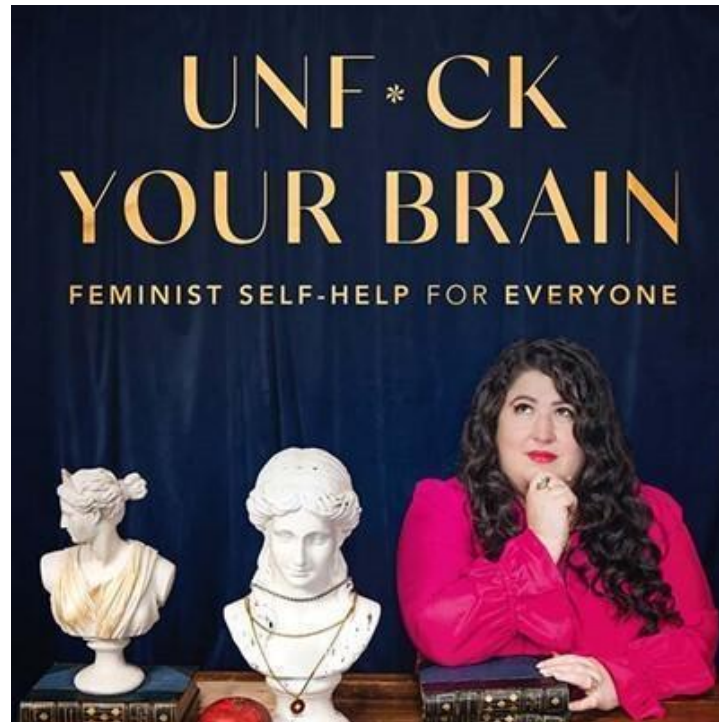


# UFYB 380: You Don't Need to Be The Best - How to Deal with Envy, Jealousy, and Competitiveness



## Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Kara Loewentheil**

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## **UFYB 380: You Don't Need to Be The Best - How to Deal with Envy, Jealousy, and Competitiveness**

Have you ever been struck with deep envy or anxiety when you see someone accomplish something you want? Or have you ever felt disappointed to see someone else succeed, even though rationally you might know and like them and want them to do well?

So many women and other marginalized people have a deep unconscious belief that we must be the best at whatever we're doing, and that if we are anything less than the best, we are failing. And this not only makes you feel unsupportive of others, but it makes you feel bad about yourself, both for being unsupportive of others, but also if you aren't always acclaimed by everyone around you as the very best, which is stressful and sometimes actually paralyzes us from doing anything at all.

So today I want to talk about why we have this belief from a historical and socialization perspective and some thought hacks that you can use to start to heal this pattern. 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 the other day I was watching a Disney movie. Not what you would expect to hear, I know. I'm not usually a huge Disney fan, but not here to yuck anyone's yum, just not usually my style. But I was on a plane and the plane suggested that I watch a movie about the first woman to swim the English Channel. So I did, because you know, who am I to disagree with JetBlue and what its movie screen tells me to do.

So if you don't know the story, the first woman to swim the English Channel was Gertrude Ederle. She was an American woman and she swam the

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channel at 20 years old after only five other people had done it who were all men. And she goes by Trudy, so I'm gonna be calling her that in this episode.

Her story is very inspiring. And of course I absolutely sobbed because I always cry watching women achieve things that men told them were impossible, especially when they're set to a stirring soundtrack. But I'm used to being inspired by incredible women. So that was not what was really a standout to me from this film.

What stuck with me from the film was actually a subplot about Trudy's sister. Now, I did some research and I couldn't find a lot about her sister. And like this is not a term paper, so I don't know if this subplot in the movie is true. But it's literary true, right? It's metaphorically true. It stuck with me because it illustrates something that was historically true, whether or not this actually happened to Trudy's sister.

So in the movie, Trudy's sister is also an excellent swimmer. She's not as good as Trudy, but she's good. But when the time comes for the Olympic team to be put together, Trudy makes it and her sister doesn't. And Trudy did actually go to the Olympics and set a bunch of world records. And Trudy went on to win medals and swim in the English Channel. And Trudy's sister married the apprentice in her father's butcher shop and that was that. She was a huge supporter of Trudy. She even helped her in her swim across the channel. But in the movie at least, her career as a swimmer is over and she just like marries the guy who her parents want her to marry.

