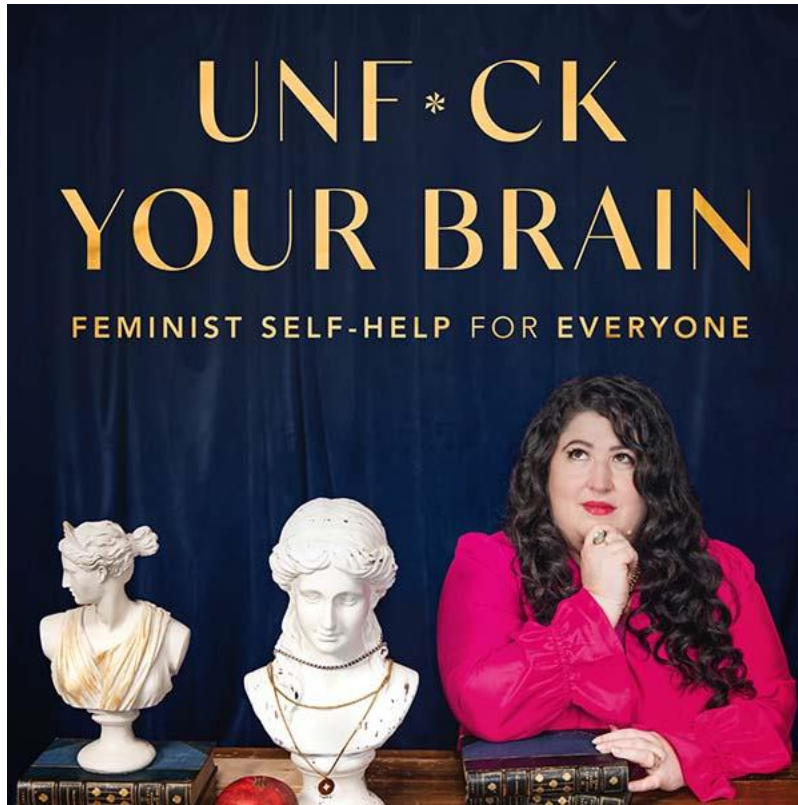


UFYB 356: My Feminist Wedding & Future Self



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

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Do you want to know what my favorite compliment at my wedding was? It was not how many people told me I looked beautiful. It was not how many people complimented the music or the decor. It was how many people told me that our wedding felt special and different and that they'd never been to a wedding like it before.

In this episode, I'm going to dig into what we did differently and why you should care, because while my wedding is not inherently interesting on its own, necessarily, I mean, it is to me, but not many of you. Reinventing and reconceiving patriarchal traditions and institutions to suit our true selves and envisioning that future self who has the outcome and the experiences that we want is a topic everyone needs to hear about. And that's really what I'm going to be getting into in today's episode.

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.

Welcome back, my friends. We are getting into the swing of creating new podcast episodes, new ideas, new teaching. It's so good to be back. Without the book launch and the wedding on my mind, it turns out I have a lot more brain space to be thinking of new ideas, new ways of teaching, new tools, and new kinds of help to share with all of you. And in the next few episodes, I'm going to be talking a lot about how to create future outcomes by connecting to what I call your future feminist self.

That doesn't mean you're not a feminist now and you're going to become one. It is about connecting to the version of you in the future who has overcome some of the programming that you're struggling with right now.

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So we're going to get to talking about that through the vehicle of one of the most patriarchal institutions in the world. And the title of this episode was almost "The Feminist Wedding I Never Dreamed Of" because I can't tell you how many times I heard the phrase "the wedding of your dreams" or "your dream wedding" in advertising with service providers when we were wedding planning. And like how many times I got asked about my Pinterest boards or what I had always imagined.

And I almost started to feel like I needed to apologize up front that I did not have a decade's worth of Pinterest boards with wedding inspo. That is no shade to those of you who do. There's obviously nothing wrong with collecting inspiration for any event. And I made a Pinterest board myself in the end to better communicate what I wanted visually.

But I do want us to question why women are socialized to see their wedding day as like the pinnacle of their existence. And it's because in the patriarchy, being a wife is the most important role a woman can have. Being a mother is very close to that in the patriarchal world, but not all women can have their own biological children. And again, remember, we're talking about patriarchy's value system, not like my value system and how I think about these things, right?

