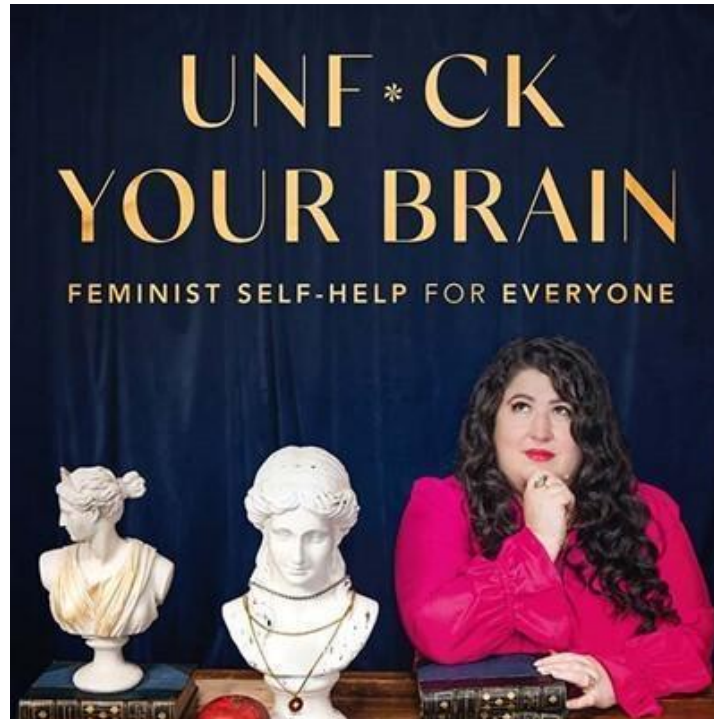


UFYB 281: Is It All My Fault? & Other Questions



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. Today we are doing kind of a throwback but it's new, a new Q&A episode. I used to do these quite often and I haven't done one for a while. So that's what we're going to do. I'm going to answer some questions. Now, listen, when I asked for questions on Instagram I got a lot of questions and I can't answer all the questions. So if your question wasn't picked, doesn't mean anything about you, doesn't mean your question wasn't good, doesn't mean I don't like you. Doesn't mean anything like that.

There were just more questions than I could answer. And I've picked a few that I think sort of cover some different topics and will be relatable or are interesting and I feel like answering them.

So here's the most important question I get asked. What do I think about pineapple on pizza? I'm not here to yuck anyone else's yum. I am kink positive and if people want to do this to themselves I support them. It's not my thing. I'm not into it. I am a New Yorker. I have a real traditional set of feelings about pizza. Although at this point probably Hawaiian pizza is very traditional. It's not for me, not a thing we do in our household but you know what, if it makes you happy, life is too short.

And I think we should enjoy what we enjoy. Sometimes I enjoy things and I'm like, "Does this make me too basic?" But that's what I like so I'm okay with it.

Alright, let's talk about some other questions. So I got one question about how do you coach yourself through anger that I thought was really interesting. And so here's what I'll say about that. I sort of don't coach

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myself through anger in the sense that like with any emotion but I happen to feel anger quite strongly. When I'm feeling a rush of anger, usually I'm not very coachable in that exact moment. When I am at the height of that emotional experience I'm not very coachable and that's okay.

My job is to not act on that emotion when it's coming up really strongly and to just recognize that my nervous system has probably been activated. For me if I'm very angry that's usually what's happening. I am having a fight response so my brain thinks that it's detected a threat. Now I'm having a really intense response, a fight response. And the most important thing for me to do is to try to not act on it until I can regulate myself and calm down. So if that counts, I mean that does count as coaching myself I guess.

So I would say what I do is I use my kind of emotional and nervous system regulation tools which for me are not actually really somatic. It's more I just remind myself that this feeling will pass and this feeling is not an accurate representative of what's going on probably and I just need to allow the feeling and not do anything about it right away. And sometimes I will sort of practice some of the, what I call survival thought work to myself where I'm saying to myself, nothing here is a threat to my survival. I am physically safe right now.

So for me it's sort of almost allowing the urge to strike out, to pass without acting on it. And then once the anger passes, my system calms down, that's when I can use coaching and thought work tools. But when you're really sort of wound up in that way you're not thinking rationally and you're not thinking kind of logically. So that's how I coach myself through anger. I mostly have a pretty hands off approach until the anger sort of recedes. But that is also in the context of having done all of this work and knowing that my thoughts are not always accurate.

So I think people get stuck in anger. When they think a thought they feel angry and then they keep thinking the thought over and over. Then they

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keep creating the emotional anger over and over so it never passes. It never flows through them. So this really is about this anger is coming up. I'm not going to keep thinking my thought. I'm sort of not believing my brain about what it says I'm angry about.

I'm going to let this emotion pass, then I'm going to look at what happened and see whether I want to coach myself to change my thought, whether I do want to take some action based on it. But I'm going to let that ride that wave to the crest of it and then down before I take some action and before I try to coach myself really rationally.

