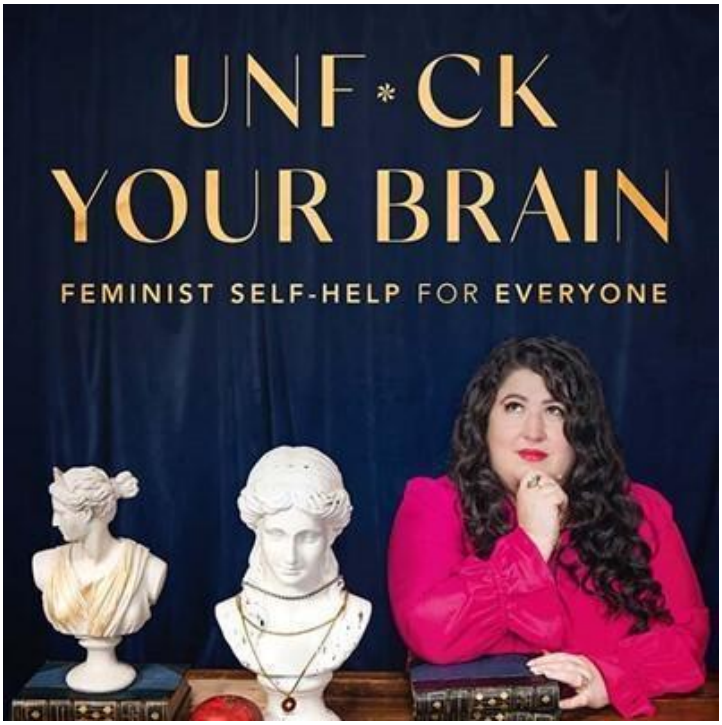
UFYB 125: Choose Your Own Adventure



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

UnF*ck Your Brain with Kara Loewentheil

UFYB 125: Choose Your Own Adventure

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? Alright, so let's talk about today's topic, which actually kind of relates to the concepts of time and how it's our limited resource and our anxiety around how to use it. So if you grew up in the 80s and 90s like I did, you may remember these books that were called Choose Your Own Adventure books.

I actually Googled to see if they still make these, and they're definitely still available. I couldn't quite tell if they're writing new ones or just republishing the old ones that we used to read, but you can still get them. So the premise of the book was that as the reader, you got to decide what you wanted to do.

Usually reading is kind of a passive experience, right? We have to go where the author wants to take us. The author has made all the decisions for us before we even picked up the book, and we're just along for the ride. But in a Choose Your Own Adventure book, there were actually multiple different books that you could end up reading within that one book.

So let me explain how it worked if you don't know what I'm talking about. What would happen is you would read a few pages, the story would start off normally, and then you would get to a page where it would say something like, "To go deeper into the forest with Sam, turn to page 74. To turn around and get in the boat and cross the lake with Jane instead, turn to page 82."

And then you would turn to those pages and the story would pick up going in a different direction, whether you decided to go deeper in the forest or you decide to get on the boat and cross the lake. You would actually have a

choice in how to continue the story. And that would happen multiple times in the book, sometimes circling back, sometimes not.

So there were kind of all of these decision trees of how the story could unfold and what would happen. And I think these books are a perfect metaphor for how to think about your life in two really important ways. First, think about how often we act like our lives are just happening to us.

It's like we sat with a book and all the choices have already been made. Well, this person said and did these things so I have to think and feel and act this way. My parents were this way, so this is the kind of person I have to be. I went to this kind of school, so this is the kind of job I have to have. I live in this place, so this is the person that I have to be with. Everyone else has kids and a house so I have to have those things too.

We act like we're passive participants in our own lives. Not even participants. We act like we're passive observers. Like our lives are a story that's happening to someone else and we can only watch it unfold ahead of us. Like the story is inexorable and can't be changed.

Chapter one happened this way and chapter two happened that way, so chapters three and four and five and six all have to happen this way, and there's nothing I can do. That's how we think about it. And even when we become aware of our own thought patterns through therapy or journaling or meditation or whatever else, often we just keep observing them without changing them.

Well, I have anxious attachment, so if my partner acts this way, I have to think and feel and act this way in response. I have scarcity thinking around money, so that means I'll always have to worry about it and this is how I have to act. I see this happen with my clients. Sometimes they attach to coaching language or terms that are just descriptive, as if they are diagnoses that foretell the future.