But in a patriarchal value system where women are valued for domestic labor, sexual labor, producing children and raising children, right? Not every woman will produce and raise children, but every woman can theoretically be married off to provide at least domestic and sexual labor in the home for free.

So because that is like the archetypical role for a woman in patriarchy, there's all of this kind of pomp and circumstance around that moment of transition, right? And it's like this time that is supposed to be dreamed of and hoped for and longed for and celebrated because it is symbolizing that like conversion, that patriarchal conversion to wife. And in a society that is

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constantly telling women to be quiet and take up less space and don't want attention and don't want anyone to look at you and don't be selfish and don't be needy and don't be vain, it's like you get this one day that you're allowed to be the most important person in the room. Because that's really what society teaches us, that this is like the one day that the bride is the most important person.

Like historically, the day that you're transferred as property from one man to another is the most important day. And even today, I think, you know, you get to matter most on that one day. That's what society tells you. You're allowed to have lots of opinions on that day. You're allowed to spend money on yourself and your preferences that day without guilt or shame. You're allowed to want people to look at you and talk about you.

I think that that's intoxicating when you're used to being told to play small and stay on the sidelines. So there's a lot of socialization built into this idea that a wedding is the best day of your life or your special day.

So I personally did not ever dream of having a wedding and I didn't think I would necessarily even get married and I spent zero time growing up imagining what that day would be like. That's about weddings. I was absolutely obsessed with dating as a measure of my validation and self-worth before I found coaching, do not get me wrong, I'm not saying that I was living like this enlightened feminist life of the mind where I was unaffected by socialization. I just wasn't focused on my wedding. I couldn't even get there because I was so focused on all of my drama about dating.

And what I did do when I was dating that is relevant here is that when I started to really use coaching tools on dating and try to deal with my just off the charts level of anxiety around dating and drama around dating and like dating and weight loss were my two mentally all-consuming obsessions for most of my life until my mid-30s. So when I was finally dealing with dating, I had to do the body image stuff first so I could believe that I was like a

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person in a body that could be even desired or cared for and then I started to do the work on my dating stuff.

One of the things I did is I spent a lot of time working on connecting to what I call my future feminist self. So this is a really powerful technique for changing your thinking and, you know, shifting your identity, which is a little bit of like a coach phrase, and I've seen people like say that they don't know what that means. And what it really means is like the person you think about yourself as being is your identity. It's like the story you have about yourself.

We all have stories about ourselves, about what we're good at and what we're bad at and what we're like and what we're not like. "I'm a procrastinator" or "I'm really generous" or "I'm short-tempered sometimes" or "I'm selfish." It's like we have these stories about ourselves. So it's that person you think about yourself as being. That's your identity. It's like your self-conception. We all have the stories about who we are and for about 20 years of my life my story about myself was that I was the one who would never get married, forget that, I would never even live with a partner because there was something wrong with me.

My story was that I was always the one who was less desirable, less lovable, was just missing something that other women had that made men love them. I wasn't attractive enough, I was too much, I was intimidating, I was too fat, I was too critical, I was too sharp, there was just something mysterious and wrong with me, right? I had a ton of quote-unquote "reasons," some of which were literally just, "I don't know, wrong with me." And of course, because that was my story, I was always acting like that person.

So in order to change my outcome in dating, I had to focus on who my future feminist self was. So for me, I didn't imagine her wedding day, partly because I can't visualize, so maybe that's why. But I did imagine what it

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would be like to be that person who was in a loving, committed, positive relationship and who felt loved and who felt loving and felt committed and secure, right? Who was in a relationship where she was building a life with someone who she really respected and adored and wanted to jump, right? So I had to ask myself, like, that future me, that future feminist self who's not just in it for validation, like, what would she be thinking?

And that's really important. You'll hear a lot of coaches teach some version of future self work, but if you are not doing this from the feminist perspective, you are going to be like missing the boat entirely. Because often our future fantasies are about subconsciously thinking socialized thoughts that we don't even realize. So if I'm not looking at this from that feminist lens, then when I imagine my future self who's in that relationship, that feels so good, but what is my subconscious thinking, if I'm not using my kind of feminist coaching lens, if I haven't changed my thoughts, the subconscious thoughts that that person is having, that future me is having that feels so good are things like "I have a husband, so I know I'm good enough.

I'm finally a real part of society. I'm finally normal and like everyone else. I've been chosen by a man and that means that I'm worthwhile. I'm more valuable now that I'm married. Being married is proof there isn't something wrong with me. I have what single women want now. I'm better than them." These are the kind of thoughts that society has programmed into my brain.

