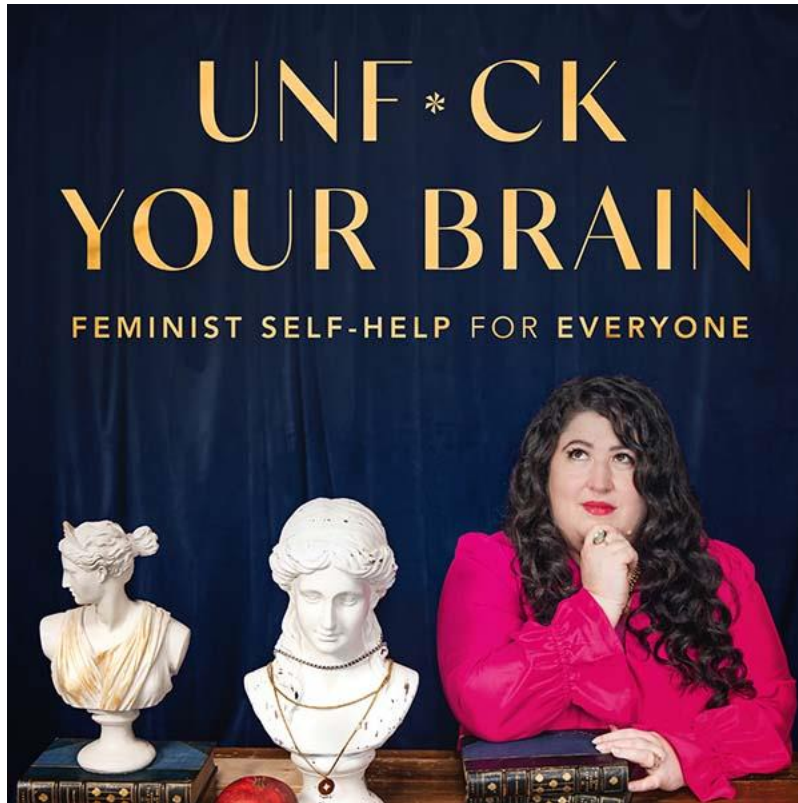


**UFYB 374: Budgeting, Diet Culture & Spending Well -  
A Conversation with the Frugal Friends Podcast**



**Full Episode Transcript**

**With Your Host**

**Kara Loewentheil**

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

Hello, my friends. So, I am excited because this is one of those interviews where I went on their podcast first, and we had a great conversation. And now they're here on our podcast, just one of those swaps where what we're all doing, I think, adds so much to what each other's doing. So welcome, Jen and Jill, of *Frugal Friends*, the podcast, which you all should go listen to if you don't. And they also have a new book coming out very shortly called *Buy What You Love Without Going Broke*, perfect thing to pre-order yourself for a little holiday present right before the holidays.

I guess today, if you're listening to this the day it comes out, it's the day right after Christmas. So, Jen, Jill, welcome, please, in our tradition, brag about yourselves and tell us who you are and how you got here.

Jen: Thank you so much for having us, Kara. I'm so excited to be here. So, my name is Jen. I'm one half of the *Frugal Friends* podcast. And I got into this because my husband and I paid off \$78,000 of debt in two years without making a six-figure income. And I got passionate about helping other average income earners also feel good about their finances. And over the past seven/eight years, have built this podcast to be one of the top home and leisure podcasts in the world, listened into by over seven million times by people.

Kara: Amazing.

Jill: Yeah, that's some good bragging.

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Kara: Yeah, that was good.

Jill: My name is Jill.

Kara: You should all know that she flinched when I said they're going to have to brag about themselves. So, we're particularly proud of that.

Jill: My name is Jill. And I am the other half of the *Frugal Friends* podcast. I'm a licensed clinical social worker. And similar to what Jen described, I really love the opportunities to help other people, particularly women, to feel really good and confident and less shame around finances, be able to recognize that they can make solid money decisions. They can build wealth and make it more accessible, and less gate kept. So that's what we're aiming to do with the podcast.