So what struck me about this was that it illustrates how for so long to be a woman who succeeded in anything outside of mothering and homemaking, you had to be literally the best. You had to be the best in the world. You had to be the top one. You had to be the one who could compete with or exceed the men. And this is true for other marginalized groups, right? You

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had to be the exception, the one who could compete with or exceed the dominant group, whatever that was, because you were the exception. You were the token. There wasn't going to be space for more than one of you.

If you are an elite woman swimmer today who doesn't make the Olympic team, that doesn't mean your entire swim life is over and you just have to marry the man closest to you. You can still swim in your college team. You can coach swimming as a job. You could start a swim school. You could give swim lessons. You could compete in the adult national races. Like you don't just have to marry the butcher's apprentice and give up swimming forever.

But for so long, if you were a woman or a member of another marginalized group, and especially if you were both, there really was a scarcity of opportunity and a scarcity of success available. You did have to make your way through a system designed to keep you out, and only a few of you could succeed.

And you had to be impeccable to get through, and you would be considered responsible for the reputation of your entire group. And this is still the case today, right? With other minority and marginalized groups and in some cases still for women as a whole as well. It's gotten better, but those systems are still there.

So it's not a surprise that so many people socialized as women have this deep unconscious belief that they have to be the best, that to be anything but the best is to be a failure, and that the only options are to be the best or to be nothing at all. And this manifests as perfectionism, as not allowing any room for error, as not allowing any room for being a human, as having unrealistically high expectations for ourselves, and it manifests as scarcity, as believing that there's not enough to go around, there's a limited amount of success out there, and if someone else gets it, then we don't.

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And these belief patterns lead to feelings like envy and jealousy and anxiety and shame. We see someone else make VP and we believe that means we can't make it. We see someone else's writing get published and we believe now ours won't get published. We see someone else get engaged and we believe now there's one less good potential partner for us.

My friend Rachel and I always laugh about this because when we got certified as coaches, she got very upset with me for suggesting that I thought we could both make \$100,000 in our coaching businesses because her brain told her and she told me that there could only be like six or seven \$100,000 coaches in the world. So like obviously we weren't both going to be able to do it. Like the odds were not that we could be in the same certification class.

And now we laugh about it because from that one class of like 25 people, there are at least three seven-figure coaches in front who came from that class. Me and Rachel and our friend Stacey, we're all in that same group. But I think we all do this in different ways. We believe there's not enough success or money or love to go around. And if someone else gets some, that means there's less for us.

And I think for people socialized as women or who are in other marginalized groups or identities, or especially more than one marginalized identity, that's not just random.

And it's not evolutionary biology of competition, at least not totally. It's actually socialized into us. We are taught that there's plenty of success and money and power available for mediocre white men, but there's only a little to go around for the rest of us. We all got to split the token that's left. And historically, this was true. That is the part that so struck me from watching that movie. That historically, that was so true and we are still living with the legacy of that lens passed down from mother to daughter for generations.

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It's less true now. It's not completely not true. There are still power structures in place, and our current government in the US is literally in the middle right now of trying to make it harder for people who aren't cis Christian white men to get ahead, right? The entire kind of made up war on DEI. Not that the war on it is made up, the things they're saying are made up, the war on it is very real. But it's not 1820 or 1920 and even with what's going on, it is no longer the case that there's room for only one woman at the top of every field. So we need to rewire our brains and teach them that there's more possibility out there for us.

So I'm gonna share with you my two-step approach for doing that right after this quick break.

Okay, so now that we understand where this thinking comes from, what can we do with that insight? That insight is not going to magically change our brain, obviously, we need to work on rewiring our thought patterns to address this.

So I wanna offer you a two-part technique for when you notice these kinds of feelings coming up. When we feel envy or jealousy of something or someone, when we feel competitive, when we feel like we have to beat other people, and I'm talking about it in a way that's unpleasant. Some people enjoy a healthy competition in a race or something. I'm not saying there's anything wrong with that. I'm talking about the kind of competition that feels like anxiety producing and upsetting because we believe like there's only enough to go around for one of us and I have to beat this person or I won't be okay and I won't be safe and I won't be able to be happy, right? It feels very different.

That is an insight into something we need to know about ourselves, something we wanna have or experience or achieve. And our brain is currently identifying that thing as something that's not available to us or

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something that's limited. And that's why we have the envy or the jealousy or that kind of negative type of competition, competitive feeling.