So if all I'm doing is just sitting here feeling miserable about dating and trying to imagine future happily married me and I'm not bringing a feminist lens to the coaching exercise, then I'm just having a fantasy about really damaging patriarchal thoughts and I am not going to really find the true path to feeling liberated and feeling good about myself. So I really made sure to be really careful to connect to that future feminist self, the happily partnered woman whose thoughts were not about how she was finally good enough because she had been chosen.

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So my future feminist self that I was really imagining and connecting to when I was in the throes of my dating lunacy and doing this work, had thoughts like, "I'm an amazing catch. I am a loving and supportive partner. I know how to create a healthy and exciting relationship. I'm lovable just the way I am, flaws and all. There's so much love in my life. I'm happy in this relationship and I would also just be as lovable and happy on my own."

So you can really see that the focus here is on the kind of thoughts that I didn't at the time believe, right? At the time, this was my future feminist self. Now, today, this is my current self. When I was doing this work, this was my future feminist self. So it was both the person I wanted to be in the future with the outcome I wanted in the relationship, but I was being really careful to make sure that the thoughts that I was coming up with, the thoughts I wanted that person to be living, right, were not just like socialized propaganda in my brain.

It was not "future me is married and then she finally feels good about herself because a man has chosen her." Like I had to excavate all that subconscious programming and be really thinking about what would someone, a woman who feels good about herself regardless of her relationship status, be thinking when she's in a relationship.

So connecting to that future me helped me know what I needed to work on believing and it helped guide my actions because I could use that future self as kind of a filter, like an advice giver for how to navigate all the things that come up in dating.

Okay, so fast forward, I became that feminist future self. I met and now I've married my husband, although that was really just the icing on the cake of loving myself and not feeling desperate for a relationship anymore, which is the real prize. In any case, though, when my husband and I decided to get married, I was pretty much, we were pretty much starting from scratch in terms of how to proceed.

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I did not feel like I needed a wedding to be any specific way to validate me or to control what other people thought about me or to make anyone happy or to conform to any particular institution or to like symbolize something about me having met this social norm. If you're curious why we decided to get married at all, given the problematic origins of the institution, that is a very good question. I have a whole two episodes on this on my feminist mixed feelings about getting engaged and getting married and why I made these decisions. That's episodes 306 and 307. But here in this episode, 356, the decision's been made. We're planning our wedding.

So this I want to share a little bit about our process, again, not because my wedding is inherently so fascinating to anybody else, but because I want to give you an example of if you do choose to participate in this kind of – in any kind of patriarchal institution, it looks like to really create something that's meaningful to you within that framework. And again, some people would be like, "burn down the framework, don't participate" and that is totally valid and legit and that's just not what I chose to do here.

So the first thing that we did was we sat down and we talked about what values would guide the design of our wedding and what our priorities were in light of those values. In other words, where are we going to spend time and effort and money and where would we not? And this is something you all have heard me talk about a lot, using your values to identify your priorities and help you allocate your resources, and that is true in every area of your life. It is true in your professional career, like what things are important in your profession or your professional development and what things are you going to let go. It's true in your family life and parenting, what things are you going to really try to work on with your kids and what things are you going to let go or not spend time or money or effort on. Like using your values and your priorities in light of those values helps guide those decisions.

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So before I get into details I'm just going to preface this by saying that there's obviously financial privilege involved in this story. I'm not about to tell you about a wedding that we did for \$250. But I'm sharing this not for you to copy the what of our wedding, but for you to hear about the how, right? So I'm going to share some of our details just as examples of places that we chose to do things differently and why, but it's not about copying the details. It's about listening to the way you can think through how to create something personally meaningful within an existing problematic institution.

So we started with what was important to us that felt top of mind, and that was that we both have time with the friends we're close to who we don't get to see as often. So we're getting married in middle age, I'm 43, my husband's 55, 54, about to turn 55, and a lot of our friends have small kids. And so we both had really, you know, people we love so much that we get to see like on one day a year maybe. Maybe we are able to get out to California for a short trip in between our cycle of having the kids with our custody schedule and we get to see like one friend for dinner and one friend for lunch the next day.

So we have these like far-flung friends that we don't get to spend time with. And that was the most important thing to us. That was one of the biggest reasons to even have a wedding was that people will come to your wedding. The patriarchal institution and its importance pays off in this instance. And we had gone to all these people's weddings, so they, you know, probably feel like they should return the favor.