Jen: And without 'knowing' anything about personal finance, was able to cash flow a master's degree without going into debt and pay off, was it \$60,000 of debt?

Jill: Yes, over seven years.

Kara: [Crosstalk].

Jen: [Crosstalk] why I like helping people.

Jill: Yes, because of my own experience and I think that helps make it accessible for other people.

Kara: That was such good socialization. You were like, "I'm here just to help people." And then your friend had to be like, "And also you're a badass."

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Jen: This is why we work very well together. We are very complimentary.

Kara: So, in your new book, *Buy What You Love Without Going Broke*, one of the things you talk about is making financial decisions based on what you value instead of what other people value. Which I love because so much of my coaching of women is helping them get in touch with what they actually care about. Because women are so socialized to be a good girl and do what everybody else says and follow the rules and that's how you'll get approval and love.

So, I'd love to hear more about what you see. What are some examples of people making financial decisions based on what other people value and how they can shift that?

Jill: A lot of times, I think we see this in what we term our impulse spending. And to be said more plainly, it's just the purchases that we make that we didn't intend to or set out to make, maybe five minutes to an hour before the purchase was made. Where our money goes in those types of moments, in those decision-making opportunities can be indicative to us of the things that we value, or maybe even some of our higher needs that we are trying to get after.

And so, we've got a couple of things going on. We've got our own kind of biological makeup and the ways in which we were socialized. So internal forces happening, as well as external forces going on of marketers knowing how to kind of play into some of our cognitive biases, the ways in which we think, how we operate, utilizing behavioral economics to get us to spend, sometimes unnecessarily. There are certainly times where I'm very glad for an impulse purchase or something that was marketed to me. I wanted to know about that thing. It does solve a problem.

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But we also run into these circumstances where we end up spending money where that wasn't actually my value or that didn't actually meet my need. This is being sold to me as this will solve your problem. And we're constantly being bombarded with messages of you can buy your way out of your problems. And while I love having money, and I think it's great for especially women to have money, it's not the full answer to the issues that we face.

And so, I think recognizing some of these things that are at play and understanding ourselves, our higher needs, our values can be a lot more helpful to us in making some of these more beneficial spending decisions. So, to get a little bit even more granular with this, an example might be, well, this was an example given to us by someone that we talked to on the podcast recently.

Where she described how she was scrolling Instagram and found this influencer who was selling dresses, some sort of article of clothing that she thought looked super cute. Showing images of people that looked like her wearing this similar outfit, and she bought it. She's like, "That looks cute. I like it. I want it. I'm going to buy it." And she did. And then it got to her door, and she kind of felt bummed about the purchase. I don't know that I actually want this dress.

I don't actually know that this is my style or something that I feel good and comfortable in. And realized in digging deeper that the purchase was actually for this kind of love and belonging need that we all have, that she wanted to kind of fit in. She wanted to find herself a part of a group of women who seemed to be getting along and having a fun time together and friendship and camaraderie. And that this might have been actually what she was trying to buy.

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Fast forward, she was able to return the dress and then actually just call up a friend and hang out and meet that need. But just a small example of sometimes how we might end up spending money unnecessarily to meet some of our values. And again, that's both because of our own wiring as well as the ways that we are being messaged to.

Kara: So, I think that something you said that I think is really important is one of the things I'm always saying is that money helps you by making things more convenient and solving some practical problems, but it doesn't solve an emotional problem. And I think that's true that so much of that spending, impulsive spending is sort of by definition, an emotion comes up in our body, and now I feel this urge to take this action to complete that loop and feel satisfied in this moment.

But if your sink is leaking and you order a valve for it, that is going to solve your problem. But also, that's usually not an impulse purchase. That's a strategic purchase where this thing's happening. This is the practical problem I have to solve, let me get the thing for it. So, I think even thinking of when you're contemplating an impulse purchase, I don't think that's always bad. It's just like emotional eating. It's fine to eat emotionally sometimes. And I know we're going to talk about the links between diet culture and budget culture.