So the next question I got that I think is really important is somebody asking, is everything that happens our fault because of our thinking? And we were just drafting an explanation about this for *The Clutch* because this comes up so often. It's such an important question. And the answer is no, of course. But there's sort of this nuance to it because it's not nuance in the sense that you are to blame when you have a bad feeling. That's not what I mean. But the sort of top of what I answer is no, things happen to us that we have nothing to do with.

In terms of circumstances, maybe this is the best way to say it. In terms of circumstances that happen to us of course shit happens that we did not create with our thinking. Somebody can break up with you like this person is experiencing and it's because of their thoughts. Sometimes their thoughts might be about your behavior.

Sometimes their thoughts are about something else totally different, not about you at all. You can get sick. You can lose your job. You can whatever, lots of circumstances about which we have negative emotions can happen and we did not cause them with our thinking. So that's the first answer.

The second level of the answer is what we do cause is our own reaction. Our thinking, our cognition, our nervous system responses, those cause

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our emotions and our physiological responses. But there's a really big difference between cause and blame. And that's part of what's getting conflated when people ask this question. It's the same as when people are worried that thought work is sort of victim blaming. You cause some things that happen to you but there's a lot of things that happen to you, you don't cause at all.

Your brain does cause your own reaction but it's not an issue of blame. The fascinating thing about this is that when we say, so if somebody said it's their fault. What's under that is this unconscious belief that being sad is something bad that shouldn't be happening. That grieving or anger or anything else, that emotional suffering or just intense emotional experience is a bad thing that we are all trying to avoid having happen. And then if it does happen then somebody is to blame.

That's a natural thought pattern a lot of us have but a lot of thought work is about breaking down that thought pattern. That suffering is a part of life. That having a negative emotion doesn't mean something has gone horribly wrong. So that doesn't mean that we don't care about reducing suffering in the world. But it's just interesting to think about this idea that when we even ask, are you saying it's my fault if I feel angry, it's not their fault for what they did? The premise of the question is wrong.

The question isn't about fault at all. It's just you didn't create the other person's actions. You do create your own reaction and it's okay to have any reaction you want. There isn't a right and wrong reaction. So you're not doing something wrong by having a certain emotion and it's not bad that you have a certain emotion. There is no exit ramp off the human experience. There's no human life where we don't have to sometimes have negative emotion often caused by our own brains responding to how other people are acting.

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So even the question of blame I think is framing the question wrong. It's not about blame. Causation isn't the same as blame. So no, everything that happens to you is not your fault. Your reactions are caused by your own cognition and you can decide if you want to change that or not but there's no blame involved because you're not doing anything wrong and something wrong hasn't happened just because you're having an emotion.

Okay, on that topic I've got a question of how do you stay out of other people's models in dating? But I think this is true for everything. And a lot of coaching has just been like, let's ask a different question. So we could ask, how do I stay out of other people's models and that feels hard because we don't know how because we keep doing it. But a more powerful question to ask yourselves would be, why am I up in these people's models? Why am I so up in this person's model?

Why am I constantly thinking about what they might be thinking and what they're feeling and why they're doing what they're doing? Asking yourself the question, this is for a lot of thoughts, how do I stop thinking this thought? There's no way to stop thinking a thought. A much better question is what do I want to practice thinking, instead? How do I want to redirect my brain and build a different neural pathway? So kind of the same thing. How do I stop thinking about someone else's thoughts? We can't stop your thought.

The question is why are you doing that and what do you want to do instead? And if you ask yourself that question, why are you up in their model? That's going to be so much more illuminating for you. And I don't know what the answer is. It's going to depend. The answer might be because I feel insecure and I want them to validate me. The answer might be because I secretly believe I'm unlovable. And so I want to be constantly thinking their thoughts to try to figure out if they're going to validate me or not.

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It might be I want to feel in control and so I'm constantly thinking about their thinking. It might be as a child I learned to always take responsibility for other people's thoughts and emotions and now I'm doing that here. I don't know. It's going to depend on you. But asking yourself a much better question is going to get you a much better answer. So don't ask yourself how to stay out of somebody else's model. Ask yourself why you want to be in that model in the first place whether it's dating or your mother-in-law or your boss or whoever.

Why are you all up in their model? That's going to give you a much more interesting result. Speaking of models that you can be up in. This has happened a lot in parenting. Somebody asked me to talk about becoming a step, well, they said stepmom. I don't call myself a stepmom but let's say bonus part-time parent after being childless by choice. So they didn't have a specific question about this, I assume that they just sort of want to hear my reflections on it or why I did it maybe. And I was like, those are good questions.

