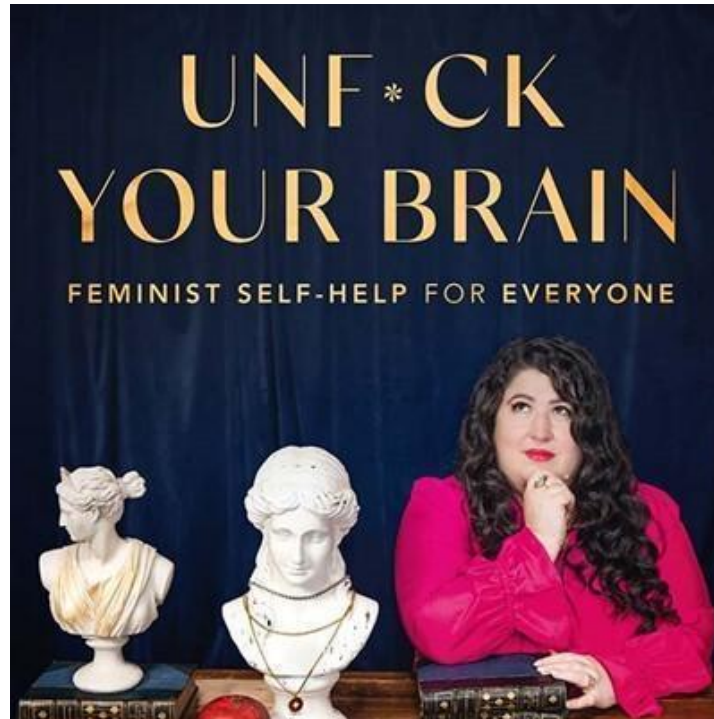


UFYB 297: What Matters More Than Thoughts



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

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Welcome to Unf*ck Your Brain. I'm your host, Kara Loewentheil, Master Certified Coach and founder of The School of New Feminist Thought. I'm here to help you turn down your anxiety, turn up your confidence, and create a life on your own terms. One that you're truly excited to live. Let's go.

Hello my chickens, how are you? I am a little congested you may hear, but we're going to power through here. If I sound a little more nasal than usual though, that's why. So other than having a head cold, I am having one of those weeks where I feel like a lot of my thought work has paid off and I want to share that with you. Because so often when we are in it, it is all consuming. And then as we change our thoughts, the irony is that we don't notice the problem as much. So we often don't stop to really see where we've grown and changed because it happens bit by bit and it just becomes normalized in our experience.

And so one of the places that I saw this really pay off this week was around body image. This is an area that I have done so much work on over the years. And as I've mentioned on previous episodes of the podcast, I have kind of a new frontier of this to work on recently because I have been doing some filming for a potential project. And I've been watching myself on film a lot. And it's filming I don't control, so however the videographer and cinematographer decides to shoot me, that's how I show up. And we all have different mediums.

And I think we get used to how we look in certain mediums. So I've done a lot of work on loving how I look in photos, how I look in the mirror, how I look on Zoom, but how I look on film is different because it's a different type of lens, different type of film, a different medium, different angles etc. So the first time that I saw some of the footage I had a really negative body image reaction, which was pretty tough. And then the second time I saw footage, it was still rough in my brain. It was a little easier.

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And then the third time, there were still a couple of shots that I really struggled with but overall I was okay. And the fourth time just now, or the last time before I'm doing this episode, there were one or two shots that bothered me but I was able to just let that reaction be there and it passed. And the rest of it, I was really fine with. So what's wild to me about this is I actually didn't even work on my thoughts about the film very much. When I was doing kind of my more foundational body work, thought work, it was a daily slog. I have talked about this a lot.

Multiple times a day, I had to change every thought and I had to practice so much. And then a few years later when I started my business, I started having photoshoots for social media and website content. And I had to do another round of the work. It was a little easier but there was still a lot of repetition of thoughts. I had to do a lot of exposure to photos. I think it still took multiple photoshoots for me to be able to change my thoughts enough and have enough exposure to start to like them.

