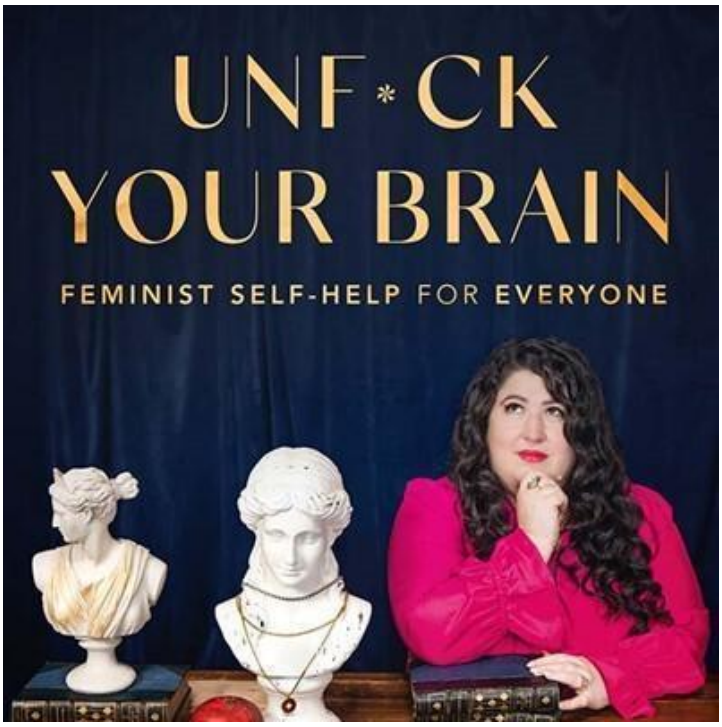
UFYB 136: Anti-Racist Thought Work for White People



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

UnF*ck Your Brain with Kara Loewentheil

UFYB 136: Anti-Racist Thought Work for White People

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 you probably noticed we did not have a Thursday episode this week. Had the short bonus episode on Monday about kind of what is the point of thought work and allowing and processing negative emotion and using it to help us change the world, and we're going to be talking more about that.

So this week's episode is coming a little bit late and I apologize for that, but it's because I wanted to record a bunch of new teaching and content for you guys. And so we'll be picking up with some of the pre-recorded episodes later on next week, but I wanted to put together stuff that would be really relevant to what was going on for you.

So, we've got kind of two things coming up. Today's episode is all about how white people, mostly, can use thought work to get to know and uncover their own biases. Some of that material may be somewhat familiar if you've listened to the episode on internal bias and how to be a better ally, but I've kind of developed it more, taken it in some other directions.

And I also talk about people pleasing and racism, like one of the reasons that I think white people, especially white women don't speak up is the intense fear of what other people will think, whether it's worrying that people won't think their woke enough or that they did it wrong, or when they hear something racist around other white people, worrying that it'll be awkward and uncomfortable for them to speak up.

So I talk about where all of that comes from and how you can use thought work and processing emotion in order to get more willing to do that. I really encourage you to listen to this, even if you think that you are not racist as a

white person. I talked about this a little bit in the last episode, but if you believe what I tell you about the ways in which society impacts your brain as a woman, then you should also believe what I tell you about the way society impacts your brain as a person living in a society that is white dominated and that has racist beliefs and institutions.

So that's what's happening in this episode. You might notice the audio is a little choppier. There might be one or two mentions to something else that you're a little confused about. Don't worry about it. This content was originally recorded was two different Facebook Lives and so we've put them together in this podcast for you.

On Monday, I am going to be releasing another kind of thematic bonus episode, which is going to be a conversation with my former student and client who is now a certified coach, Erica Royal Barnes, and she is an amazing coach and she is a black woman, and we are going to be talking about how we can use thought work to deal with experiences of oppression or discrimination and how we can use the thought model that I teach and that she uses also and how we can use thought work generally to think about processing our experiences and changing the world and the kind of balance of not just believing everything we think and challenging our thoughts, which is what we know creates more empowerment, but how to do that in a kind of wise and skillful way so that it is empowering, not disempowering.

So I'm really excited for you all to hear that conversation and we are going to be talking about that on the podcast on Monday. Because of our scheduling to get us together at the same time, to be able to record, we weren't able to get that out this week, but we will have that for you in a few days. Alright, without further ado, I will let myself take it away in these recordings and I will talk to you guys on Monday.