I will say, I'll just tell you my thoughts about it since everybody wants to hear them. The reason that I decided to do it, I mean I did not set out to do this. I ended up deciding to partner and integrate my life with somebody who had children but I still made a conscious choice to be involved in the children's lives, that wasn't kind of required. We had very open conversations about different forms our relationship could take. I was always, of course, if you are life partnering with someone with children you're going to have a relationship with the children.

But there was a real range I think of possible outcomes that we talked about in terms of how involved that would be and whether we would cohabitate and all of that. And for better or worse one of my values in my life is growth and self-development and learning. And there were things that I really enjoyed about being child free and being single. And there are things I miss about that sometimes. But I met my partner when I was, I

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mean technically middle aged. I'm 41, we met when I was 39, just about to turn 40. And so I felt I had really lived that life.

I'd had a pretty long stretch of time. I'd had partners of course but never somebody that I truly had integrated my whole life with who had become like family. And I felt I had done that. I knew what that was like. I had learned a lot about how to be happy on my own, how to be independent, how to kind of not feel pressured or try not to feel pressured by the social narratives around dating and relationships. I mean I had done a lot of work on my dating mindset on my life.

And I felt another 40 years single or 40 years childless, that was probably going to be very enjoyable in some ways. But also I wasn't going to learn that much new from that. I had kind of learned that lesson and I felt deciding to go into a more involved intimate partnership and a more family style intimate partnership and a semi parental role. I was just going to learn a lot of shit. I was going to learn a lot factually. I was going to have a lot of new experiences. I really didn't have very close experiences, close relationships with children.

None of my siblings have had kids yet although one of my brothers is about to have my first niece. But that hadn't happened yet and I have friends with kids but I just didn't have close relationships with children. So I was going to learn something new there. It was going to bring up, the other thing I tend to do is go towards experiences that are going to bring up all my shit. And I had a lot of stuff from my own childhood and my own family experiences to work through and choosing this brought all that up.

And it was a little bit like stepping on a landmine. I had a pretty intense first eight months of the relationship but I think those are really kind of my motivations. So I think that that was most of my thought process. I also sort of discovered that in a weird way it felt much more natural than I thought it would. I think because I was someone who had chosen not to have

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children and partly for what the world would call selfish reasons although I think that's totally fucked up because I don't think these reasons are selfish.

But basically reasons kind of centering around wanting to have a lot of control of my time, wanting to have a lot of personal space, wanting to be very independent. I had a very good idea of the things you give up when you become a parent. But I think I had thought that it would feel harder or more awkward or something and it turned out to feel surprisingly natural. And so I think that was a surprise to me. And as that started happening that made me feel more open minded about it.

And I think I had underestimated kind of the intellectual engagement of caring for small people who are learning and growing. And I'm very good at communicating with adults and that's very different in some ways than communicating with children. So learning how to communicate with children. And I think seeing what I could offer and what I could bring to the table, that would complement what their parents already had and were already offering. So I think all of those things fed into the decision.

And also it has not made me want to have biological children of my own that I would be caring for 24/7. So it's still more limited in scope than that would be and it has not made me change my mind about that. So that's the story on that.

Let's see, the last question I really wanted to answer I suppose is a good one. I got a couple questions that are kind of different variations on this theme of what models are you working on or what thoughts are you trying to believe that you don't believe yet? What are you working on believing etc.? So I would say I have a couple of big ones right now. One is in my business, by business has been, we've sort of been at the same kind of revenue and size and service level for the last two years.

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And as I'm looking ahead to the book coming out and reaching a bigger platform, growing the business I'm sort of working on sort of identifying with that future self. Who is my future self who has a New York Times bestselling book and who has a \$10 million business and is serving twice as many students? And is changing the national conversation around feminism and mindset and women's socialization. I'm sort of bringing that person into focus in my mind, in my vision.

And that is involving things I wouldn't have thought like changing my living space, changing my personal style, all of it feels like I am kind of conjuring that next validated bigger impact version of myself. And it's not a specific thought exactly. It's more of a question that I teach all of you to ask, which is what would my future self think about this? What would my future self do about this? When I was trying to make my first \$100,000 in my business I asked myself all the time if I was making the me who's made six figures, what does she think about this, what does she do?

And so I'm connecting more to that vision, that next level for myself. So that's a big one. And then I've also been working on a thought that is sort of I am someone who is always happy to see my partner because as we talked about on our episode he is like a golden retriever and always very excited to see me. And that is not a model that I have. I just by nature am a little more reserved. I think I tend to be a little more critical. And because of the way my brain work I am always looking for what's wrong.

And so I have done a lot of work on that in my business life and my relationship with myself also. And in past romantic relationships but each one is different and new and activates different old patterns. So I've been working on I'm always happy to see my partner. I am someone who's always happy to see my partner and believing into that thought to create more of that actual result because I do love him. I've decided to share my life with him.

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And so it's really not that helpful for my brain to take an inventory of everything that might be wrong every time it sees him. That is not a helpful thought pattern. So those are the two that I'm working on right now.

Alright my chickens, that's it for this week.

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