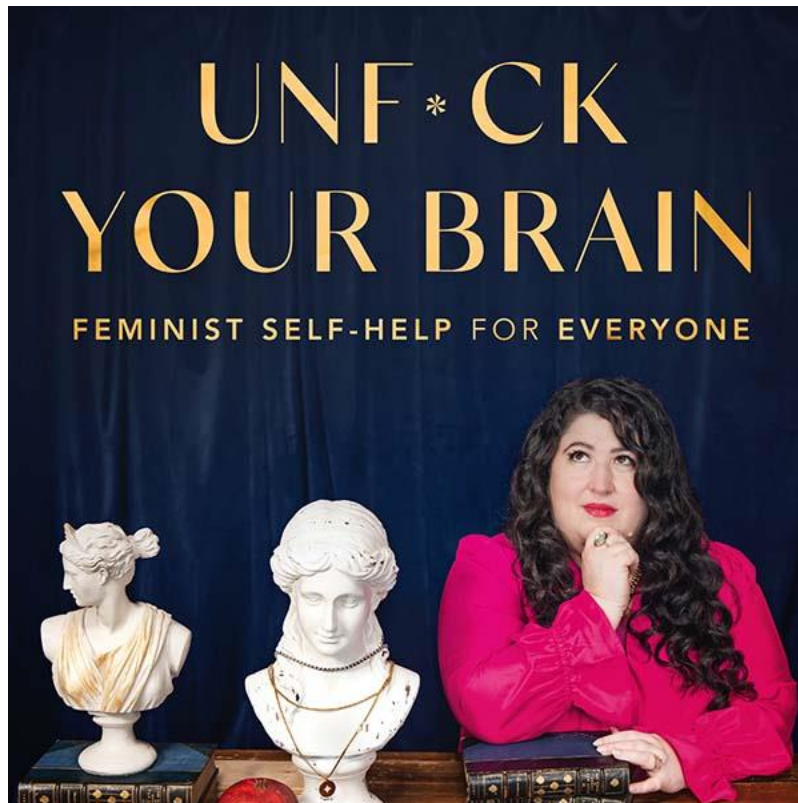


UFYB 371: Stop Fetishizing Systemic Change or Your Brain in Denmark



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

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You all cannot imagine how long it took me to title this podcast because I wanted to fit the entire concept and all my disclaimers into the title. I absolutely believe that changing systems that make life unfair for people based on their identities or their circumstances is crucial. And I think we're fetishizing these changes in the sense that we're giving them an unrealistic amount of power over our minds and our feelings in a way that disempowers us from helping ourselves.

So today I'm going to share a message I received from a listener who lives in one of those holy grail Scandinavian European countries that we all imagine has a perfect social safety net and perfect conditions and perfect work life balance. And we're going to talk about what systemic change does solve or would solve and what it would not solve that you, for better or worse, need to learn to solve for yourself no matter where you live. So, let's get into it.

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.

So, let's start with a message that I got from a podcast listener and then we're going to talk about what it means for your brain and what it tells you about how to solve your emotional problems. So, this listener responded to something I posted on social media about how many women have fantasies of a non-life-threatening hospital stay just to get a break from the overwhelming over-responsibility that women are taught to feel and have taken on in their lives.

And among, I think, the educated, more liberal leaning population, I think there's this belief that Europeans have better work life balance because

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they have better systems and better values and that therefore they're a lot happier and they're not burnt out and they're not stressed out and it always feels like you're on vacation. And they have better systems like universal healthcare and better parental leave and vacation leave policies and that those are what make life just feel so pleasant there.

So, the existence of those systems is largely true and it's absolutely important. I want to be so clear that this episode is not saying that systemic change is not part of the puzzle. Universal healthcare is important. Paid vacation is important. Having a culture of work life balance instead of constant productivity and the equation of productivity with morality is important. All these things are important.

But I think we tend to imagine that if we just lived, say, somewhere in a Scandinavian European country, all of our problems would be solved. But here's a message I got from a Scandinavian listener, she's a teacher in Copenhagen.

She said, "I have been in the hospital for a serious but non-life-threatening issue, and everyone is telling me how jealous they are. Denmark has so many rules. If children have issues, there's so much red tape to get through, so teachers there all struggle with these very thoughts every day. The same ones you're talking about in your episode. It's terrible. There are only two Americans at the school.

We have two Danes who are both stressed out. We have British, Welsh, North Irish, French, Italian, Estonian, Spanish, Mexican, Argentinian, and Indian. Also, everyone working at my school is from a different country, mostly from Europe, but even we childless people feel the same burnt-out way. All of the teachers, including myself, have access to the Danish system because most are either EU citizens and the others, like myself, are married to Danish people. But they would all take a cleat kick to the shin if it

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meant a day off. Our principal, who is amazing, said to me once when I asked her what she'll do on vacation, 'All I want to do is sit in a dark room by myself.'" This was shared with permission, of course, from the person who sent it in.

Now, I was not surprised by this because I have so many European listeners and so many European members of the Feminist Self-Help Society. So obviously, I know the systems in Europe are not a panacea that resolves women's socialization.