UFYB 125: Choose Your Own Adventure

And the underlying premise is like, I have this kind of thought pattern right now, so this is how the rest of my life has to be. We act like it's all already been decided for us and we are just along for the ride. So disempowering. What if we thought about life as a choose your own adventure?

There are decision points coming up in front of us all the time. And in fact, way more of them than in a Choose Your Own Adventure book. Those books probably had 25 or 50 decision points max. But your life has thousands of decision points. Thousands of opportunities to change the way you're thinking or feeling or acting.

Thousands of opportunities to change your patterns, to change your experience, to change the trajectory of your life. And you know, when you default to what is familiar, what you think has already been decided for you, that is a decision. Not embracing your agency in your own life doesn't mean you aren't choosing.

You're just choosing your unconscious brain. You're just saying to yourself, "I just want my life to be made up of whatever nonsense my lizard brain has come up with unconsciously. That's what should be in charge. That's the adventure I want to choose." That is a choice. And I think the only reason that choice is appealing is because we feel overwhelmed by the weight of making decisions for ourselves.

Because we're afraid we'll make the wrong decision. But this is where the second way that Choose Your Own Adventure books is a great metaphor for life comes into play. Because in the books and in life, there's no wrong choice. When you made a choice in one of those books, there wasn't a 50/50 chance that you would turn to a page that just said, "You suck, wrong decision, you fail."

Most of us think of life and our decisions as opportunities to make the right or wrong choice, to fail or succeed, to be happy or tragic. We think of our

decisions as a binary. But they're not an on/off switch unless your decision is to jump out of a plane without a parachute or something.

Your decisions are really a branching tree. They're like a fractal. Each decision leads to make more decision points that create one pattern, one adventure instead of another. But no matter what, you get to have an adventure. And there's no wrong adventure.

One adventure isn't better than another. They're just different. You're going to have the human experience regardless. Happiness and sadness, love and loss, darkness and light, every adventure has those in common. There is no adventure where you just get to be happy all the time.

So agonizing over whether you're making the right choice, that feels terrible because you're trying to make a choice now to control your thoughts and feelings in the future. You're trying to think which thing that I pick now will make sure that I'm always happy and not upset in the future.

That's not an option. You're a human with a human brain. You will have positive and negative thoughts and feelings in the future no matter what decision you make. You will have to manage your mind on any adventure. So what if you stopped trying to make your decisions that way?

What if any choice is just an opportunity to take the adventure in one direction or another? You will learn something on any adventure. One adventure may be different than another adventure, but it's not better or worse. It's just a different set of things to experience and learn.

And what's really wild is that unlike a Choose Your Own Adventure book, when you're choosing your own life adventure, you're the one creating it and you're taking your own brain with you. So the odds are you will probably learn the same lessons, no matter what you choose.

UFYB 125: Choose Your Own Adventure

Because you're taking the same brain with the same thought patterns down any path, and we know that the same brain will have the same thought patterns if you don't change them, regardless of the circumstance. So the stakes are just so much lower than you think. You can have any adventure.

Adventures are different but they're not better or worse than each other because they're all going to involve a human life with positive and negative emotion and they're all going to involve something to learn, and probably a lot of the same things to learn because we all have the same lessons we need to learn based on our brains.

So you can keep thinking about your life like a story someone else has written that you can only watch unfold, you can think about your life as something outside your control, that was decided before you were born by the decisions other people made. You can think of it as a story that's half or two-thirds over and now it's too late to change.

You can keep all those thoughts. They sound terrible to me. Or you can choose your own adventure. You can start looking for the opportunities that you have every moment to change the course of your own experience. You can become the author of your own story. You can choose to change how you think and feel and act and react in any given moment.

And you can do so with ease and freedom, knowing that there's no wrong decision. There's no wrong path to take, there's no wrong story to write. Any adventure you choose will be full of joy and sadness, of struggle and triumph, of love and loss, as long as you engage in it. And you will always learn whatever you need to know along the way, as long as you are willing to try.

So have a beautiful week my chickens. Choose a new adventure and write your own story the way only you can.

UFYB 125: Choose Your Own Adventure

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.