. And then I was sort of like, okay, but something's still missing here. This explains part of it, of how my brain works and why I think the way I do, and why I have the insecurities I do and all of that, but there's something missing.

And what I saw was missing was we weren't taking into account how being socialized in a certain way, being socialized as a woman or being socialized as a man, being socialized as a white person or a person of color, being socialized as a fat person or a thin person, all these different value hierarchies in society, being socialized as whatever identities you have impacts the way your brain thinks.

So we were trying to understand how women's brains work just based on their childhood and evolutionary biology, and not taking into account you grow up in a society that's giving you messages about what it means to be a woman and what your value is and all of that your whole life. We're just not going to talk about that part and how that might impact your brain?

So that's really what I mean. It's not that when you work with me we're doing a PhD program in critical theory. It just means that I'm bringing a feminist and intersectional and really social justice lens to this to teach people, if we want to work towards social liberation, how do we do that? Work on our brains first. We've all been impacted by society.

Hannah: And it's funny how the word she's crazy is such a rampant thing. It's like an ex-boyfriend be like, "My ex was crazy." It's like, yeah, well things happen to maybe get her to that point and it's interesting for you to be like, there's a reason why sometimes you're sitting there so insecure

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about yourself for no reason, even though you have a great job, or a great family.

It's like, there is a reason and I love that you talk about social conditioning yes, and self-critical talk. And I feel like especially for successful women, this is a big issue.

Kara: Yeah. I mean, everybody you meet has imposter syndrome. When was the last time you met a woman who didn't have imposter syndrome? That whole - women are always socialized to think they are not doing enough, aren't smart enough, somehow tricked everybody to get where they got.

We're always acting like - which is my favorite thing about imposter syndrome is that this is what your brain is saying to you. Your brain is like, you're too stupid and bad to have this job on your own worth, but you're incredibly clever to be able to trick everybody the whole time.

Hannah: So funny. Well, Nikki Glaser is an incredible comedian, one of my good friends who talked about this because she suffered from it. And she said her therapist was like, "So you think you're so slick that you were able to trick everyone to think you were funny when you're really not? Don't give yourself that much credit."

And when she put it that way, I immediately was like, this is some bullshit. But also as someone - I was a tennis player and then I was in standup, they're in very male-dominated fields, and it's so easy to succumb to the pressure cooker of you're the girl on the show, everyone's watching you, or everyone's not watching you because you're the girl. And no one cares. How has your own experiences affected your choice in getting into this line of work?

Kara: Yeah, I had a real mix because I originally came up in the reproductive rights movement so I was doing reproductive rights and

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reproductive justice work, which is a heavily female field, as you can imagine. And then I became an academic and legal academia, especially I was working on a topic that basically had been a kind of relevant big topic in the 60s and 70s.

So a bunch of people had become specialists then, and then it had kind of not been a big deal for 30 years. I was working on religious accommodations, like if somebody worked for an organization that doesn't want to provide insurance for birth control.

So anyway, that part is not so relevant to your audience necessarily. But basically the field was just starting to heap back up so it was me and a bunch of 70-year-old white dudes. That's who were already the experts because nobody had really specialized in this for the last 30 years. And there were a couple of other young women too.

So I had this very different experience of going from this very female-dominated industry that was pretty much all women or some men, some gender non-conforming people, or non-binary people, but pretty much heavily cis women. And then academia, where it was like, everybody was 30 years older than me and straight white man.

I would say the attitudes were slightly different in those two industries but actually for me, what was so striking when I started thinking about it through this lens was when I was working in reproductive rights organizations, I was working around - we were the experts in the world in this field. Nobody knew more than we did.

And still you'd be sitting around in a meeting and people would be apologizing for their ideas and doing that prefacing of like, well maybe this is stupid. It was such a good example to me of like, the call is coming from inside the house is what I always say.

Hannah: I love that. I love that so much.

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Kara: It's inside. We're sitting in this meeting, the president of the organization is a woman, the director of the departments are women, there's actually like, one man in this meeting and it's the administrative assistant. This is not - any kind of disclaimers or whatever we're doing here is not because the men in the room are intimidating us. It's not like we made it all up, we were crazy. The point is just we're socialized this way and that's how your brain works.

Hannah: It really is like a cult. Because I feel like society tells you what to think, and then other women to each other are like, tricked to be like, enforcing societal standards on women.

Kara: It's just how you learn to think and so we're all doing it. And it doesn't really matter. This is what I always say, when people - having come from spending 20 years working on more policy solutions of how do we change the structures, at this point, understanding the brain, I'm like, okay, we could pass a law tomorrow that 50% of every board seat and CEO suite has to be women or has to be whoever, and if we haven't changed the mental situation, if we haven't changed how we think, that's not really going to solve our problem.

We're still going to have the 50% of women apologizing for their thoughts and thinking it's not good enough and taking on all the unpaid additional administrative labor, and the 50% of the men still running things.

Hannah: Why are we doing this to ourselves?

Kara: Because we don't understand how the brain works. That thing you said in the beginning that it wasn't for a long time that you were like, wait, what I'm thinking isn't necessarily true, I learned that when I was 32 and I was like, hold the phone, what?