So we really want to spend time with those people. And so the biggest thing we decided that shaped everything else really was that the only way to achieve this goal of really having more than like 10 minutes with our friends who live far away was to have some kind of extended wedding experience that we could invite people to. But a destination wedding did not work well for us because... Number one, we didn't want our attendance to

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be a financial burden on anyone and number two, I have a grandmother who's 97 years old who was not able to fly internationally to a destination wedding.

So a destination wedding was not the right option for us, but we still wanted to create some way that we could be with the people that we love, our closest friends and family, especially the ones that we don't see very often. We also knew it was not really important to us to have a traditional couple-only honeymoon. We didn't really see any reason to make like the best trip of our lives, something that comes right after our wedding.

First of all, your wedding is already like a huge dopamine high. If we were going to take the best trip of our lives, we'd rather do that at a different time anyway, like something to look forward to. Also, we lived together already, we're adults, we're able to travel. We just didn't see any reason that this particular trip should be specifically expensive or specifically ambitious. Like we just had no attachment to the traditional honeymoon.

In the end, we did go away for a few days together, but it was not like our biggest, fanciest trip we've ever taken by far. So instead, what we really decided to do was to split up our wedding budget in two parts. And we decided to have a less spendy wedding in New York City, skip some of the stuff that people do that's very expensive, or just do things on a smaller scale so that we could take a group honeymoon after our wedding, which people thought was like bananas, but also amazing, and it was.

So we paid for the accommodations and food for everyone. So people just had to get there. And we also offered help with airline miles to those friends for whom travel was a significant cost. So that was our kind of way of at least offering people the option to spend a little more time with us in a way that wouldn't be a burden on them. And I think our friends know us well enough to know it was all totally optional.

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Although in the end, almost everyone we invited came. We didn't have a wedding party or anything like that. We didn't have bachelor or bachelorette parties. I didn't plan to have a wedding shower. We ended up having like a friend of mine organized a little high tea nearby, you know, but like we didn't do presents. We didn't do bachelor or bachelorette parties. Like we didn't want to ask people to have to overextend or to travel two or three times for us. Again, like we're middle-aged. People have kids. People have big jobs. People have lives.

So this was kind of the go all out, like come to our wedding, come on this trip and we will help make it feasible for you. So that was the most important thing to us, and then everything else kind of flowed from that. And then we sort of planned our wedding based on, okay, well, we're going to use half of our budget for this. And then what's important to us, what's not important to us, from a couple of different perspectives, a Jewish perspective, an egalitarian perspective, a feminist perspective, and our own personal priorities.

So when we started planning the wedding itself, we thought of it as three phases, the ceremony, reception and the after party. And for each phase, we talked about what experience we wanted to create. Again, this is like such an important tool when you are trying to create something of your own within the constraints of an existing patriarchal institution. And you could talk about marriage this way, but certainly a wedding or a baby naming or any other rite of passage.

There's a great book by Priya Parker called "The Art of Gathering." And one of the things she talks about is like setting a purpose for gatherings, not just like "we're having a party." Like, why are you having a party? What do you want the party to feel like? What do you want the party to create? What experience do you want people at the party to have and how do you plan the party to make that happen?

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So we didn't really take like "this is what a wedding is" and tweak. We really started from our priorities and values and worked from there. So for the ceremony, we wanted it to feel egalitarian and equal and then intimate and personal and we wanted our friends and family and loved ones to all be a part of it. So we customized everything.

For instance, I did not want to be walked down the aisle by my family to be given to the gentleman consort. And in fact, I found the idea of walking down the aisle while everybody stands up and stares at me very weird. I didn't want to do that. This is a perfect example to me of like, I think, something that women usually don't allow themselves to do, like be the center of attention. And it's like, you can only do it in this wedding context. There are contexts where I do like to be the center of attention when I'm speaking, when I'm teaching, like I'm very comfortable with it there. But to me, just personally, it would have felt very awkward and like performative to process down the aisle in a white dress led by my father while everyone looked at me.

Again, there's no shade to anybody who loved doing that, that's great for you, just not in integrity and alignment with me. I really found the idea of walking down the aisle altogether strange and I kind of wanted to just be like hanging out with people before the wedding started and then like scamper up to the chuppah when it was time. The chuppah is a Jewish wedding canopy. My partner's children, my stepchildren, really wanted to be flower children. So somebody had to go down the aisle because that was very important to them.