So the first thing we need to do is get curious about why we are feeling envious or jealous or competitive. Do we actually want the thing that that person is doing or being or that experience? And if so, why do we want it?

Sometimes we don't actually want it. We've just been taught by society we're supposed to want it or we're supposed to have it. And so if we see someone else doing it or having it or being it, that reads to us as, oh, they're doing it right, they're okay, they're good enough and I'm not.

So we have to actually ask ourselves if we even want this thing, truly. And if we do, why do we want it? Do we imagine that we'll feel a certain way if we get it or if we experience it? Do we imagine that person is feeling a certain way that we want to feel?

Right, we want to get really curious about why we think we want this thing. What is the feeling that we're after? And why are we assuming that there isn't enough to go around and do we want to keep believing that?

If the reason we want something is to prove that we're good enough or to impress other people or to try to make us feel a certain way, that's an invitation to us to stop worrying about that thing or that experience or that accomplishment and start focusing on the thoughts that we need to believe to feel that we're good enough now, right?

To detach from other people's opinions, to not feel pressure to live up to societal expectations. Like that's an invitation to us to turn our mind from focusing on that thing, that experience, that accomplishment that we're jealous or competitive or envious about, and to focus on what's going on in our brain that's making us fixate on that.

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The second step is only sometimes necessary. Sometimes that step takes care of it, you realize I don't actually even want that thing, or I only want that thing to make me feel good enough about myself or something similar, so I gotta work on my thoughts about that.

Now, sometimes I think we discover we do actually want that thing or that experience and we like our reasons. It's actually connecting to like a little spark inside of us that has similar ambitions or desires. It feels curdled because we think we can't have it, but that there is a real spark in us that's like, but I think I really do want to write a novel. I think I really do want to see if I'm capable of starting a business. I really do want to see what it's like to live in Bora Bora, like whatever the thing is. We get to decide whether to double down on that curdled, envious feeling or whether to shift it.

Because we can choose to notice that emotion and notice that spark and flip our perception and interpretation of it to focus on inspiration instead. If I see someone announcing that she sold 200,000 copies of her book or speaking on a huge stage and I feel that stab of jealousy or envy, that's an invitation for me to do that inquiry, right? Do I want that thing? Why?

But if I discover, oh, I do want that thing, I think it would be so fun to give a TED Talk and to be able to share my work with millions of new people. I want that. I already think I'm good enough. I already think my work is amazing. I want that exposure. I want to have that experience and that adventure and level up.

Then I get to choose whether to make that person's success mean that it's not possible or less possible for me or whether to make it mean that it is possible for me, it's more possible for me. I had this modeled for me really early in my coaching career when I was thinking about starting my business and I was focusing on coaching lawyers. And I discovered there was already a lawyer coach.



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And of course in my brain, I was like, well, that means I can't do it. Like it's already been taken, it's already done, there's already one person doing it. So she'll always be ahead of me and there's no room for me and she'll already have all the connections and she'll always be successful and I won't be. But my coach of course had none of those thoughts and when I was like, well, there's already someone doing this, she was like, awesome, that's proof of market potential.

That's proof that the market's viable. That means someone already did the part where they went out and found out if people would pay for this. So now we know that people will pay for this and it is a viable market and you can do it too.

That was so mind-blowing to me, that I could take someone else getting there first and take that as proof that I could do it and as inspiration instead of immediately using that to mean now there's none left for me. We can choose to interpret other people's accomplishments as proof that it's possible for us, as opposed to proof that it's not possible.

And when it comes to competition, we can choose to believe that two people can succeed, or 12 people, or 20 people, or 200 people. Okay, yes, you might not both be able to be in the exact same job at the exact same organization, but nobody for good reasons feels like they have to have the exact job at the exact organization or they'll never be able to be happy or have an impact. Like that's not a thought that is ever useful.

When we are feeling that competition, it's like, what is the thing we're really wanting, right? And believing that whatever that bigger thing is, that impact, that wealth building, that experience, that it's possible for more than one person to experience that.

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You don't have to be the best in the world at anything to have an accomplished, happy, and fulfilling life. You just have to practice believing that you're capable of creating the life you want, you're capable of knowing what you actually want and care about, and there's enough space and acclaim and money and time and success for all of us to do that too.

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