Hannah: Because that's like the call's coming from inside the house and the call is not you.

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Kara: I was like, I don't understand, what are you saying? Why did no one - when I first learned this work, I was like, why did no one tell me this before? Did everybody else know that your thoughts are not necessarily true and that you can change them?

Hannah: And I think it's important as a feminist, I was reading on your website, we know I don't think I should have a boyfriend to accept myself, but then secretly you're worried that you're unlovable without one. You're like, I need to love my body, but then you're just criticizing it all the time.

And it's like, I guess women, we also - and men, you don't always realize how those little thoughts that no one can hear actually affects your reality because you're not saying it out loud.

Kara: Yeah. Most people aren't aware of how when you join The Clutch, which is my feminist coaching community, one of the first things we teach you to do is how to learn what you're actually thinking, how to start to pay attention to it. People are shocked.

People come in being like, I think - obviously they signed up so they're like, yes, I'm anxious about this thing, but they're like, I think I'm pretty nice to myself. And then when they write down all their thoughts, they're like, oh my god, I had no idea that that was going on in there. But you are subconsciously constantly criticizing and evaluating yourself. And because of the way we're socialized, women will say things to me like, "I'm not self-critical, I just know that I'm lazy and stupid." You're like, no.

Hannah: You're like, okay, we need to unpack that even further.

Kara: Let's step back. This is not right. Because we're like, that's just accurate. I'm just explaining it to you. We think we're not being self-critical because we think that our self-critical thoughts are true and so we're just explaining reality.

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Hannah: We're just describing ourselves.

Kara: Yeah, it's like the weather report. We're just like, no, I'm fat and disgusting, I mean, it's fine, I'm not being mean to myself, it's just like it's snowing outside.

Hannah: You have actual PhDs or whatever, you have real shit that you've done. I saw an Instagram, there was a test with plants. Have you heard the plant thing where two plants are growing and one plant you yell at every day and the other plant you give love?

And it said the energy of that one plant didn't grow as well. Who knows? There could have been variables, but that's kind of how you talk to yourself. I'm so good at putting on a poker face and being the class clown and being so funny. And I'm like, yeah, I'm great, but I was aware of everything I'd say to other people but I literally didn't care what I said to myself. And the next thing you know, you're in spirals.

Kara: Right. And that impacts how you feel.

Hannah: Next thing you know, you're speaking a language that's just not positive at all. So girls out there who are strong fucking feminists and they know what they want to be and they're like, I don't need a boyfriend, but secretly they think they're unlovable. What kind of little piece of advice do you have for that kind of love situation?

Kara: I think the advice is actually the same for anything. So many women have the same gap that we're talking about right there, which is like, well, I want to believe this, I think I do believe this, but somehow it doesn't apply to me. And so I think what's going on...

Hannah: My situation's a little bit worse.

Kara: Yeah. Or what people will often say is like, I believe it intellectually but I don't feel it emotionally. That's the way people talk about it a lot. I think

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that's a misunderstanding, which is totally normal, of how the brain works. What's actually going on is you believe both things. You believe the thought that a woman shouldn't need to be married to feel okay about herself, and you believe the thought if I don't have a boyfriend there's something wrong with me.

And so it's not an emotional intellect split. You believe two different thoughts, one of which is much older and more powerful because you've been learning that thought since you were six months old and people started saying like, "Oh, she's a heartbreaker, she's going to have to keep the boys away." That socialization starts so early.

So what I always want to teach people is to first of all just understand that's what's happening. When you tell yourself I believe it but I don't feel it, you have no idea how to resolve that problem. That just seems mystifying and like there's nothing you can do.

And so we want to understand really what the problem is. The problem is in the most basic terms, I have thought this one thought six million times, and I've only thought this other thought like 2000 times, so it's just not as strong yet. And the good news is you don't have to get to six million. I'm just making up these numbers.

It's like we've thought one a lot and we've only started thinking the other one since we were 23. It's much more recent. And most of us don't know that you actually can change what you think just by practicing thinking something new on purpose that you can believe. That's the secret to the universe right there.

So it's not working the way people are trying to do it because they're trying to think the thought, "I don't need a man to feel okay about myself." It's way too far. So in this example, if your thought is, "If I don't have a boyfriend there's something wrong with me," you don't yet believe truly the thought, "There's nothing wrong with me no matter what." So trying to think that,

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which is positive thinking or affirmations, a lot of people don't have success with those because it's too big of a gap.

Hannah: And it becomes performative.

Kara: Yeah. Or then you feel bad about yourself that that's not working. You're like, I can't even do positive thinking right.

Hannah: Affirmations don't even love me.

Kara: Yeah, exactly. Or I'm bad at this, now I'm failing at loving my body in addition to. So what I really teach is to practice what I call a ladder step thought, which is a little bit of a better thought. So if we're talking about the dating example, we're not going to go from, "There's something wrong with me because I don't have a boyfriend," to, "I love my single life and feel like an amazing goddess" when you don't yet.

But we can practice believing something like, "Lots of people find a partner later in life," or, "It's possible that my brain is not being accurate about this whatever," or, "What if I met that person tomorrow? Would that mean I was worthy tomorrow and not today?" You can start to play with little steps you can believe.

