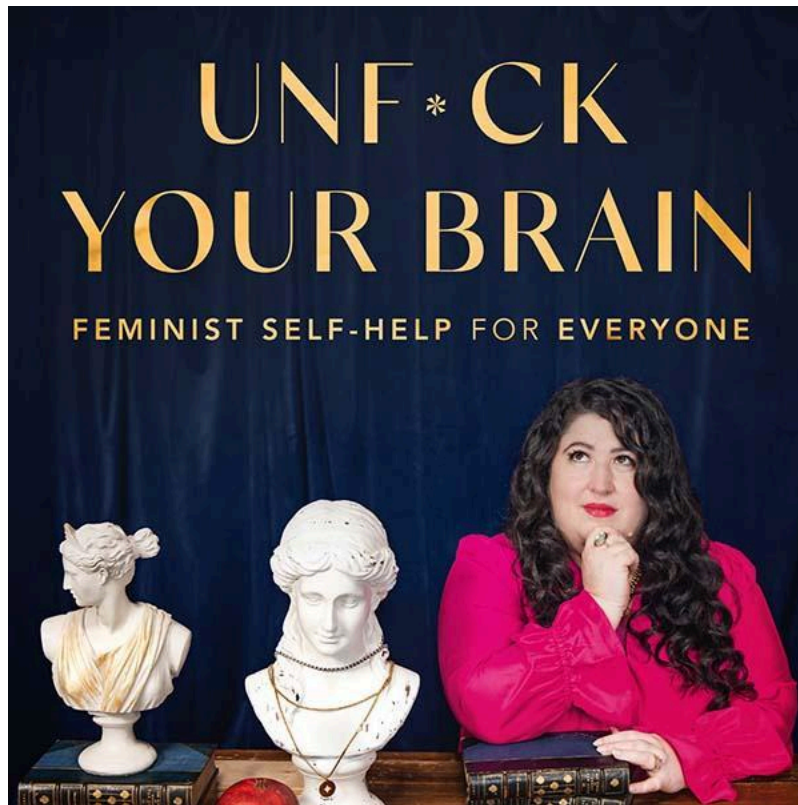


**UFYB 335: Self-Help Without Patriarchy
(Feminist Mindset Principles Series Ep 1)**



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

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Have you ever felt a little embarrassed about perusing the self-help section of the bookstore or reading a self-help book on the subway? Or have you wondered whether constantly trying to fix yourself might actually just be the patriarchy and society in your brain making you think you need to fix yourself to begin with? This episode is going to explain exactly why self-help is a feminist practice, but only if you come at it from the right perspective.

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 fine feathered friends. I am so excited for today's episode because this is the first in a 10 episode series that I'm doing to get us all on the same page about the most crucial foundations of feminist thought work. If you're new to the podcast, this is a great place to start to get oriented and get the basic concepts of feminist mindset work established in your brain.

And if you've been around for a while, even if you've been around since the beginning, this is going to be a great updated refresher course on how society impacts your brain, how your brain impacts your life. And how to change your brain and your returns in your life on purpose. And this is going to be the most updated version of these concepts. So let's set the stage in this episode for what we are doing here in this whole series.

Why do I embrace the concept of self-help? What does self-help even mean? And what does it look like to do self-help without the patriarchy? So I have been a self-help junkie my whole life. Before I found coaching, I was reading every self-help book I could find to try to fix myself. I was sure that

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there was something desperately wrong with me, probably many things desperately wrong with me. And I was always in search of the next quick fix or the next makeover or overhaul or program or diet or cleanse or whatever, to make me better, to finally make me good enough to feel okay.

Of course, now I know it was societal conditioning that made me think that way in the first place. It was society that made me think there was something wrong with my body and that I needed to weigh a certain amount and look a certain way to be attractive or desirable.

It was society that made me think that if I were single, there was something wrong with me and that I needed to be in a 'serious relationship'. Which meant a relationship that went up the traditional relationship escalator like dating, exclusivity, monogamy, cohabitation, marriage, children, etc., to have social status and legitimacy and not be an object of pity or scorn. It was society that made me think that I couldn't make money or I couldn't build wealth on my own. That I just had to make do with what someone else wanted to pay me.

And that I couldn't trust myself with money because I was bad with it and frivolous and irresponsible. It was society that made me think that not being able to 'control myself' in various ways, food, movement, habits, routines was a moral character failing because, of course, women need to control and restrain and limit and discipline themselves to prove their goodness.

All of this was from societal messages about women that my brain had absorbed without me even realizing it. Because society tells women their worth and value come from how they look and how many people, especially men, find them sexually or romantically desirable. Society tells women they're bad with money. They make irresponsible decisions.

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They're frivolous spenders. They need to budget and financially restrict themselves to prove that they're good people.

Society tells women they can never be too thin, so you need to restrict your eating as well. And that if you're single and sexual, you're slutty, but if you're single and not sexual, you're a frigid prude. That you need to be married and have kids to be normal, but also that wives and moms are a pain in the butt and people whose opinions don't matter.

So of course, women and people of any gender who are socialized as women are driven to try to comply with these standards, even though they're contradictory and inconsistent. Because our brains have been programmed to attach our self-esteem and happiness to achieving them. And then we're easy prey for all the markets that make money off of this unhappiness including the diet and weight loss industries, the beauty industry, and the self-help industry.

Now here I am, a life coach, criticizing the self-help industry and someone who's about to release a self-help book. So what gives? Well, the key is what kind of self-help we're talking about because what kind of self-help it is makes all the difference in whether it's actually helpful or deeply harmful. The kind of self-help I spent thousands of dollars on before finding coaching was always designed to help me better conform to social expectations. It was self-help with a goal of making me more of what society told me I had to be. So self-help to lose weight, specifically to restrict even when my body was hungry.