And now here we are, it's about five years after that, and I've been thinking more positive thoughts about my body this whole time and that has built up such a strong foundation in my brain. Now, that didn't prevent the initial shock of seeing myself in a different way. Some of my old thoughts did still come up. But the speed with which I adjusted and adapted was so much faster and it took so much less conscious effort on my part. Because I had been through this process several times my brain knew what to do.

And because I had built up such a strong foundation of self-acceptance and body acceptance and that was my default, these old thoughts were actually creating cognitive dissonance. So my brain was able to reject them.

Cognitive dissonance is not inherently good or bad. It's just a thing your brain does that you need to be aware of how to navigate. Cognitive dissonance is when you have one set of thoughts and then you learn

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something or you receive information or you have another thought that conflicts with the first set of thoughts that you had.

And this is not inherently good or bad, it's just a thing your brain does and it can be helpful in cases like this. When you're first changing your thoughts, cognitive dissonance is something you really have to overcome because you're trying to change a thought and your brain really wants to hold on to the preexisting thought, to your old thought. But in this case when you've created a new default thought pattern like I've created positive body image, now that's my default thought. So now cognitive dissonance works in my favor because my brain rejects ideas that contradict it.

So if I've truly switched my default thought pattern to something like my body is perfectly fine the way it is. When my brain offers something up like you look fat and gross or whatever, my brain actually rejects it. So cognitive dissonance is a pain in the ass when you're first changing your thoughts.

Your brain's trying to reject the helpful new thoughts. But once those new thoughts become your default it actually can work in your favor. So here's how this kind of relates to today's topic.

One of the reasons my brain was able to do its thing and process a lot of this subconsciously for me is that I did not react to these body image thoughts when they came up. And I did not react to the negative emotions either. I let them flow through. I had a little cry and I moved on. And this is the one thing that matters more than your thoughts. Your thoughts are so important, they determine so much of your mental and emotional state, the actions you're able to take or not take, the returns you're able to create in your life.

But what is even more important than the thoughts you have is your reaction to the thoughts and to the feelings you have. Often when I coach someone, they have a negative feeling that they find kind of intolerable.

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When a negative emotion feels so intolerable we will do anything to escape it. It's almost always not just the emotional responding to when it feels that bad. What feels intolerable is the reaction we have to the negative emotion. It's the story we tell ourselves about the emotion. Sometimes that story is subconscious and instinctive.

Humans do not like pain. So when we start to feel a negative emotion we resist it. We want to run away from it or drown it out with other sensations or numb it out with substances or take some kind of impulsive action to change it fast. We've talked a lot on this podcast about how resisting negative emotions makes them worse. I'll probably be talking about that forever because it's a lesson that I personally have to relearn all the time and I'm sure that you do too.

Sometimes the story we have about a thought or emotion is conscience. So we may be thinking to ourselves, I hate feeling this way, I can't stand this feeling. I'm so tired of feeling this way. Those kinds of thoughts make us feel trapped or despairing or both. The truth is that an emotion usually passes through us aside from cases of sort of clinical mental health problems. So it's not usually true for most of us that we always feel a certain way most of the time but when we tell ourselves that, it feels believable and it makes us feel hopeless.

We may also be evaluating and judging our thoughts and feelings. Part of the problem with learning that our thoughts and feelings drive our actions and produce our returns is that we start to kind of justifiably give a lot of importance to our thoughts and feelings. But the point of thought work isn't to turn your thoughts and feelings into the things that you feel control you, that you have to be then afraid of your thoughts or feelings or try to get them perfect so you can be happy.

We're not trying to substitute your thoughts for whatever else you use to try to do perfectly to be able to be happy. It's your relationship to your thoughts

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and feelings that will actually change your life, above and beyond any specific thought pattern, developing a new way of relating to your own brain and emotions is what will transform you. Sometimes what I see happen is we realize that something is a thought pattern.