Hannah: And this is a form of cognitive behavioral therapy?

Kara: Yeah. And this is how you change your thoughts.

Hannah: This is why I think, to anyone listening, it's super important to speak to someone, whether it's a professional or even - I know I'll call my mom sometimes and I'll be like, I'm having this crazy thought about myself and she will see it in her perspective that will help my change that thought.

Because I know I will spiral deep, but sometimes it just takes one other person being like, hey, okay, let's take a step back, you don't mean that. For this thought for example, I've definitely had this thought being single

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and then thinking like, no, I actually could get a boyfriend if I wanted and I'm waiting to meet the right person. I'm not not lovable, there's plenty of people who love me. So that's a great first step. I love this so much.

Kara: I always say to people like, if you truly wanted to be married more than you cared who you were married to, you could be married by now.

Hannah: You could be in an unhappy relationship at any time if that's going to make you feel better.

Kara: 100%, exactly. And I think that little bit of - you have to practice believing something where you get a physical change in your emotional state. You feel a little bit different. And most people don't know that that's what they should be looking for and they expect it to be like magic. I always say it's like going to the gym and being like, okay, well I've decided I want to deadlift 400 pounds so I'm just going to do that. You're like, no.

Hannah: You're so right. Because the affirmations, they don't work unless you really do believe it. But I really think anyone's capable of anything. I wonder, how come Rihanna became such a famous singer? She really did want it and also believed she should. And who knows the steps that took her to get to that belief.

Kara: Right. And you got to work your way up the belief. You can't pick up 400 pounds if you haven't trained, so you don't fool yourself into thinking you can. But with thinking, you can say a thought to yourself in your brain. And if you don't know to check and see do I actually believe it, how does it feel in my body, it's like we don't know, we just think we're doing it, we think we're deadlifting the 400 pounds, and then we're like, this isn't working.

Hannah: And the way you believe something is by starting out slow like, okay, I might want to be a singer. And then fighting societal norms like you can't do it, you're not pretty enough, you're not talented enough, and do that first step of learning how to sing and really taking the steps. Not to put

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you on the spot, but what kind of societal messages are we getting as women at a young age that is fighting against us in terms of looks. Can you give us some examples of everywhere?

Kara: So for the dating one, I think this is why this perspective is so important because women often end up also beating themselves up for having these insecurities or having these anxieties. One of the stereotypes about women in general is that they're overly emotional or they're irrational or whatever.

And we've learned those too. So when we are feeling super anxious about some dude we met on Tinder two weeks ago not texting us back, then we're telling ourselves that we're being unreasonable and we're being irrational. It gets us all fired up to this fevered pitch.

The truth is that society has been telling you since you were born that the most important thing about a woman is romantic acceptance by a man. That's it. It doesn't matter how evolved we think we are. Yes, things are better, we are now also told we can have jobs.

Hannah: Thank you.

Kara: It's a little bit better than 100, 150 years ago. And I say this as somebody who was raised in a family that was very focused on my professional and academic success, I was not being told at home you need to get a husband. So I had a pretty professional, academic focused family. And still I absorbed so much of it.

It's just everywhere, that the most important thing in a woman's life, that determines her value and her worth is male sexual and romantic approval. So yeah, of course you're going to...

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Hannah: And then knowing that, then it's so easy for society to be like, want a man? These are these blowjob tips you have to conquer. Your waist has to be this small to your butt ratio.

Kara: That's what all that advertising is.

Hannah: Want a man? You need this \$400 serum. And the next thing you know you're in this spell. That's why I think I started this tweet thing of do I actually like him or. And it's like, a lot of the time with women, it's like, are you quick to just want to be in a situation with someone or do you actually like this person?

Or do you find out seven months later after you've gotten what you wanted, you tricked him or whatever you had to do, and then you're like, I don't even like the way this person forms a sentence, I want to punch myself in the face. Also, when girls are growing up, I think there's a lot about being pretty.

Kara: Oh yeah, totally. These things are both related. Women are socialized to think that their appearance is the thing that will get that male acceptance, that's supposed to be the most important thing. And women are socialized to think of their bodies as objects that they're supposed to manipulate and trade to get that male approval.

Hannah: It literally makes me nauseous.

Kara: Yeah. But that's what it is. Women are so alienated from their bodies because we don't think of our bodies as being the animal that we live in or the home that we live in. And we don't think of our bodies as being - men are socialized to think...

Hannah: Vehicles.

Kara: Yeah. It's like this object that you're supposed to sculpt and whittle and wax and dye and whatever so that you can trade it...

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Hannah: Bedazzle.

Kara: Bedazzle so you can trade it for the currency of male sexual acceptance. And this sounds extreme but this is actually what is underlying so much of the way that women are in relationships. And it's not a coincidence that a lot - I mean, when you look at women later in life who have gotten divorced or gone through menopause, obviously this is a generalization, but a lot of them are like, why the hell would I want to get married again? I got that thing that was supposed to make me feel happy forever and accepted forever, and then I was like, wait, nope.