Self-help to develop the discipline to push my body to exercise no matter how it felt. Self-help to become more attractive and palatable to men, to learn, not to intimidate, not to be needy, not to be too challenging. Self-help to learn to wear makeup and have the right skin, to make myself look more

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like what conventional society told me I should look like. Make sure my hair wasn't frizzy, to make sure everything on my body was sleek and smooth like a seal, because that's what women are supposed to be like.

Self-help to become better at budgeting and being thrifty and restrict myself better when it came to money. It was never self-help about making more fucking money so I could do what I wanted with it because that's not what society teaches women. Self-help to have the perfect morning routine, to demonstrate my own value and worth, to who knows who I was doing that for, myself, people on Instagram, the man in the sky, unclear. All that was clear is that everything about me was wrong and I needed help to make it right.

And unfortunately, a lot of self-help still these days and a lot of coaching is still like that. When self-help is aimed at 'helping' you conform to the social standard that patriarchy has created for you. That is sexist self-help. Needless to say, that is not what we are doing here. Feminist self-help is not about encouraging you to try to live up even more to damaging and impossible social standards.

Feminist self-help is about freeing you from those standards. It's about showing you that there is a way to live life where you feel free in your body, where you can move when it feels good, and rest when it doesn't, where you can bring your whole self to friendships and romantic relationships. And you can be loved and adored for everything you are that society told you was too much.

This world exists, it's already here and waiting for you. All that's missing is for you to unlock the door to step into it. Because when we don't believe it exists, when we believe what society tells us, that we can't find happiness or health or acceptance or love unless we conform, we can't even see this

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magical world that's just next to us. Where we can have all those things by connecting to our true selves instead. Feminist self-help connects you to the bigger questions that matter in life. Who are we trying to be? What is the purpose of our lives?

How can we create happiness and fulfillment for ourselves? What kind of a world do we want to live in together? When men ask these questions, it's called philosophy or ethics, it might be on the shelf with Aristotle at the bookstore, or at worst, it's over in the executive leadership and development section. So I could call what I teach and what we do together, something else.

And I do call it philosophy, practical philosophy, but I fucking love the term self-help and I insist on reclaiming it and here's why. Because women and other marginalized groups have always had to help themselves. Society was not designed for us, it was not built in our best interests. And the people who decided what was normal and who women should be and how we should be disciplined into complying with society were, at least, in the west, straight, white, Christian men mostly. And in other places, they were mostly other kinds of men.

And those social institutions are not here to help us. Who was performing lobotomies on women through the mid-1950s? Even though more men were institutionalized during that time that lobotomies were performed, the vast majority of the patients on whom lobotomies were performed were women, up to 75% by some estimates. Who was doing that? The mainstream esteemed psychology industry.

Who still gaslights women about their pain and suffering and doesn't research how illness and medication impacts women specifically, much of the time? The esteemed and mainstream medical industry. I am not

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anti-medicine or anti-psychology. My family is full of doctors. I know many wonderful doctors of all genders and I considered becoming a psychologist before I went to law school. So this isn't saying that those disciplines and fields aren't important and full of some wonderful people.

But I'm very aware of who built these systems and institutions, and how biased they remain and those are just two examples. There are many institutions and systems that structure our society, the legal system, the educational system, the political system, the social network and social systems. And they were all built not for the benefit of women and other marginalized people.

So women have always had to help themselves and each other. And this doesn't even require you to assume bad intent, even if a bunch of straight, white, Christian men are creating a field of coaching, let's say, with the best of intentions. They don't know shit about being a woman in this society. They don't know anything about being a person of color in this society. They are not aware of their own privilege. They are not aware of what life is like for other people. And so the tools and concepts and the norms that they are creating are just missing so much, no matter how well intended they are.

So women and other marginalized people have always had to help themselves and each other. We have always had to depend on the wisdom that we whisper to each other, who is friend and who is foe? Who can you trust and who to avoid? How to not get pregnant or how to get pregnant, or how to stop getting pregnant or stop being pregnant. How to deal with menstruation or how to deal with menopause. How to take care of ourselves and our sisters and our daughters and our friends.

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Why were women in the 1960s and 70s in the feminist movement, looking at their cervixes with hand mirrors? Because no one else seemed to be looking or caring about them. Feminist self-help recognizes that women have always had to take their mental and emotional health and safety and well-being into their own hands. Women are socialized to wait for someone to rescue them, to be the damsel in distress, to be the follower who needs a leader, to defer to authority no matter what.

Of course, experts are important figures and it's valuable to seek other people's expertise, especially if they are trained in an area you need expertise in. But we have to be our own authorities because the systems and the experts and the mainstream is not built for us and was not created for us. We're taught we cannot take care of ourselves but meanwhile for centuries we've been taking care of ourselves and everyone else too.

So I am proud to call this work, feminist self-help. But I'm not just trying to help myself. It's not just self-help. I'm trying to help you. And I know you're not just trying to help yourself. You want to help others, too. Personal liberation and social liberation are inextricably tied together. Any change we want to see in society has to come from our human brains.

If every person socialized as a woman woke-up tomorrow with full belief in their own self-worth, their value, their inherent right to freedom and their own potential, the policies and structures and institutions of the world would change pretty fucking fast. So whether we want to improve something in our own lives or change something in the world, the change has to start within.

Over the next nine episodes of this series, I'm going to take you through that process, start to finish so you know how to coach yourself from a

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feminist perspective. We're going to question everything and when we're done, your brain will never be the same. Let's go.

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.