Let's say I was coaching someone recently about this on scarcity versus abundance, which means believing that there's not enough of something to go around, success or love or money or whatever else. That's scarcity, there's not enough to go around or there's enough for other people but not for us. And then abundance is there's plenty of that to go around, there's enough for me too. So at first that can be a relief to realize, this is a thought pattern. This isn't just a true reflection of the world.

But then we start to judge our progress and be reactive to our scarcity thoughts. We're in a hurry to finish the process. We want a breakthrough, to be done with the thoughts. And so every time the thought comes up we get upset that it's still there and we blame the thought for how we feel and that seems intuitive because you've learned that thoughts create feelings. But there's actually two thoughts happening. The thought there's not enough love for me, let's say, creates one feeling, sadness.

But then you think, I can't believe I still think this, I'm never going to get through this. And that creates a much worse feeling. Then you feel hopeless or despairing because you believe you should have already been able to change your thought and you haven't. So it's not so much the original thought and feeling that are so terrible, it's your reaction to the original thought or feeling, the thought you then have about that thought.

Anytime you recognize a thought, whether it's the initial thought about there not being enough love or the thought you have about that thought, that you'll never get rid of it and you'll be stuck with it forever. You always have an opportunity to decide how to relate to that thought, what story to tell yourself about that thought.

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When my body image stuff came up from watching the film I didn't forget about it. I didn't make it mean that my body image work hadn't worked before, that I was supposed to be past this, I wasn't supposed to have this problem anymore. This is going to take forever to solve. I didn't tell myself any of that. I just recognized it popping back up and I told myself, of course this is a new frontier, it's a new stimulus, it's totally normal that this is coming back up. I just normalized it. I didn't judge it or give it a lot of power over me. And that made it much easier to shift it this time around.

So remember that there is something more important than your thoughts, it's how you react to your thoughts. And that's amazing news because it means that any moment when a thought comes up, you have the choice of how to react to it. If you judge it or reject it, you make it harder to change it. And you make your current emotional experience much worse. But if you can accept it, you can get traction. And for extra credit, you can even love on yourself, actively support yourself while you're having it.

Often we're just trying to stop resisting our thoughts and feel neutral about them. But what if you loved yourself through the process of changing a thought, what if a thought pattern you're really working on changing was still happening and it came up, you didn't look at how far you have to go, you looked at how far you've come. What if you gave yourself so much credit for how far you've already come and the work you've already done. Rather than always looking at how far you have to go.

So imagine you're on a two mile walk and you're at a mile down the road. If you're thinking, I can't believe I still have another mile to go, I should already be there. That person who passed me is going to get there faster than I am, but I'm such a slow walker. You're going to feel tired and hopeless and exhausted. And if you're thinking, I'm a fucking badass, look at me, I walked a mile, I only have to do this one more time and then I'm done, how amazing am I at walking.

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Sounds silly but you feel so much better and you'll probably get there faster and in better physical shape too. So what if you gave yourself a high five for being such a badass, that you are changing generations of thoughts that were handed down to you. If you're teaching a kid to tie their shoes and they get it half right, do you yell at them for not doing it perfectly or do you give them positive feedback on the part they did do right? And then encourage them to keep working on the part that they're still having trouble with.

You can talk to yourself in the same way, loving on yourself and celebrating yourself, seeing awareness of a thought pattern as progress, see the thought pattern come up only sometimes as amazing progress because it used to be always. That is going to change your life no matter what thoughts you're having.

If you're loving what you're learning on the podcast, you have got to come check out *The Feminist Self-Help Society*. It's our newly revamped community and classroom where you get individual help to better apply these concepts to your life along with a library of next level blow your mind coaching tools and concepts that I just can't fit in a podcast episode. It's also where you can hang out, get coached and nerd out about all things thought work and feminist mindset with other podcast listeners just like you and me.

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