But it's so useful to hear it straight from a listener, and it's such a good example of what systemic change will and won't accomplish. Because we would imagine that teachers in a Danish school would be living a blissful Montessori life. In rooms full of beautiful wooden furniture and toys, speaking quietly to 12 adorably perfectly behaved toddlers dressed in hand-knit woolen outfits. But that's not reality, that's a fantasy. First of all, no system is perfect. The trade-off of more government regulation is more government regulation.

So as this person talked about, there's a better, more equal educational system there. And it means when something goes wrong, it takes forever to get it sorted out because there's so many more regulatory layers. When you have a universal healthcare system, there are more waiting periods, less choice in providers. Now, that's statistically a good trade-off. We can tell, looking at the mortality statistics of the United States compared to other similar countries that have universal healthcare, the numbers don't lie. Universal healthcare is better for more health outcomes.

So, me personally, 100% in favor of universal healthcare here. But I'm bringing this up because it's important to recognize that everything is a trade-off, and that is really crucial when it comes to the way that we tend to idolize certain conditions that we're not living in currently. So even as we're

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advocating for systemic change here, we need to avoid having a perfectionist fantasy about what it would be like. Because systemic change through policy and law only changes the impacts of systems that are outside of us.

Why do I have so many European listeners and clients? Because socialization creates emotional oppression for women. So, for instance, whether daycare is affordable or expensive makes a big difference to your budget. It does not make a difference to the internalized socialization that tells you that once you become a mother, you should sublimate your own needs and desires to being a mom, and then you should feel guilty about putting your kid in daycare. Whether healthcare is free makes a big difference in your ability to access it for yourself and your family and can make a big difference in your health outcomes. That obviously matters a lot.

But what it doesn't solve is your internalized socialization that makes you neglect your own health to take care of everyone else, or the internalized socialization that makes you second guess or doubt yourself about health symptoms, or make you blame yourself for not being able to 100% control every health marker. It also doesn't solve the socialization that makes doctors take women's symptoms and pain less seriously. It doesn't resolve your need to be able to advocate for yourself.

Systems can either help or hurt, and those impacts make a big difference in the world for sure, but they don't change our socialization on their own. They don't change the emotional problems that our socialization creates. Systemic change doesn't solve over-responsibility. It doesn't solve people-pleasing. It doesn't solve being driven by external validation because your internal monologue is constant self-criticism.

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And this is where fetishizing systemic change or that fantasy of moving to a European country and living happily ever after becomes an issue. So, I'm going to explain what this fantasy does to our brains and why it's a problem right after this break.

So, the problem with fantasy is the same in any area of our lives. The more we fantasize, the less we actualize. I'm going to say that again. The more we fantasize, the less we actualize. Fantasy is not the same as goal setting or visualization. When you set a goal or you visualize success at something you're actively planning and working towards, you're actively engaged. Fantasy is passive, it requires nothing of us. You've heard me talk about this as passive imagination before.

So, when we're in fantasy mode, it's like watching Netflix, we see it as fiction. Even if we're starring in our own fantasy, we're not activating the part of our brain that actually makes things happen. We're just enjoying the show as a passive observer. And when we have a fantasy about how if one thing was different, that would make our lives so much better, we end up giving that fantasy all the power. And we forget about our power to make our own lives better right now.

We fetishize that thing we don't have, we make it the solution to all of our problems, but then also we make it impossible to have. And when we do this with systems, we give those systems power they don't really have. The power to change our mental and emotional challenges as women raised and programmed in a sexist society. So, when we take a passive position towards this fantasy, we relinquish our power and our responsibility to change our own brains right here and now.

The irony is if you were going to move to Europe next week, you'd find that out soon enough. In that case, actually, the fantasy wouldn't do so much harm because you would get there, experience different systems, realize

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your brain is still a problem. And you'd get around to changing your brain pretty quickly because you'd realize that circumstances don't change your feelings. But most of us who have this fantasy are also not ever moving to another country with different systems.

We're mostly just going to stay here telling ourselves how much better life would be somewhere else, but not being willing to actually move to that place and that is the worst possible combination. Now, this doesn't mean forget systemic change. Working on making this country we do live in more like the ones we admire is very worthwhile work. A lot of my coaching is to help women have the personal power to show up to do that. But that's not what we're doing when we're in a fantasy world.

When we're in a fantasy world, we are not taking responsibility for what we can change in our lives or actively working on changing the world. So, here's what I want to suggest. You do not need to give up your belief that if the material circumstances were different in certain systemic ways, like universal healthcare, affordable childcare, more paid vacation, life would be easier on some practical levels. But don't delude yourself that those changes in circumstance would solve the emotional and mental challenges of your socialization.

You can be over-responsible regardless of how much daycare costs, and the emotional weight will only be solved by changing your thoughts. That's why my listener from Denmark listens and wishes that all her colleagues would listen, because they have access to life shaped by all the policies we here in the US fantasize about and yet they are still burning themselves out. They're still stressed. They're still fantasizing about sitting in a dark room alone for vacation.

Because the socialization that makes women take on too much and over-function for others and deplete themselves futilely trying to manage

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everyone and everything else is only solved by changing your thoughts. That socialization operates independently of whatever system you are in. And so that socialization is what you need to change if you want to feel better.

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.