But at least even having some awareness of, I feel that urge and where is that coming from and what emotion am I trying to get away from? Or what emotion am I trying to create? As in your example, because I think we do both. I'm stressed. I want some dopamine. I'll buy something. Or in your example, sort of it's appealing to this need. So, I'd love to hear, I know you use Maslow's hierarchy of needs in your work. And I'd sort of love for one of you to explain what that is, because not everybody knows, and how it relates to these kinds of spending decisions we make.

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Jen: Yeah. Well, we don't think that impulse spending is bad at all. It's really what you're spending on is either aligned with your values or not. And we use Maslow's hierarchy of needs to figure out what those values are. So, for people who are not as familiar or not obsessed with Maslow's hierarchy of needs as we are.

Kara: I mean, obviously all cool people are obsessed with Maslow's hierarchy.

Jen: I know. I know.

Jill: We just love triangles mostly.

Jen: Yeah. I love it.

Kara: Toddlers and also us.

Jen: Yes. So, it is a beautiful triangle with five different sections. And essentially a hierarchy, at the bottom of the triangle are two sections. They're considered our basic needs. We've got on level one, food, water, shelter, level two, safety, consistency. And these basic needs are where a lot of personal finance education stops. But we have found that above these, we have our psychological and self-actualization needs. We will spend on these needs even if our basic needs are not met.

And so there is a difference, when you're hungry, there's a difference between being hungry and not knowing where your next meal is coming from. So, if you don't know where your next meal is coming from, yes, you're not focused on these higher needs. You are really entrenched in the basic needs aspect. But I can be hungry and if I know where my next meal is coming from, I can work for four more hours if I'm working on a project that I'm very interested in.

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So, we find that in our spending with these higher needs, which are right above our basic needs is belonging, connection, friendship, family, love, all of that. It is our most substantial higher need, our most substantial values. Above that is self-esteem, self-confidence, something that we're almost told we shouldn't spend on, that we shouldn't have. It's almost a virtue to not have this.

Kara: Yeah, for women specifically, people socialized as women, yeah.

Jen: Yes. And so, then we will spend money to acquire it, but not know we're trying to acquire it. So, we are spending on makeup, skincare, fitness products, all of these other things when we're really trying to get at that level of our human needs. And then at the very tippy top, we have self-actualization, which people might think to be this transcendent feeling like you have self-actualized. But in reality, it is these motivations, these motivators that are really just making us feel like I'm a functioning human being in this society and I have a place.

So, your creativity, you're innovating, you're spontaneous, we have a human need to be spontaneous, which is where a lot of our impulse spending comes from. Because we're not meeting it other places because we're told being spontaneous is irresponsible, childish, stuff like that. So, it's just the feeling that you're getting to live your true self, whether that's at work in your personal life, all over the place.

And so, there's a lot of these little subcategories on the hierarchy, but we have found to basically distill it down into four sections, four core values. You can hit almost every higher need and find where you're spending money is to get at one of these things. And we call them the four Fs because we love F words, frugal friends over here, family, friends, faith, or some spiritual practice, and fulfilling work.

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And so, when you're looking at these, they hit several or all of the higher needs. And they're typically what we're trying to get at when we are spending money and if it's not one of those four, it's fallen somewhere else on that hierarchy.

So, we love looking at that. And to go back to your example of the broken faucet and you're buying something to replace it, that's still considered an impulse buy. Because any impulse buy is just a spontaneous unplanned buy. But we don't consider that as irresponsible, which is why we don't think impulse spending is irresponsible. But we want to make sure all of our impulse spending is somewhere on this hierarchy, somewhere within our core values, so that we make sure that when the dress comes in the mail later, it's not a regret. We're aligning our purchases and our impulse purchases with our values.

Kara: I want to share kind of where I see people impulse spending and then how this fits into your framework. So, the thing that I see women often spending on is an image of the person they think they're supposed to be or want to be that they don't feel they are. And I would see this even myself, this piece of clothing, it fits this image of this person that I think I'm supposed to be or I want to look like the person wearing it. Even if I know consciously, it's not going to transform me into a fashion runway model. It's the woman I imagine myself to be or think I need to be.