And also we wore very unexpected outfits. I wore a custom raspberry-colored silk dress, and my husband wore a tropical flower jacket, and so I thought the kind of ooh-ahh moment of surprise and joyfulness from those colors would just be really fun as a dramatic entrance. So that's what we did, and I did not wear white. People have asked me why I didn't wear

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white, and I didn't wear white because I couldn't think of any good reason to wear white.

It's such an interesting little example of how because most people wear white, then that's like the assumption and then you're supposed to have a reason not to. But I didn't have any reason to wear white. I'm certainly not trying to signal that I'm virginal, which was like the original association. I don't personally look good in white. So there's absolutely no reason to wear white other than the fact that most people wear white, which again, had held zero weight for me.

So we came in together and we danced down the aisle to "You Can't Hurry Love," which I thought was hilarious and I hope everybody could hear. And then we customized our ceremony. It was important to me and my family that it be a Jewish ceremony, but a lot of the traditional Jewish ceremony is quite patriarchal. And the very traditional one, the woman does not even speak. So that was obviously not going to fly with me.

And so we needed a rabbi who would perform an interfaith marriage and would also let us edit the ceremony. And so we went through every single element of the ceremony and decided, like, did it match up with our values? Should we keep it? Should we tweak it or should we get rid of it? And then we also had a non-religious ceremony where we had friends and family come up and offer blessings for us that they came up with and they surprised us with like blessings, poems, advice. We basically told them they had 90 seconds to say whatever they wanted to say to us at our wedding.

And that was really important to us because part of the point of having a wedding and having all these people there is some like old school tribal communal thing of like a group celebration and a community witnessing. And so we wanted our friends and family to be part of that. Especially I think in our culture, like so much pressure is put on your romantic partner to

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be like everything and everyone to you. And that's not possible. I don't think it's healthy. And it's certainly not true for us. I have friends I'm always going to have known longer than my husband now, since I didn't meet him when I was three, which is when I met my oldest friend.

So we wanted all those people to be part of it with us. And finally, maybe the most untraditional thing we did is we did not do any vows. We did not make any promises. I did not want to do vows because I don't like to make promises I can't be sure that I'll want to keep. And I certainly hope that we are married for a long time and maybe forever, meaning until one of us dies. But more than that, I just want us to be married as long as it feels good and positive for us to be married.

So I did not want to make any forever promises. Given the divorce rate, it's actually bananas to me that so many people make those promises, especially people on second or third marriages. That's not a failing to me. A marriage or any relationship can end and that was like a beautiful relationship that did exactly what it needed to do. But I have been in the mental health and growth and evolution world too long to pretend that I can be absolutely sure what the me of 30 years is going to be like or want or be available for.

So what I did want to do instead was talk about our reasons for being there and getting married. So we shared why we were making that decision with each other, and we shared that with our community. And it wasn't just why we loved each other, but why we thought this level of commitment was a good idea and what we hoped would sustain our relationship over the long term.

And then we also had a friend officiate in addition to the rabbi, and this was also something that we got some side eyes about because we didn't choose the friend we knew the longest or somebody who, you know, was a professional at this, but we chose the person who we thought would speak

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the most beautifully about love. We chose somebody who we both knew who we felt was someone who really loves hard and with her whole heart and is optimistic about love, and we just thought that she would speak beautifully about that, and she did. So she did an amazing job.

It ended up being a pretty long ceremony, and we were fine with that. We had to coach ourselves through a little bit of people pleasing of like, "are people gonna get bored? Do they think it's too long? Are they gonna think it's self-involved?" But we didn't wanna treat the ceremony like this kind of boring auto thing you're supposed to get through before the party. Like it wasn't our goal to make it long, but we were willing to have that as a side effect. And it was important that our wedding be meaningful to us.

So that was our ceremony. And then we set a separate intention for our receptions. The intention for our ceremony was that it be authentic, that it be about connection and community and very intimate and personal. And then for our reception, our goal was that other people get to know each other. So our ceremony was about like our love and existing connections. And then our reception, we wanted everyone else to, you know, create new and real authentic connections or, you know, spend time with connections they already had. We wanted our loved ones to get to know each other and we wanted it to be fluid.