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UFYB 136: Anti-Racist Thought Work for White People

So here's where I really start. I start with the idea that we have thoughts in our minds. So a thought is a sentence in your mind. Some of this will be familiar to some of you who are coaches. A thought is a sentence in your mind. So where do our thoughts come from? Our thoughts come from - I think of the brain as an open source code.

So it's programmed before you're even conscious by everything around you. Your parents, society, education, the schools, the shows you watch, what you read, everything. Anyone can be typing code in there. And sometimes we're aware that they're typing code in there and sometimes we're not.

So your thoughts are the sentences that go through your mind. Some of which, the minority of which are conscious. You actually hear yourself saying them to yourself to see the images. Most of them are unconscious. And they are - think of it as a primordial stew or a soup in there. All of the different things that have impacted you, things you've seen, things you've heard, things you've absorbed consciously or unconsciously. It all goes into the hopper. It all goes into the mixer. I'm mixing all my metaphors. It all goes into the program.

And then your thoughts are like the ways that your brain puts together all those different influences. So what that means is whatever kind of society you grow up in, you absorb the premises of that society. So most, for instance, white women will have no problem acknowledging that they've absorbed messages about women's appearance from the media and from society.

We find that pretty easy to acknowledge. But the truth is that we also - most of us, I mean, I don't know exactly who's on this Live, but certainly if you grew up in America or any kind of Western country and really given the reach of Western media and colonialism, really kind of most of the world, you grew up in a society that - I'm going to use the words that scare you - in a white supremacist society.

That doesn't mean that you personally are a Nazi or that you would join the KKK. What that means is that you grew up in a society that was founded on the premise that certain people matter more. Hard to debate that, right? Women, African American people weren't allowed to vote and were enslaved at the time of the constitution. Women weren't allowed to vote. I don't think it should be a very contentious historical statement that we live in a society that was built to benefit straight white men.

That doesn't mean that every straight white man is terrible. Again, we're just talking about what's the historical and social context. So that's where we started and human culture lasts a long time and human culture impacts our minds.

So if you grow up in a white-dominated society, you are absorbing messages constantly about whose lives matter more, that white people's lives matter more, that white people are smarter, that when white people succeed, it's because they deserved it and it's on their own merit.

And you're absorbing negative messages about blackness and about brownness and of people of color. That's just how the brain works. You absorb the messages that are around you. It's happening before you're even conscious. Your brain is absorbing those different messages.

This is true even if you were taught explicitly contrary thoughts, which is a place I think a lot of us get tripped up. I was taught explicitly feminist thoughts as a child. I was taught explicitly anti-racist thoughts as a child. That doesn't mean - that was one influence or two or three influences.

So of all the people programming the open source code, yeah, a couple of them were putting in actively anti-racist and a lot of them were not. A lot of them were putting in racist or white supremacist messages directly or indirectly.

So this is one place I see white people and white women especially get confused is sort of like, no, I mean, I was raised this way. I mean listen, my mom was a federal public defender who taught us never talk to the cops, and we talked a lot in my childhood home about anti-racist work. That doesn't mean that I didn't still absorb a ton of racist messages elsewhere.

And even at home too, because everybody is operating in the same cultural climate. So that's the first premise is that your thoughts are created by all of the conscious and unconscious messaging and concepts that you absorb. Some of which are conscious and some of which are not.

Here's the second one, which is where some people start to want to jump off the boat but I just want to ask you to stay with me. I don't believe that our thoughts have moral value. I don't believe that what we think, what pops into our head makes us a good or bad person.

That initial thought, I think that's because what pops into our head is just the brain's electrical signals processing everything that we've been taught. So I don't believe that our thoughts make us a good or bad person or have moral value.

I don't think we get a good result from believing that they do. Because when you believe your thoughts are moral, when you believe that what pops into your head unbidden makes you a good or bad person, you are creating this enormous disincentive to look at your own thoughts.

You are automatically creating a lot of guilt and shame around your own thinking, which makes it impossible for you to evaluate it. And I think that we think that believing that our thoughts and moral value makes us a good person, and I actually think it's the opposite.

We think like, "Oh, if I believe that my thoughts are moral, that's what makes me a good person," but I think that believing that your thoughts are moral or means something about you, what that does is actually just make

you very preoccupied with yourself and your own thinking in a way that isn't actually helpful.

I mean, I think everybody denying that they have racist thoughts is probably partly at least because they believe that would make them a bad person. They don't want to believe that about themselves. They don't feel like they're a bad person. They don't consciously have those thoughts. They don't think that they exist, and they have no incentive to go looking at their unconscious thoughts because they have this association that that would mean they were a bad person.