And so, I see that with, one of the things I always say about spending is, I also will buy red lipstick, there's nothing wrong with buying makeup, but if you're making your confidence dependent on it. And I think part of what you're describing is how capitalism teaches us to kind of funnel all human needs through consumerism. So, whatever it is you want or need, you're going find it in a purchase of some kind.

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So, let's take that example of you buy something because there's some feeling of inadequacy or lack pre-existing in you. I think marketing can spark it up, but it's in your thoughts already. I've always wanted to be sophisticated and I'm not or I see these women and I think they look so put together and I don't feel that way and then I feel bad about myself. And I want to buy this thing to bridge that gap.

In some ways I see these purchases as, they're aspirational towards the kind of person you want to become, but they're focusing on the surface. And if you don't change your inside, you're never going to get there. But I'm curious where you think that kind of motivation fits in the four Fs.

Jill: Yeah, this kind of fantasized version of ourselves, I think can sometimes intersect with procrasta spending too, we'll see where we have a goal and instead of kind of taking the steps towards that goal, we'll purchase towards that goal.

Kara: Oh my God, all the time. The podcast I do about, don't buy another daily planner and set of colored markers. When you've never used a planner for more than three weeks in your whole life.

Jill: It's always the planners and the journals.

Jen: Yeah, that was a big one for me.

Kara: All the cute yoga outfits. How about we go to yoga and see if we actually like it before we have to buy six yoga outfits.

Jill: Yeah, so much of it in my estimation is this trying to buy the love and esteem and the self-actualization. We think that by purchasing these things, it'll get us there. But I think it's also this myth that we think those who are hawking the products have it, that they have arrived there. That

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these people on Instagram who are showing a certain type of lifestyle have the deeper need met of feeling loved. And feeling like they've got a community that they belong in where there's reciprocity of relationship.

And so often that's not the case, especially if we're finding ourselves in this system of a hamster wheel where we're buying to solve problems that aren't actually being solved. And then it's creating more problems and we're throwing more money at it. And so, I think some of the solution here is just to kind of remove ourselves a bit from that hamster wheel and to opt out. We have permission to opt out of the system to varying degrees for sure, but whatever's within our control.

So, there's a couple of ways that we talk about doing this and one is through visiting an extreme. So, we don't love to talk about living in extremes. We love to talk about the radical middle and holding the tension of the two extremes, the things that are beneficial in both. But it doesn't mean that we can't visit extremes to learn what's useful here and what can I take with me to create some longevity.

And so, with that comes what we love to describe as a 30 day no spend challenge. Not to deprive ourselves, not for the purpose of constantly saying no to things, but to pause some of the dopamine hits that we are maybe becoming accustomed to as we spend to solve our problems. But also, to get more curious about ourselves and to understand who we are, how we tick, how we operate, how we're responding to both internal and external stimuli to be able to make the shifts that feel really great for us.

And so, what can happen when we say we're not going to spend on certain things. We get to decide what it is that we're going to say no to for 30 days. We get to interrupt some of the dopamine release that happens and find what happens to us when I am desiring this. What can I choose instead?

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What did that end up doing for me? And we might even find better solutions to the problems that we're facing.

And so if I do find myself, I'm buying in order to fulfill some sort of ideal, what happens when I don't? What happens when I'm not purchasing the makeup, the skincare products, the clothing? Not to say that I never won't go back to those things because I like to look good too, but what might I choose instead? Is there a hobby that I know that I'm good at that I can engage in? Is there a simple goal I could set for myself? Could I try something new?

Could I do something that might feel a little bit daunting to me, but I'm going to try my hand at it and find that, I'm feeling capable in this thing. Or I was able to set my hands to something that really lit me up and I'm feeling really confident about who I am and some of the things that bring me joy. And I'm engaging with people who, again, there's reciprocity and relationship and they're so kind to me and I enjoy being kind to them. And we start to see, we can meet our needs.