Hannah: So many women I think literally get their checklist done and then they're like, then how come I feel so lonely and empty inside? But I do know that when I was first dating in my 20s, everyone heard about girls are crazy, and you know, girlfriends can be so annoying, and I just wanted to be the least annoying cool girlfriend. I'm just so cool.

And then I'm like, what am I doing? I have to be myself at some point. I wasn't bothered by anything. And the next thing you know, you don't have boundaries and you're not respecting yourself. And you can't even find the right person for you, even though everyone's trained to be like, we want Prince Charming, when it's like, I'm sorry, Prince Charming is probably a narcissist, let's be honest.

Kara: And there's also your socialized - it's not all one way. Women are also socialized, because women are socialized to believe that their worth is dependent on their romantic status, that means then they want a certain kind of man to validate that they're good enough.

So at this point now, everybody's just being objectified. No one in that scenario is dating for the love of the other person. You're trying to trade your looks and your agreeability and your whatever for the status of a certain kind of job, or certain kind of money.

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Hannah: Does that equate to real happiness?

Kara: Of course not. That's how you end up like, three years later, post-wedding depression because now you're like, oh, now I'm just actually married to this person and it didn't magically change my life.

Hannah: And what I do love about what you do is you have a great humor to it. I mean, obviously you have curse words and you have the F bomb in your title so I knew I loved you. But you really have a good sense of humor about it, but I also think women having a sense of humor has been hard for society to really accept. People say that it's a typical masculine quality, which again, is a social construct.

Kara: It's hilarious. I only want to listen to - if I'm listening to standup, I want to - a woman, a person of color, anybody with an outsider perspective, that's what's funny.

Hannah: 100%.

Kara: I'm not at all interested in what jokes a straight cis white dude has to tell me. They're all blowjob jokes. I just don't care.

Hannah: For men it's hard - they trying not to come and girls are trying to come.

Kara: So my mother was a lawyer for many years and then she took up doing standup comedy as her late in life hobby.

Hannah: Oh my god, I love that.

Kara: She's hilarious and adorable. She's not trying to go make a career out of it obviously, but I go to all these showcases she's in and it is always - there's like, five or 10 straight cis white dudes in their 30s living in Brooklyn whose jokes are all about oral sex. Fucking snooze fest. And then all the

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people who are kind of weird, it's so much funnier because humor is an outside perspective.

Hannah: But if you look at standup as a business and you wonder why are there not more women, or different sexualities and diversity in standup, it's because when it's run by one kind of person, you don't always...

Kara: Totally, that's what they think is funny.

Hannah: You don't always feel comfortable as a girl going into a bar at 11pm because you got a spot in Greenpoint, Brooklyn and it's all just full of straight guys judging you, and you're kind of like, I don't want to do this. And there's so much talent that has quit because they don't feel comfortable in that cis white male world.

Kara: But I think this is the core of the work for me is that I totally believe we need to change society, but right now, here's where we are. So for me, I'm like, okay, if you want to be a standup comic and the thing keeping you from doing it is those thoughts and feelings about going into that bar, then we got to work on changing those.

Because we have to change - I don't know where people think the social change is going to come from if we don't change people's minds first. We have to make the social change. So we have to liberate ourselves from the inside first if we want to go be able to make that change.

Hannah: And I think because I grew up playing tennis in a male-dominated field, I weirdly felt comfortable in that space and I think I was able to then get some girlfriends who were like, I don't like going to spots at night and then being like, guys, let's go together. Because we come in and we're confident together and that's been fun.

But also, I've realized over time that women just taking up space can really trigger men. Being the funny one in a conversation can trigger men. Being

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a loud laughter for whatever reason. I just fucking love taking up space and it makes people, men, sometimes very uncomfortable around me.

Kara: Yeah. And then it's just the question is what kind of life do you want to live? I just can't imagine getting to the end of my life and being like, man, I'm glad I didn't make any men uncomfortable.

Hannah: I'm going to be like, I wish that I didn't hold in all those great laughs that I could have had my whole life. Who told women they have to giggle?

Kara: I mean, we could have a whole other conversation. There's such a thing about women being restrained and not taking up space and being small and being meek and not laughing loud, not talking. And there are studies showing that if women talk a quarter of the time in a meeting, men will say they're talking more than 50% of the time in the meeting.

Literally, our brains don't process it accurately because of all of this internalized bias. But I think I spent a lot of years in the world of both social change but also like, okay, men need to change, get better. And I'm like, that's true, but this is what I can do.

I'm here for this amount of time on this earth, yeah, I'm going to teach the women how to change their thought processes so that they're like, I don't care that this man thinks I'm talking too much in the meeting. I'm going to talk in the meeting anyway. And if there's a negative repercussion on the line, I'm going to be ready to deal with that and if this turns out to not be the job for me then I'm going to feel confident that I can get another one.

Hannah: It's so funny because I've felt like a crazy person because I'm currently - I'm on a TV show and there's a guy on the show who literally is like, you talk too much. And in my head I'm like, but he talks 10 times more than I do. So how come - what?

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First of all, I don't think anyone talks too much but if you think I talk too much then how - what? So it was very hard for me to comprehend. And people would be like, yeah, you talk too much, it became a thing. And I'm in my head like, but I don't talk as much as him.