So you get in this cycle of guilt and shame. So I actually think that what makes you able to contribute and show up in the world in a more positive way is actually accepting or at least entertaining the premise that your thoughts do not have moral value. That just what pops up in your head because of all the conditioning you have and all the ways you've been taught to think and everything you've learned does not mean anything about you as a person.

Again, the reason that I think that that's so important is that the one hill I will die on, the one thing I am sure about in my experience as a human and as a teacher and as a social justice activist for 10 - well, for longer than 10 years. I was a litigator for 10 years - and as a coach is that shame and guilt don't produce effective transformation for human beings.

And we know that's true for animal training, we know that's true for children, and it's true for adults also. It doesn't work or at least not for anyone that I've ever seen or myself. I can't prove it doesn't work for anyone. But when we create guilt and shame around our own thinking, what we are doing is basically - if you think about Pavlov, we're giving ourselves an electric shock every time we look at our own thoughts.

And the problem with that most humans will want to avoid pain and avoid guilt and shame. And yeah, we can say until the cows come home that to

be a good person or to be a good ally you have to push through that, but the truth about human nature is that a lot of people won't because as white people, we have the unearned and unfair privilege and advantage, most of us, of being able to opt out of thinking about it.

That's what human nature will do when the options are guilt and shame. So if you believe that having racist thoughts makes you a bad person, you are creating a situation where you won't want to look at your own thoughts or if you do, you will become very fixated on things that don't actually help anyone.

I think that's where all the virtue signaling comes from, just trying to convince everybody around you and yourself that you're not a bad person. It's all useless. It's all about you and your feelings and your guilt and shame and trying to get other people to tell you that you're a good person. It's pointless.

So let's back up the argument and go through it again. If we accept that what causes our thoughts is all of the social conditioning around us, that we are taught these concepts explicitly and implicitly, we are taught to think about the whole world. We come out knowing nothing accept having a preference for pleasure and away from pain, which is again why I don't think shame and guilt are helpful.

Everything else, we know how to breastfeed basically. Everything else we learn. Mostly from society. So number one, that's where our thoughts come from. Number two, you grow up in a white dominated and a white supremacist society, meaning a society that values white lives more than people of color and that teaches you implicitly and explicitly that white people are better and more important on a whole host of levels, you will absorb some of that thinking.

Even unconsciously, even if you consciously are taught anti-racist thinking. You will still absorb it. It's impossible to get through your life without

absorbing it. And then three, if you then also believe that your thoughts are moral and they make you a good or bad person, you are going to avoid doing the honest inventory of your thoughts that is required to actually change them.

You are going to disincentivize yourself from looking at them and even if you look at them, then you're just wasting a bunch of emotional energy feeling guilty and ashamed, and then most people either hide and don't take any action or the action they take is really performative and is about - and again, not because you're a bad person, just because now you're torturing yourself with guilt and shame and now you're trying to get other people to pat you on the back so you don't have to feel as bad about yourself.

So if we just accept that we all have these thoughts, all white people, we're all a little bit or a lot racist, we all have these thoughts, we have these thoughts because we were taught them, not because we're bad people. Having thoughts, having a certain electrical signal fire in your brain, like electric signal goes through a piece of meat that lives inside your skull does not make you a good or bad person, if we accept those things, then we can actually just do some fucking work on them.

So I want to say that to me, this is not about sort of centering white feelings, especially in public. But if you'll notice, I don't think I've posted anything about my feelings because who gives a shit? They don't help anybody. Nobody cares. If you spend a little bit of time internally working on your own thoughts and feelings, you are able to show up and contribute to the world in a totally different way.

If you accept that you're racist, you can just get on with the work. Everyone is. It's not a secret. You're not hiding from anybody that you're racist. Everybody knows. Everybody who is aware of this knows. Certainly, the people of color know. Everybody knows. It's not a secret, you're not hiding it.

Here's the other thing I want you to understand because I think one of the things that happens, especially with white people is that - especially with white women because women are socialized to guilt and shame themselves all the time anyway, and we end up centering our feelings in a not helpful way is that we get very paralyzed that we're going to do it wrong.

Now, I could just yell at you and tell you to get over it, but as a coach, I don't find that that is that effective. You have to understand why you're thinking that way in order to change. The fear of doing it wrong and the desire to do it right comes from that same shame and guilt cycle that is so counterproductive and unhelpful.

And here's the other thing; it's literally not possible to do anything in the world in a way that everybody will approve of. You just can't. It's not possible. I spent 20 years of my life in feminist activism on boards as a litigator, in personal activism. You get 10 feminists in a room and you ask them a question about how to do feminist work on one issue and you will get 20 opinions.