I can experience self-fulfillment and meet some of these esteem needs outside of throwing money at some company who's probably just contributing to some dude buying a yacht somewhere.

Kara: Yeah, I mean, I think what's coming up for me, the first part of what you're saying is that when we're trying to bridge that gap to the version of us, we want to be, I actually think we're trying to purchase our own self-love. We're trying to spend money with a company to get permission to think a certain thought about ourselves which you cannot purchase your own self-love from Sephora. I've got to write down that phrase because that's going.

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Jen: I wrote a similar phrase in the book is that you can't buy your self-love, I was talking about Ozempic or something. But you can when you know what you're trying to buy. When you take that no spend challenge and you give yourself the space, then you have time to think about what you're really, truly trying to buy. And if it is more self-worth, more self-confidence, then you can find the creative ways to actually pursue that. If I'm not feeling respected, what is something I can do to gain a little respect?

I think sometimes as women, we are kind of hesitant about gaining respect from others and being respected. So, what's something I can do, whether that's maybe posting about something that I have accomplished and celebrating that so that others around me know that. That increases my respect, my self-worth, my view of myself when people are congratulating me. So, it doesn't have to be braggadocious.

Kara: I think it's okay to be braggadocious.

Jen: But we need, these are human needs that we have. And if we're not meeting them, we're trying to, and usually it's by spending money. So, if that's our issue, then we need to look for another way to meet it.

Kara: I think that when we're thinking about, what is the need I'm really trying to meet, I think I always like to think about my spending as, okay, I'm making an investment and what is the return I'm getting? So, if what I want is confidence, you mean you can reverse engineer it too, if what I want is confidence, then I'm going to need to invest time or money or effort into something that will actually produce that outcome.

I know now, I think we've all bought enough makeup and skincare to know that confidence is not coming from that next final new one you try. So, where is it coming from? In my world, that would be, it's coming from your thoughts and feelings. So, investing in coaching makes more sense. For

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someone else, it might be something else. But what am I actually trying to get?

I'd love to talk a little bit more about the spending kind of freeze. Because I know one of the things we've touched on before that I want to explore in our last few minutes is the connections between diet culture and budget culture. And there's definitely, obviously people have heard of financial gurus out there who tell you, if you have any credit card debt, you should never eat out in a restaurant again until it's all gone, and you should be on an extreme, basically starvation diet financially.

And I know I came on your podcast, and we talked about how all the media literacy around finances for women is focused on budgeting and saving and for men it's focused on earning and creating wealth. So how do you sort of think about that tension? There are obviously good reasons for people to learn to be more conscious about their spending. And so much of frugal, I think stuff is aimed at women. And these are all very gendered examples even that we're using of, if you're buying makeup, you're buying clothing.

We're not having this conversation about a man buying a golf shirt, even though probably he's also responding to some of those same needs. So, what are your thoughts about that?

Jen: Well, so when you think about diet culture for men versus women, it's all about women slimming down and men bulking up. It's the same parallel. We talk a lot about food and dieting and stuff, but we don't talk a lot about money and it's a different form of consumption. So, because it's not talked about, we just take what we already know about consumption from food, and we translate it to money.

And so that's why you have so much frugality, is the spending race to the bottom because as diet culture, entrenched women, we are used to

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restricting calories and being as slim as possible. We had a really good run there with Kim Kardashian's butt, but we're back to skinny chic. So, it's a vicious cycle and we want to, again, find the radical middle. Cutting your calories to 1200 a day is just as unhealthy as taking steroids and super bulking.

So, in spending, we want to embrace increasing your income and focusing on that, but not at the expense of a lot of our most non-renewable resource, which is time. So, in the financial independence community, which is big in personal finance circles, that's been a huge problem that people have kind of been shying back from because tomorrow's not promised. Where on the other end of the spectrum, we're kind of doing the other thing and trying to teach people it's okay to spend money.

You don't have to feel guilt for every latte you spend as long as you're connecting it with your values. And hopefully some of those values are savings for bigger things. I think we talk a lot on the show about how this I deserve mentality is kind of toxic because so much of it is I deserve the little treat. But in reality, we deserve so much more than we're being told we should deserve, which is actually us being marketed to.