And then it's just so easy to always be like - I'm currently in the middle of a Twitter drama of something happened on our show where the misogyny is just rampant in relationships of just so easily being like, yeah, the girl's crazy and she just wants to be with a hot guy. And I'm like, actually, I kind of want a guy who's smart and funny and kind, so let's not assume that I just wanted that. But anyway, enough about me, spinning back to you.

Kara: No, but I think that's true. And there is such a - I think one of the most insidious things about a lot of these socialization patterns is they flip whatever's really true. So it's like women are taught that their appearance is the thing that matters most about them but then also we're being told that women only care about how handsome a man is or something. And you're like, no, it's the other way around.

Hannah: It's the last thing I care about at this point in my life. Been there done that. I just want someone who's soul connects to mine. In this work that you've been doing, how has it helped you understand yourself more throughout?

Kara: I mean, I think everything that I teach came from doing the work on myself. Obviously I read books and stuff too. I'm not making it all up. But I think with any kind of - how does a meditation teach or learn something? Of course they can study what has been written in the past but also their meditation practice.

I would never go to a meditation teach who was like, oh no, I don't meditate, but I've read a bunch of books about it. You'd be like, no, kind of need you to have a serious meditation practice if I'm going to trust you with this. And the same I think is true for coaching.

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I think everything that I have sort of added to the world of coaching that has been really unique from my perspective has come from doing my own work and seeing it in myself. And of course I get coached, I'm a big proponent of we never get there. We're all - the brain has always more levels.

Hannah: Yeah, there's not a final destination.

Kara: Yeah. So I always have coaches and I get coached. It's not like I'm on the mountain top and I've reached enlightenment.

Hannah: And things are always changing too. It's never a final answer.

Kara: Totally. I'm always like, I want to be an example of how much your life can change with a half-managed mind. Because all my students are total perfectionists who think they have to get it all perfect, and I'm like, no, I'm just 50% less crazy than I used to be and my life is so much better.

Hannah: So do you find a certain type of woman that ends up in your course?

Kara: Yeah. I would say women with - this describes a lot of women, but self-critical, high anxiety. Often they don't know that they're self-critical but really...

Hannah: They think they're just really observant.

Kara: Yeah, exactly. They think they're just realistic. This is what I would have said too. I'm just being realistic about myself. I think women who feel like - what I used to feel like before coaching, I just felt like I never felt good enough. I always felt like there was something wrong with me, I was always trying to fix the next thing about me to finally feel okay about myself.

Hannah: Yeah, like that would check and bring the happiness.

Kara: I felt like I was living under this miasma of guilt and shame all the time.

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Hannah: Shame and guilt is the worst emotion.

Kara: I would feel guilty if I told myself I was going to go to the post office and then I didn't go to the post office, even though nobody cared and it didn't need to happen.

Hannah: And then I get to the post office and feel guilty because I don't know how the post office works.

Kara: Yeah, right. It's just that constant - I just was living under that constant cloud. And I felt so emotionally volatile. This is the thing. There's the stereotype of women being crazy and irrational and it's like a feedback loop where on the one hand then we just think anything - a man having a strong emotion is just being forceful and a woman having a strong emotion is crazy.

But also, I was quite emotionally volatile not because there's something genetically crazy about women but because I'd been socialized to think in these ways that were all about basically being constantly mean to myself and being totally dependent on external validation. And so you're constantly swinging between external validation and feeling shitty about yourself and yeah, of course you're all over the place.

Hannah: I do think it's why I didn't really last in corporate America. I couldn't handle having a boss and dealing with the situations that I was observing in the office and I was like, I just need to do this on my own because it's really difficult to – oh my god, we had unlimited vacation days, which turned into no vacation days. Because none of the girls in the office would take it because it would look bad. And at some point, I was like, we are all just abusing ourselves and being abused and it's just this sick cycle. And when do we stop the pain?

Kara: Yeah, and what I've discovered is you have to change the way you think. It's the key to it all. And my students tend to be women who are often what you describe of like, "Well I've done a couple of these things that I

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thought were supposed to make me feel good, like did get married or I did get the job or I did get the whatever,” and that’s what happened to me for sure.

I spent 10 years being like, “Okay, I’m going to get the next gold star. I’m going to go to this law school and then I’ll feel smart and good enough. And then I’m going to get this clerkship and then I’m going to get this fellowship.” And then eventually I was running a thinktank at Columbia Law School and I was like, I don’t think the job’s going to do it. I have enough evidence now. I think maybe it has to come from inside my brain.

Hannah: Well, it’s funny because I’ve always talked about plastic surgery and I was thinking about it last night, how the materialistic stuff with women has become so important, especially with social media and the Kardashians and what they’ve normalized. It’s literally been normalized to be 18 and get lip fillers.

So, I always tell people before you do something to your face or your body, why don’t we think within first. Why do you want to do that? And if you could fix that. Because I think what I’m hearing you say is kind of like, I don’t think the nose job is going to solve all your problems.

Kara: No, you see this with weight loss all the time, right? People want to lose weight to feel confident. But then they do it and they don’t feel confident. And that’s because if you have been thinking the thought, “I’m fat and disgusting,” the whole time you’re trying to lose weight, it’s like we think the minute the scale flips to that last number, all of a sudden, we’re going to have a different brain that says nice things to us.