And you put - my mom is the president of her synagogue board, but 10 Jews in a room and ask them how to do something, you get 30 opinions. There's no way to do it perfectly because social justice movements are not monolithic. People of any particular group are not monolithic. There's a kind of stereotyping inherent in that too to think about it that way.

There's no right way to do it because people are going to have different opinions. There's no way for you to perform or function as an ally or as anti-racist in a way that everyone will agree on. So believing that there is is also just pointless and useless and it keeps you from doing anything. You have to be willing to do it wrong.

I can come up with five totally valid critiques people could make of this Live right now. I'm sure they will show up in the comments. I'm telling white

people to think about their own thoughts and feelings, I am centering whiteness. There's a million critiques you could make.

There are people who will think that I shouldn't have done this at all and that I should be amplifying the voices of women of color and that if all I did was amplify the voices of women of color, there would be people who think that I shouldn't have done that, that's being lazy, I should have spoken up, I should have balanced them both equally.

And I'm not saying any of those are wrong. It's just there's no way to get everybody's approval, and everybody's approval is beside the point. That's not what it's about. I mean, I will say for the record and if you've been following me on Facebook, you've seen this. I don't think that thought work and looking at your own internalized thoughts are the only thing you should do.

This is in addition to, not an only. For me personally, we also - I donate, I make calls, I sign things, I go to protests. Everybody makes their own choices about those things, but I don't think that it's an either or. It's an and. But when I'm trying to take action from trying to control what other people are going to think of me and do it right and get a cookie or at least not get yelled at, that's what I would be trying to do. That's perfectionism. It's as useless in this area as in any other.

If you follow me, you have heard me teach about why perfectionism about anything in your life is useless and counterproductive, and it's true here too. And it all comes from that guilt and shame. That's really what I want all of you to take away.

If you continue to believe that your thoughts are moral, that you're a bad person for thinking certain things, and that there's a way to do it right or wrong, you will be paralyzed. Or you will be doing things that aren't about doing anything, that are about performing instead of actually contributing.

But if you're willing to just accept that you're racist and you're willing to look at your own thoughts, I don't think - it's not a journey to become unracist. That's not possible. It's a journey to become anti-racist as an active practice. Not to get to some perfect destination where we finally get the pat on the head and the certificate and we've arrived.

Any set of beliefs that we have inherited like that and that we have been steeped in, we're going to be working on undoing for the rest of our lives. But if you just accept that that's where it comes from and that your thoughts don't mean anything about you, then you can skip all of the flagellation and the guilt and the shame and the worry, and then you can actually do something useful in the world to move forward the causes that you care about.

And be willing to fail and get it wrong. If you follow me, you know I teach all the time about being willing to try and fail. If you are unwilling to ever get it wrong or ever fail, you're making it impossible to ever do anything and that is why that perfectionism is the opposite of progress. It is the biggest impediment to progress.

In your own life, in social justice work, in anti-racist work, in any kind of work, in any kind of project. Trying to do it right, trying to get everybody else's approval, trying to get your cookie and your certificate that you did it perfectly are exactly what's going to prevent you from doing anything.

On the other hand, if you just accept these premises and you are willing to look at your own thoughts because you don't make them mean something about you, then you're able to go out there and that's going to change depending on who you are. So that might mean you go to a protest even though you're worried about doing that wrong, or it might mean you have that uncomfortable conversation with your family member who says something objectionable, or you call in or call out the people in your community.

There's a lot of coaches on this. There's been a lot of conversation about the lack of response in a lot of the coaching and wellness community, so maybe that means you send a DM or you comment on somebody's post, or you ask somebody who you've paid money to for coaching how they're going to show up.

If you are willing to do that and just acknowledge that you are racist and you're still going to do it anyway, that you're not trying to get pure and anti-racist, then you can actually take some action. We're not trying to get perfect at this before you do it.

So you can hold all these things. Yes, you are racist, white people, yes, you're going to try to go call someone out or in and probably put your foot in your mouth and they're not going to respond, they're not going to like it, or they are going to respond, somebody else isn't going to like it, and then you're going to feel ashamed.

And then you're going to beat yourself up because Kara told you not to feel ashamed. Just be willing to be in that suck and have it be uncomfortable. This is a perfect place to practice feeling your feelings and processing your emotion and being willing to feel it and willing to be uncomfortable. It's going to feel bad. That's okay.