We deserve wealth, we deserve to retire, we deserve bigger things in life. And that's really where we should place more of a focus on. Yes, of course you deserve the latte, but nobody should tell you, anybody that tells you, you don't deserve is dissociated from reality. But yes, and you deserve that and more and sometimes you can't have both. The more informed you are, the better and more empowered decisions you can make.

Jill: Well, and to talk about where this 30 day no spend challenge sits, I think it is not to be equated with a diet and restriction of calories and food. But more so equated with an opting out of the system for a time to actually get our bearings on how we operate and what are going to be the best

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decisions for us. So, it'd be almost like opting out of diet culture to engage with foods and your body in a new and different way. And to learn more about yourself is more so how we see the no spend challenge.

And not to be fueled by fear, not to be fueled by myths of good food and bad food and good money decisions and bad money decisions, but rather what's most beneficial for me.

Jen: Yeah, because we read books, I've read books from people who have done no spend challenges for one year, two years. It's really great for a story, but if you're learning how to spend money, then just doing one month is good. If you're learning how to not spend money, you can do it for longer, but we want to learn how to spend money well. We're not trying to opt out of the system, but really operate with that.

Kara: [Crosstalk] diet book that we tell you which categories to count. If going to Pilates every week is crucial for you, or you do go and so you want to exempt one cute outfit, whatever, you get to decide what it is. I think that those parallels are so important. And I would even say even if you don't spend in line with your values, I don't think it's super useful to feel guilty about it. It's just information about what's going on with you.

And I love the equation of online kind of feminism or girl discourse with the consumption of material things, or the treat or the whatever else. I mean, especially when it comes to small, highly palatable treats or little purchases, this is just marketing, playing on your brain being primed to get dopamine from shiny trinkets or certain kinds of foods or caffeine, which is a drug. It's just marketing, playing on that to get your dollars out of you.

And so, I think even taking listeners of my podcast, when I'm like, "Always check the words with yourself." I don't use the word 'deserve' with myself at all, because it immediately makes me feel like I'm in some sort of moral

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equation that I just don't even want to be a part of. It's not about deserving, it's just, how do I want to spend and use my money, and what proportion of it am I willing to invest or exchange in short-term pleasures? And then what proportion or percentage of it do I want to save?

Jen: Yes, want. Want is such a powerful word. And we think we need to justify with need or deserve. But you'll save a lot more money by embracing the word 'want' and you'll empower yourself so much more by sticking to words like 'that' versus 'deserve' and 'need'.

Kara: Yeah, one of my favorite little suggestions, I saw this from Tori Dunlap who talks about, when you have that impulse spend, impulse invest instead. You're still cooperating with your biology but towards your long-term goals. Anyway, so your book is coming out soon. Please tell everybody where they can find you. I assume they can pre-order the book anywhere, but should they go through you? Is there any special offer you want to tell people about?

Jill: You can get the book at [buywhatyoulovebook.com](http://buywhatyoulovebook.com). We are offering some pre-order incentives right now since this is coming out on the 26<sup>th</sup>. We've got a live event coming up on the 29<sup>th</sup> for people who pre-order our book where we're doing a full year's meal plan. And then in January, we're going to do a full year's spending plan. So just really setting ourselves up well, but the book is essentially teaching the skill of spending, recognizing that spending isn't bad. It's a skill that we can all get really stinking good at and feel really confident in the money decisions that we make.

So [buywhatyoulovebook.com](http://buywhatyoulovebook.com) and then you can also listen to our podcast, we put out two times a week, *Frugal Friends* podcast.

Kara: Two times a week, you're putting the rest of us to shame. Alright, my friends, you know, since you all lived through my book campaign, pre-

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orders are everything. So go pre-order this book, start January off right. Thanks for coming on, my friends.

Jen: Thanks for having us, Kara.

Jill: Thanks for having us.

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](http://www.unfuckyourbrain.com/society). I can't wait to see you there.