It’s because people don’t understand how the brain works. People think outside things cause how I think and feel. It is the number causing my feelings and as soon as it’s the right number it will cause a positive feeling. But that’s not how it works. Your brain is much more – it’s not really a muscle but it’s the right metaphor. Your brain is like a muscle. You’ve taught

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it to think a certain way. It's not going to change just because a number changes or your nose changes in the mirror or whatever.

And I think what you see with plastic surgery a lot is people will – and the plastic surgery industry will tell you – people do report increased satisfaction after blah, blah, blah. Yeah, with their nose. But now they've switched to, "Now I need a chin lift." Now I need a whatever. It's like a switch to the next thing.

And I'm not here to guilt or shame anyone, obviously, that would make me a terrible coach. But we're all complicit in different ways. I wear makeup and high heels sometimes. I'm not telling anybody that they shouldn't do whatever they're doing. But I totally agree with you that I totally think, like, we have got to pump on the breaks and think about why are we doing this. And especially with beauty and constantly trying to stay young, this is a losing fight. You're going to get older...

Hannah: Aging gracefully is a thing. The point of ageing gracefully is not fighting it and looking like a reptile midway because you're fighting it.

Kara: And you can't. With weight loss, some small percentage of people are able to lose and keep weight off long term. Okay. Nobody has successfully stopped aging, no matter how hard they try. It's not an option. And there are ways in which living life in a fat body in a fatphobic society, like yeah, there's a lot of downsides. But one of the plus sides is I had to learn to love my body for myself and also I haven't based my entire sense of wellbeing on fitting into society's conventional attractive boxes.

I actually really feel for people who are conventionally very beautiful because I think that they start to lose their shit when that's bee your currency and then eventually that currency goes away, what are you going to do?

Hannah: And it's wild that a typical person who has kind of a societal accepted body, you don't see the fat shaming or the lack of acceptance for diverse body types because you're in that privileged body.

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Kara: And you still don't feel good though. You talk to a model and they still are like, "I'm too fat."

Hannah: It doesn't feel good because the photo of – she's jealous of herself because it's photoshopped, so let's be realistic.

Kara: There's no winning. This is also such a misconception. It's like, yeah, when we talk about body privilege, we're saying there's a difference in society. But of course, it's not saying everybody experiences the emotional pain because we've all internalized the same things that we can't live up to. So, if you're a size 24 and you haven't done this work, then you're trying to be a size 18. If you're a size 18, you're trying to be a size 14. If you're a size two you're trying to be a size zero.

Hannah: Or, if you're a plus-size model your boobs might be too small for an ideal plus-size model. So, it's funny because thinking about this as I'm getting older and I might have children one day, I'm like, what do I want to teach my kids? What's the goal? Like is it success? Do I want them to be super good-looking? Or is it like I want them to understand how to be happy? What advice would you give to mothers, you know, you have a daughter, what are some words or praise or things you want the daughter to understand that society doesn't want her to understand?

Kara: I mean, I think you have to do the work yourself because your children, we know, kids are smart. They don't listen to your bullshit if they can tell you don't believe it.

Hannah: They will listen to your performative affirmations. The crystals are not doing it.

Kara: Right, they see what you do, not just what you say. So, you can't be like, you know, staring in the mirror criticizing yourself and then telling your daughter that her body is beautiful and think that's what she's going to hear. So, I think for moms or parents of any kind, the most important thing you can do is to do your own work because that's what you're going to model for your kids. That's so much more important than what you say to them.

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Kids are like little weather vanes. They pick up on the emotions behind it and what's actually going on and not, like, whatever bullshit you try to feed them if they can tell you don't believe it.

Hannah: You're so right. And you will break. Even if you're trying to be a type of way, if that's not earnestly how you feel, they'll see right through it. Are you ready to play the Seven Deadly Sins? I think it's time.

Kara: I'm ready.

Hannah: Let's go. Because I feel enriched. I feel motivated. I want to kick the patriarchy in the balls. What are you greedy about?

Kara: I am greedy about – these are going to be such annoying life coach answers. I think that I'm greedy about like self-knowledge. I get asked all the time, like, "What do you do for fun?" And I'm like, I think about myself. Self-anchoring, that is fun. When I think about anything in the world, I can't have too much of – maybe orgasms also. But you can have too much of those, actually. It can become painful. Self-knowledge, that's...

Hannah: Self-exploration...

Kara: Yeah, if you were going to give me like one wish that was like you could have unlimited something, that's what I would pick.

Hannah: Amazing. Who are you envious of?

Kara: I used to be envious of like literally everybody. I have done a ton of work on it. I actually think one of the greatest gifts coaching has given me – I promise they won't all be this coachy, but this is who I am – is that I don't feel envious anymore.

So, I used to walk around New York, and every time I saw a thin woman, I just assumed that her life was perfect, even though in New York people are like crying and breaking up on the street and I'm like...

Hannah: She's literally crying and you're like, "She looks great."