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So here's the kind of problem or premise that I want to try to help everyone unpack, which is why don't we speak up when we see it happening. So I think there's kind of three - there's a million reasons, but I've divided it into kind of these three groups in terms of being able to talk about it.

So one is we don't recognize when it's happening. We have blinders because of our privilege. And I think resolving that problem requires self-education in a couple of ways. One of those is going out and educating yourself. There's so much discussion right now about obviously people of

color's experience and black people in particular and what they have gone through in American society.

So there's really no excuse for thinking you can't figure out how to educate yourself about what those experiences are like. It's literally all over the place. So turn on the news, Google, read some books. We do have some resources on that page, unfuckyourbrain.com/justice. We have some accounts to follow.

I've kept that page pretty limited because I do not want to produce a situation of overwhelm where you see 100 things and do nothing. Okay, so one is we don't know it's happening so we need to educate ourselves. We need to expand what we see in the world is happening.

If you just accept the premise that if you're a white person you're a racist, just accept it, can move on, then you can start - and I think thought work is actually incredibly powerful for this. For helping you understand what is going on in your brain and that includes any kind of racist or sexist or fat-phobic or whatever thoughts you have internalized.

The kind of thought work I teach at least is all about learning to understand what's happening in your mind. And this is part of what's happening in your mind. And so of course, if I - the problem is that white people think saying you're racist means you have a lot of conscious thoughts about hating black people or people of color. That's not what it means.

Yeah, there are people like that, but thought work, learning what you are thinking, seeing how it causes you to feel and act and what result you create, that is an amazing tool for unpacking your own internalized racism. And I will say as a woman, it's been useful for me unpacking my own internalized sexism and my own internalized fat-phobia.

But especially when we're talking about your thoughts about other people, that's what this work is all about to me is getting to know what is in your

mind because that's where all the shit happening in the world starts. I'm not saying we don't need the political action. We do need the political action, we do need structural change.

I was a litigator and a policy person, an academic for many years. I 100% believe in all of that. This is not just like, all have high vibes and it'll all be fixed. But humans make up the institutions and pass the laws and vote and do all the things, so we need to also be doing the work inside of our human brain so that we can show up in a different way.

Okay, number two, the second reason people might not speak up is that they are afraid - we, I have these thoughts too. We are afraid of doing it wrong and of getting called out in public. That again is just making it about - there's no such thing as doing it right because no social justice movement and no group of people are monolithic.

People are always going to have different opinions about what you do. You can't ever do everything perfectly so everybody likes you. And it is much better to just go try to do something and if you fuck it up or someone has an opinion about it, be able and willing to hear that.

And that is actually what I'm going to talk more about today because it goes in with also the third situation I think, which is that sometimes white people who are theoretically committed to anti-racism or want to be don't speak up. There's two categories of being afraid of what people will think. There's the category of not doing it right and being afraid of what allies or people of color will think, and then there's the category of being afraid of what other white people are not allies will think.

So there's being afraid of what white people who are racist will think, which is all of us, but people who don't know that about themselves, who don't think they are and are actively engaging in it. So I think those are kind of two obviously separate situations, but the same thought pattern is at play.

So we're afraid that if we're in an all-white or all white passing environment and we speak up, people are going to think we're too sensitive or we're being difficult or we're criticizing them. And I see this come up in other areas too obviously, like why don't women speak up about a sexist joke around a bunch of men? Same issue. Same thought pattern.

Whatever people-pleasing tendencies you have in the rest of your life are going to show up in this arena also. People pleasing comes from not having a secure sense of self, not having your own back, and living or dying based on what other people's opinions are of you.

And that's why it's the same root thought pattern whether you are afraid to speak up around other white allies or people of color because you're afraid of them judging you for not being woke or doing it wrong or whatever else, or whether you're afraid to speak up around racist white people because you're afraid of them thinking you're taking things too seriously, you're being ridiculous, you're being an SJW, a social justice warrior.

You're afraid of that division or distain. Now obviously, I could tell you just don't care about that, but you do because you have a human brain and that is my specialty is helping you actually change your human brain so that you can act differently. It would be amazing if we could just tell everybody not to care, but that just doesn't work.

So when you care more about other people's opinions of you than you do about your own opinion of you, that is when you lie and die by what other people think, and that is when you will not speak up for yourself or for other people. Because you don't have a grounded sense of self and you don't have your own back.

And that comes from that perfectionism. If your thought is I'm supposed to do it exactly right and if I do it exactly right no one will be mad, then you will never say anything because you will never be sure you're going to do it exactly right, and therefore can never be sure that people won't be mad.