And so we wanted people to be able to mix and mingle and talk to different people. And, you know, we didn't wanna have, like, the people the groom knows are all seated at this table, and people the bride knows are all seated at that table, and everybody's stuck at their table. So we had no assigned seating, we didn't have a banquet dinner, we had a cocktail-style reception, so people could mix and mill and wander and change who they were talking to all night. We even came up with little conversation cards. It's something we use at home with each other, with the kids, to spark conversation or deeper questions. And so we put those out so people could use them if they wanted to.

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We just really wanted people to all get to know each other and mix and mingle and to feel festive. And also for you to be able to hear. My pet peeve at weddings was when any event, charity event, wedding, bar mitzvah, whatever, it's when the band is so loud that people can't talk. So we had an amazing swing jazz band and they were the perfect volume.

We didn't have a cake or a first dance because again, those things felt for us like kind of performance that didn't feel authentic to us. And we actually didn't have a dance floor at all because in general dancing was not important to us, but we did have a big enthusiastic long hora, which is a Jewish traditional folk dance performed at weddings and celebrations. And that's actually the part that makes me cry every time I re-watch our wedding video. It's seeing my friends and family dancing this dance that I have danced at so many other celebrations and that Jews have been dancing for more than a century and will keep dancing.

And then finally, we had poets who wrote custom love poems for anyone who wanted one, because writing and written communication has been such an important part of our love story and because we wanted everybody to get to have like a little piece of love at the event.

And then finally, we had the after party. And our intention for the after party was to, again, like not just be like, "ah, the people who are still awake are hanging out," right? That's like not having a purpose or a reason or anything for it. So we wanted the after party to be a chance to focus a bit more on the erotic element of a marriage and a romantic relationship, but in a humorous way that is appropriate to share with other people. Partly because if you can't laugh during sex, then I don't know how you're getting through decades of it with the same person.

So our after party was a burlesque show and we had Jewish burlesque dancers who did several Jewish-themed numbers. We did set out to have burlesque dancers. We did not set out to have them be specifically Jewish

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burlesque dancers. But it just turns out that if you are looking at like curvy brunette burlesque dancers in the New York City area, a lot of them are Jewish. Jews are often quite sex positive. And we didn't intend for it to be Jewish themed, but then a couple of them had really funny Jewish themed burlesque numbers just already that they did. And so we ran with it.

And then we also had one of the poets stick around to write custom erotic poetry for people who came to the after party. And the other thing I loved about the after party that I really chose on purpose was that I did change and I wore a white dress to the after party, but it was like a sort of like if a French aristocrat dressed up as a servant in some kind of fantasy novel vibe. Like I liked the idea of my only white wedding dress, the only kind of traditional thing I was doing, being subversive and being overtly sexy, but also in a tongue-in-cheek kind of funny way. So I did change into that. And even though I only wore it for about an hour, it was one of my favorite kind of elements.

And then we were in bed by 1 a.m. because we're old. So that was my perfect feminist wedding that I had never dreamed of. And what meant the most to me other than marrying my husband, and I'm fine with the term husband. I'm still not sure about being a wife. That term is very loaded, and I'm not sure how... how I feel about it. But the best part, other than celebrating our love, was how many people came up to tell us that they had never been to a wedding like this.

People told us that it was unique, it was unusual, it was intimate, it was sweet, it was authentic. Multiple people independently told us at the wedding, at the brunch, in emails later, that weddings are all supposed to be joyful occasions, but that often they don't actually feel very joyful. They seem stressed or they feel stilted or they feel like weirdly formal or whatever, but that at ours you could really feel the love and joy from the whole community and the group and us and that everybody was just like being themselves and celebrating. So that was really meaningful to us.

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And then one very elegant older woman who's a friend of my parents told me that we had impeccable taste, which is possibly my proudest moment.

Anyway, all of this is to say that while you absolutely do not have to get married to be worthy, loved, valuable, or committed. If you decide to, and if you are being motivated by reasons that actually feel good to you, you'll be able to do it your way on your own terms. And yeah, it is maybe one of the best nights of your life, but not because it's a wedding specifically, not because now you're married, and now you're good enough, and now you're worthwhile, but because it's an opportunity to share your love with your partner, with your community, and to really receive and absorb their love too.

The biggest breakthrough in my life that led to my ability to have this relationship, which I was not capable of before, was recognition of how much love was already in my life and how loved I already was. And so it felt like a really beautiful circle to be able to use our wedding to experience that and reflect it back and have the love really pour all around.

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.