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Kara: I'm like, "Look, her life is amazing." So, one of the things I did when I was doing a lot of body image work is, like I teach my clients to do, you have to delink the idea that a certain body is going to bring you happiness. So, I spent a whole summer walking around Manhattan, which is full of literal fashion models, being like, everybody suffers. I would see a beautiful woman...

Hannah: It's kind of fucked up. It's sad to be like, "Everyone's dad." But everyone's sad.

Kara: That's the truth. That's what Buddhist tradition teaches us. Humans all suffer. Suffering comes from our human attachment.

Hannah: Yes, everyone is living in this world where we're all going to die and we all have, you know, thoughts about just what our purpose is and no one knows.

Kara: Right, we all feel happy, we all feel sad. There's no one body that's going to make you only feel happy.

Hannah: But you can control your thoughts and your reactions to things.

Kara: Yeah, and also part of that is accepting that you're supposed to feel both happy and sad because you're a human, not a robot.

Hannah: That's hard for me. My friend earlier today was like, "It's okay to not be okay." And I'm like, "But is it?"

Kara: Yes, it is. I concur with your friend.

Hannah: What are you gluttonous about? So, what do you like to overindulge in? Besides self-exploration.

Kara: I think sex more than food. I'm not particularly gluttonous about food. But I think yeah, I don't get tired of having sex.

Hannah: It's funny because sex is not just an easy thing that women immediately find pleasure in. I mean, you could write a whole...

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Kara: Yeah, we could have a whole other episode about that.

Hannah: But it's great that you have to really feel sexy and be out of your own head to orgasm and enjoy your partner.

Kara: Yeah. That's why, since I'm so cerebral, like that and dancing, those are the physical things where I'm outside my head and in my body.

Hannah: Yes, because you can't ignore that your body is a part of...

Kara: Right, you have to be in your body to have that experience.

Hannah: When was the last time you experienced extreme wrath or anger?

Kara: Earlier today, I almost lost my mind because – this is such a funny, like, when I started doing this coaching work and I learned how to basically stop losing my shit about other people, I started losing my shit about inanimate objects not working. And so, I don't get angry at – I don't think there's anything wrong with anger and when anger comes up, I allow it. I'm not saying enlightened people don't get angry. But the place that I still have intense irrational rage is – so, I had bought a new microphone and we couldn't figure out how to get it to work. And I was like, "I'm going to throw my computer out the window." Like, I had to take a few minutes and process the emotion because I was having such an intense thing about it.

Hannah: Are you very anti, like, attachment to anger or holding grudges? Because I'm Sicilian. I hold grudges.

Kara: I'm always like, people should do what works for them. But generally, I think holding a grudge doesn't feel great to you and it doesn't really punish the other person. That old saying, you think you take the poison and you think they'll die. Like, that's not what's happening.

Hannah: So, find a safe way to hold a grudge that's not affecting you. Like you just know, you forgive but you don't forget.

Kara: I wouldn't call it a grudge. Like, you can decide, "Okay, I'm not going to keep lending this person money if they don't ever pay it back..."

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Hannah: 100% so it's a no in your head. Keep some notes. When was the last time you were a sloth, so didn't do anything all day?

Kara: Oh, I'm a big fan of that. I lay down between two and four every day if I can.

Hannah: Oh my god, same.

Kara: I have a whole podcast that came out recently where I'm talking to another seven-figure coach and we're talking about how lying down in the middle of the day is the secret to our success. So, I am 100% in favor. Yesterday, I did go on a walk, but that was the only – I went on a walk and then I sat on my couch. I'm slothful all the time.

Hannah: When you get like Shape Magazine and the people do like what they do in a day and they're like, "Wake up, got to yoga, have an egg..."

Kara: Stop reading those things. I unsubscribed from that shit 10 years ago and it was a real positive development in my life."

Hannah: The only time I'd ever do it is like if I'm in the airport and I'm kind of bored and I'm like, "Who are these robots?" But then it's also sad because it's like, you don't do that every day.

Kara: Yeah, that's also just not true.

Hannah: You're a liar now...

Kara: Or you're just describing your eating disorder to me and we're publishing it in a magazine.

Hannah: Yeah, or your workout addiction. When was the last time you let your pride or your ego get in the way of something?

Kara: This is something I still work on in romantic relationships. So, I definitely, within the last week, have had to coach myself through my brain telling me that something was wrong and feeling hurt and then wanting to

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withhold or wanting to punish. And that's a pattern that I have to keep a very close eye on myself.

Hannah: By withhold do you mean like ignore?

Kara: Yeah. I'm not like – it's all relative. I would never literally ignore somebody I was involved with or give them the cold shoulder. It's not that dramatic. But yeah, make up a story about why somebody should have done something a different way, get attached to that story, and yeah, take a little bit longer to text them back or not be as friendly. It's like that kind of nonsense.

People call that playing games and some of it is, but we have to understand – we could have a whole other podcast about this – people aren't doing that because they want to play games. It's just when your emotions aren't regulated. So this is a place where I have to watch myself because my instinct is to shut down and be in pride as opposed to love. To love somebody means, for me I think, to be in vulnerability and openness, even when you feel that way, and that's a practice...