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If your thought is becoming more anti-racist is a process and a practice and just saying one thing today is getting me one step closer, it's impossible to do it perfectly and the only important thing is that I try, you're going to feel different. One of those is going to make you feel paralyzed and afraid and one of those is going to make you more willing to say something and to speak up.

And when all we care about is what other people think of us, I also think it's ironically also what leads to not speaking up and then in some people, it leads to a lot of virtue signaling and posturing that isn't actually doing anything. Just a lot of mutual masturbation on the internet. It's not actually leading to any change or any action.

But you have to deal with this thought pattern underneath. I can tell you all day long that this is a way to leverage your privilege and contribute, but if you in the moment are having that emotional paralysis, you have to change your thinking or you're just not going to do it. Most people, just because they're humans, are not good at powering through that, at white-knuckling that.

Some people are. A lot of people are not. And that's why you have to do that thought work to change that people pleasing. So let me just talk a little bit about what people pleasing really is. I don't even like to call it people pleasing because people say that they're people pleasers and they kind of think that's a good thing about themselves.

They're like, pretending they think it's bad but they're like, "It's because I'm so sensitive and I just care so much about other people and making them happy." This is all fucking bullshit. That's not what it's about. People pleasing is actually people deceiving.

You are just lying to people about who you are because you don't think who you are is okay. And you care more that people like you than that they know who you actually are, which is totally counterproductive because

even if you successfully trick them into liking you, they don't like you. They like the fake person you're trying to be.

I'm going to go through that again. When you are "people pleasing," when you are lying to people by omission or actively about what you want to do or what you think or what you believe, so that might mean lying about whether you want to go out to dinner and it might mean not saying something when somebody makes a racist joke, it might mean not going to your HR company and reporting on something that you see that's problematic, and it might mean not posting on Facebook.

Whatever it is in your personal life or in this context, any time, this is what I'm saying, it's one thought pattern that is impacting you everywhere, and this is part of why it's not selfish or silly to work on this thought pattern. This thought pattern of people pleasing is holding you back from changing the world and making a difference and standing up for what you believe in on a personal level, on a political level, whatever it is.

So when you lie to someone and it is lying, when you say yes it's no problem when actually it is a problem, when you laugh at a joke that you think is racist or even you just don't say anything, you lie by omission, you don't say something true about yourself, which is, "That's a racist joke and I'm upset about it and it's wrong."

When you lie so that people will like you, you're lying and even if they like you, they don't like you. They like the fake version of you. So do you want to lie so that people will like a version of you that they think is also racist like them? You're like, uncle Joe said this racist thing at the dinner table or your boss or whatever it is says something racist, and your thought is, "I don't want to feel uncomfortable because I want everyone here to like me, so what I will do is pretend to be somebody who agrees with racist thoughts by not saying anything so they will like me. This fake version of me, this racist version of me, that's what I want them to like."

It doesn't make any sense. You're lying and you're not getting them to like you. You're getting them to like a fake version of you. And in these situations where we're talking about standing up to racism, not just a fake version of you. It's one thing for them to like somebody who pretends they like going to concerts when they really don't.

Like okay, it's still not really you, it's still pointless, but here, what you're doing is wanting someone to like a version of you that is pretending to hold beliefs that you don't hold and don't want to hold. Understand what I'm saying?

I am, again, I cannot say this enough, not saying this for you to guilt and shame yourself. My audience is mostly women and that's for a reason. Women are socialized to try to always be pleasant and get along with everyone and not make waves. And obviously people of color receive that message on a whole other much more intense level.

And as white people, we're raised with all of that racism just in the air and in the water and in all of our thoughts, and so it becomes so normalized. So I think that there's a two-step process to dealing with this. Number one, you do have to do your thought work and that's an ongoing project.

And when I say thought work, what I mean is working on your thinking, which means if you're in a meeting and someone says something racist, or if you drive by and it looks like the police are doing something and you don't pull over to see if you can help or intervene, whatever it is, rather than go home and guilt and shame yourself and then just start trying to justify it to yourself and get stuck in this back and forth, you go home and you write down all the thoughts that you were thinking that made you do that.

Why did you not say anything or why did you not stop? Why did you do what you did? And look at them honestly. Guilting and shaming yourself is not going to be helpful. Then you're just going to avoid looking at them.

Look at them honestly and see what your thought was. Why didn't you say anything about that joke?

Because your thought was, "I don't want them to think I'm uptight." And then you have to decide, am I going to keep thinking that? Do I want to keep thinking that speaking up when someone says something racist means I'm being uptight?

If you keep thinking that, that's the feeling and action and result you're going to keep getting. But the amazing news is you get to change what you think. You can actually practice thinking something different like, "Speaking up when somebody tells a racist joke makes me a badass, makes me brave, makes me someone who stands by what she believes, makes me someone who's working to be a little more anti-racist every day."

You can choose what you believe about the behavior that you're afraid to do because you're afraid of what other people will think. So that work is ongoing but we cannot just wait until we get perfect at that. We are not going to wait until we are just not uncomfortable anymore before we take any action. Because we will be waiting a long time and it's not going to help anything.

We also have to cultivate the ability to be uncomfortable and do something anyway. So this is not the same as white-knuckling and forcing yourself. This is like, don't have the thought that you're going to wait until you feel totally confident to speak up or to intervene.

So we have to get willing to feel uncomfortable and to take action anyway. And what that means is we don't say to ourselves, "Okay, I found the thought, I'm practicing the new thought and so next time it happens, I'm going to feel incredibly confident and feel amazing and feel ready to say something."

Because then what happens is you get there, that's not what you feel, and so you don't say anything. You're like, "I haven't done my thought work enough." No. You are going to prepare to feel terrified and do it anyway. This is just any fucking thing else in your life that is worth doing.

You're going to prepare to feel uncomfortable, you're going to prepare to feel embarrassed, you're going to prepare to feel awkward. You are not going to judge yourself for having those feelings, you are going to show up and do it anyway.

Judging yourself for all of this is a really good way to just make it all about you and your feelings and lie around indulging in your self-pity and hating yourself and feeling bad about yourself and it does nothing to help change the world. Nobody is helped by you doing that. Nobody cares. Nobody wants your feelings.

It will be extremely uncomfortable and you get to do it anyway. And if you keep doing it and you keep doing your thought work, that's why I'm saying they're parallel tracks, you have to be doing them both, you're doing the thought work to make it a little less uncomfortable but it's still going to be uncomfortable and we're just going to show up anyway, keep doing that, that's how you build that relationship with yourself and that's how you can create change in the world.

So you do not expect that when it's time to say something or time to stop the car or time to start filming that police encounter you're seeing because you're a white lady and you know that they're not going to hurt you, that you're supposed to feel calm. If you stop to film the police, you are going to feel like you are on speed.

You're going to feel terrified; you are going to feel full of adrenaline. That's fine. That's how it's supposed to feel. Trying to become more anti-racist is supposed to be uncomfortable, awkward, and/or terrifying, depending on

what you're doing. That does not mean you're doing it wrong or anything has gone wrong. That's how it's supposed to feel.

That is the contribution you can make is be willing to feel that and do it anyway. And be willing to be rejected. And you get through it and you don't die. And then you're that much stronger and braver for the next time. You can do all the thought work in the world, you will never get just from doing that to the place where you're totally fine saying something.

It is a dialectic - I'm probably using the word dialectic wrong. I haven't been in law school for a long time. My days on Marxist theory are a long way behind me. But it's like, they inform each other and build on each other.

You do a little bit of thought work to get yourself able to be very uncomfortable and say something, and then you don't die saying it and that's a privilege you have that you're very unlikely to die from saying it. And then you feel a little bit more willing to do it the next time and you keep going like that.

That's how we create that change. So you have to be willing to do the work and look at your thoughts without guilting and shaming yourself so that you can actually get to know them and change them. And you have to pick how you want to think on purpose. And then you also have to be willing to feel uncomfortable.

And what is your compelling reason for doing that? When your thought is, "It's going to feel uncomfortable, people are going to think I'm too much, they're going to think I'm ruining the company picnic," or whatever, you're just going to feel terrible, you're going to feel very helpless and like a victim and trapped, you're just going to feel horrible.

If your thought is I'm a badass - not I'm a badass who feels totally carefree about this. "I'm a badass who's willing to be terrified to say something. I'm just going to be willing to feel terrified and do it anyway." I cannot

overemphasize how much it's so much more effective if you stop guilting and judging and shaming yourself.

It makes you feel like a good person to tell yourself that you shouldn't be scared because you're not really risking anything on the line. You can get into this whole mess about your own privilege that ends up just perpetuating your own privilege of doing nothing. I'm not saying it's a waste of time to be aware of your own privilege. That's part of this work.

It's a waste of time to sit around fondling it and feeling guilty about it and feeling bad about it. Nobody cares and it doesn't help anyone. Yes, it is nothing compared to what a lot of people go through and also, it requires you to be uncomfortable and you're learning how to do that and you're allowed.