Hannah: And really be empathetic. I'm like that, where I will shut down. Also, you said play stories in your head. That's really powerful because I think I am very guilty of, like, someone will tell me something that I didn't see in a certain way and suddenly I have this story in my head of like, "How could they have done that?" But I feel like things aren't really as black and white as the story you tell in your head.

Kara: No, it's like you're hurting your own feelings. Like, I made up a story about what this means and then I decided I was hurt by it and then I decided to act on it. Like, I made all that up. None of that was actually happening.

Hannah: Well it's funny, being on a reality TV show, you have a story in your head and then you get to watch other people's perspectives play out too and you're like, "Wait, I didn't know they were mad about that too, or that they were affected by their mom." And you're just like, oh my god, it's

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never as simple as I made up in my head. Sometimes it's worse, but anyway. When was the last time you lusted over someone? So, do you have a celebrity crush or is there a barista that you have your eye on? What's happening over there?

Kara: I am dating and I'm non-monogamous. So, I would say the last time I lusted was this morning. I think one of the things people don't understand about the – I don't know if you're familiar with Esther Perel is this kind of sex therapist or emotional therapist. She writes a lot about how mystery is what creates desire, distance is what creates desire and kind of how that's at odds with our idea about companion and love which is, okay, when you love someone, you spend all your time with them and know everything about them and it's this very enmeshed intimacy. And so, one of the positives for me of ethical non-monogamy is that you generally are not totally enmeshed with all your partners and living with all of them all the time. There is that distance that allows you to create some – and then you get to have that anticipation all the time that most people only get in early dating because you're not spending all your time with someone.

Hannah: So, what's the difference between ethical non-monogamy and non-monogamy?

Kara: Oh, I was just specifying because I guess if you cheat on somebody it's non-monogamy, but ethical non-monogamy meaning everybody knows and consents to what's going on.

Hannah: So, when you see a guy, you're basically like, "I'm seeing other people and that's just how I am," kind of?

Kara: Yeah, and they are too. People like that generally date each other.

Hannah: Okay, and then are you ever looking to be monogamous?

Kara: I think some people feel like they're monogamous or non-monogamous in the same way they feel like they're straight or bi or gay, which is like it feels like this orientation. I don't feel that way personally.

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For me, like, it has varied in my life depending on the relationship and where I was in life.

I think I tend towards that. I don't feel the kind of jealousy and possessiveness, not that it doesn't ever come up, but that a lot of people feel. This is a whole other episode too, but a lot of the desire for monogamy – I'm not saying all of it, but a lot of it – comes from just the desire to be able to stop worrying about it, stop feeling insecure, stop feeling anxious, feel safe, all of these feelings we want a relationship to provide. Which of course, the relationship isn't providing. It's how you're thinking about it.

So, I don't think everybody should be any particular way. But like, doing the kind of work you have to do on that stuff to be non-monogamous is valuable, whether you're non-monogamous or not, so that you sort of aren't just expecting monogamy to solve all your problems of feeling anxious or insecure or whatever.

Hannah: Yes, well it's also like when people are like, "I don't know if he's my boyfriend." And I'll always just be like, you kind of just know when you're dating someone. It's not a label that will necessarily make you feel that much better. It either is it or it's not. Oh my god, so fascinating. We literally touched on so many things, but everyone listen to *UnF*ck Your Brain*. It is incredible. It is one of the top mental health podcasts and I feel so lucky to have Kara on my pod now. My final question for you – you're not done yet – is what advice would you give to people on how to cope with their hell when they're going through it?

Kara: The most suffering we create is our resistance to suffering. So, we feel sad or we feel angry or we feel overwhelmed or we feel hopeless, whatever we're feeling. And that feeling is like having a headache. And then, we start to tell ourselves, "I don't want to feel this way. I shouldn't feel this way. There's something wrong with me. I need to make this feeling go away." And that is like trying to saw your head open without anesthetic to get the headache out. So much of the suffering is caused by the resistance.

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And I think especially in America we have this idea that you should always be happy. We were talking about this. It's possible to always be happy. Some people over there are always happy. If you looked a certain way or you had a certain partner or you had a certain job or your parents had been different you'd always be happy. No one is always happy.

I always say, my teacher always says and what I teach from her is life is 50-50 and so, the single easiest thing you can do to reduce your suffering in any situation is to stop resisting that you're suffering and just be willing to feel shitty for a little while and know that it will pass.

Hannah: Yeah, I always feel guilt when I feel upset about something or something caused me anxiety, then you go in that guilt-shame spiral that you're being human, it makes it so much worse. And yeah, that's an incredible perspective of life, like, look, your days are going to be 50-50 on this planet so go live it.

Kara: Yeah, just allow it. Nobody is living life totally happy unless they've had a stroke.

Hannah: Oh my god, that's your new bio for your life coaching. Kara, you are so informative, such a little light of life. Please let me know where people can follow you. Give me the goods, where they can listen to you, watch you, everything.

Kara: Yeah, you can find me, my podcast is called *UnF*ck Your Brain*. You can find it wherever you get your podcasts. Or you can always go to unfuckyourbrain.com. Those are the easiest ways to find me.

Hannah: Amazing. Well thank you guys so much for coming to hell. Wow, I hope you took notes and I will talk to you guys later. Bye.

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