This is really what I've seen with thousands of people on any topic. Giving yourself a little bit of credit even if other people are going through worse things, the primitive part of your brain doesn't work that way. It doesn't take account of that stuff.

Giving yourself a little bit of credit for doing something scary or that was hard for you and not judging it as being immediately insignificant is what will allow you to build on that and do more and more and more. If you judge every little thing you could do as being insignificant and pointless, you never do anything.

Actually, that's another podcast that would be good for this. I have a podcast called The Infinite 1%. People who do a little bit or nothing are on one side and people who do a lot are on the other side. I think it's the opposite. The big difference is between people who do nothing and people who do a little because if you give yourself credit for that little bit, that's what allows you to build on it and do more and more and more.

I see people all the time telling themselves that their efforts in any area of their life are insignificant, and you know what, those people never get much going. They don't get traction. The people who are willing to celebrate each little win and to acknowledge each little time that they are willing to be uncomfortable and say something, those are the people who build up.

So when you see someone doing something big and amazing, they built up by doing little things along the way. We think if I guilt and shame myself enough, I'll do nothing for a while and then suddenly do a big thing. That's not how it works. Little things.

But any time you are people pleasing in this or any other area of your life, it is all the same problem. And this is the other reason that guilting and shaming yourself is not helpful. When you guilt and shame yourself, you're rejecting yourself, you don't like yourself, and that's what makes you so desperate for other people's validation.

When you guilt and shame yourself about your privilege or anything else, you're just smushing your self-esteem and then that's when you care what all these other people think about you. If you have your own back and you have your own self-confidence, that's when it doesn't matter.

So the path to both those things is the same. And the more you do that and the more you have your own back, when you believe you should be doing something perfectly and you can't, you're desperate for someone else to tell you that you're okay and that you're doing it okay and that you're doing it right.

When you truly believe that it's a process and it's impossible to do it perfectly and you are doing the work in the best way you can see how - even best some of you will use perfectionistically. When you believe that it's a process and you can't do it perfectly and sure, you could always be doing more but you could also be doing less and you are going to keep doing what you're doing and take small consistent action, then you have your

own back. Then it doesn't matter what other people say and you just don't care that much.

I'm not saying you don't ever have negative emotion about it. But it just doesn't stop you. You're willing to be uncomfortable, you're willing to do it anyway. The person you respect who is stopping to film the cops or is saying something to the cops or is showing up to do the Facebook Live, I could 100% have been like it's just a Facebook Live, nobody cares, but who cares?

If this gets three white people to change their minds about how they're thinking, it was worth doing. Don't assume that the people who are doing something feel amazing. One of the biggest - I see this in all areas but it really applies here, that being brave means you're not afraid.

If you're not afraid, you don't need to be brave. If you're not afraid, you don't need courage. It's a meaningless concept. I don't have to be brave to walk out to get my mail. Nothing is going to happen to me. That's not being brave. So don't try to become perfectly unemotional. Don't try to become totally comfortable before you do something. Just try to be brave.

Try to be willing to be afraid and do it anyway, and allow yourself to be proud of yourself for that. You're right, you didn't cure Polio and you didn't solve racism in America with the one little first thing you did. That's okay. You're still allowed to give yourself a little high-five for that so that you're even more willing to do it the next time.

All of the self-flagellation - I really want you guys to see, any time that you are sitting around thinking about how you're not doing enough and you're not good enough and you think that that somehow is anti-racist or that's making you a good person, you're just masturbating and not in a fun way.

Any time you're sitting around doing that, you should just stop immediately, go read something by a person of color that teaches you something and

pay them for their labor, or go do something. Go check in on someone and see if they need your support. Go make a small donation somewhere. Go make a Facebook post, even though yeah, okay, 90 of your friends will already agree with you, but maybe your racist uncle Bob is going to read it. Do something.

Don't just sit around masturbating about your feeling of inadequacy. No one cares. Okay, I think that's enough for now. Thanks for joining you guys. If you've got questions about what I teach in here, I will also go back through the comments and see if I can respond to some of the ones I couldn't get to. Yeah, terrified and willing.

Brenda Lomeli and I coined the term barf club, which means if you feel like you're going to throw up, you're on the right track. Like, if you feel like, in your business and your life, that's how you should feel, and that's how it should feel if you have been complacent and complicit to go say something. That's how it should feel. Do it anyway. Alright, I'll see you guys soon. Bye.

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