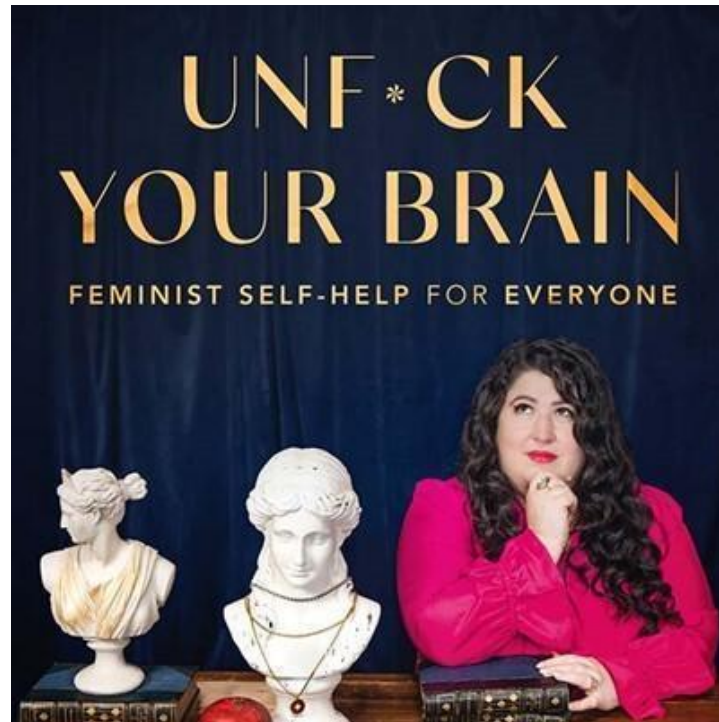


UFYB 381: Be Your Own Partner: A Conversation About Singleness and Mindset with Meghan Keane



Full Episode Transcript

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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.

Kara Loewentheil: Hello, my friends. I'm so excited for today because you all know that one of my soap boxes is the way we think about marriage and romantic relationships and the socialization that women get around those things. And I often say, even though it doesn't make any sense, that I sort of still feel like in my heart that I'm single, even though I'm married, because I feel more like affiliated with and aligned with single women and the way that they get to live their lives. And I try to live my life pretty much like that despite being married. I have a cooperative partner, and he has a lot of autonomy too.

But anyway, so I am very excited about this conversation. I'm here with Meghan Keane, who has a book all about this called *Party of One: Be Your Own Best Partner*. And so we're gonna start with our normal routine where I make women brag about themselves and they do so either resentfully or happily or somewhere in between. So, Meghan, tell us about yourself.

Meghan Keane: Hi. Absolutely. Thank you so much for having me. Yes, I am the showrunner and founder of NPR's Life Kit, which is NPR's service journalism brand. Started about seven years ago now at this point, which is now half of my whole working career and career at NPR.

And I guess the brag is that I was trusted by the powers that be at NPR to create a whole new podcast that became a brand with a lot of wonderful people that helped me along the way and still do every day to make the show. It's not just me, but I feel very honored and proud to be the leader of that, to do something that helps people. You probably feel this with your

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show too. When they listen, they feel like I feel a little bit less alone. I feel like I have a tool now that I can improve my life in some way.

And so that's I think the biggest brag for me is that I feel like I get to help people in a way, even if it's a small thing, like, oh, I just felt like a little bit more capable today. I think that's still a big deal.

Kara: I mean, nobody goes from like, I feel like shit to I feel amazing overnight. Those little wins you get that are – and we're so conditioned not to celebrate them, especially if we're socialized as women. I love that about Life Kit that it is like practical help. There's so much self-development or self-help or whatever we're going to call it. I mean, Life Kit may be adjacent to that, however you would call it.

Meghan: No, you're right. It's self-development, self-help. You're totally right.

Kara: There's so much stuff out there that's just like, just like believe in yourself. Like, well, yeah, if I knew how to fucking do that, I wouldn't be listening to this podcast, would I?

Meghan: Yeah. I think self-help can a lot of times be kind of like bumper sticker statements that feel so big. I think sometimes that really helps people and really works for people, but for people like me, I need you to break down the steps. That's a lot of Life Kit is being like, okay, this seems simple on the face, but how do you actually get to that bigger place of saving more money, feeling better, more self-confident, feeling like a good parent? How do you actually do that is the question. And so hopefully we're demystifying some of life's secrets.

Kara: Yeah. I mean, I think that's what I have always felt like sets my work apart is like being very – there is big picture. There's that socialization lens,

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which is very big picture, but then there's very concrete like here's how you actually change a thought. Because all of my experience in self-development until that had been like, great, yeah, that sounds nice. Or like, oh, yeah, I have that insight and now I just live the rest of my life watching myself do this thing with all the insights. Look at me making the same self-destructive decision over and over again with one thing. Anyway, you're here to talk about, we can talk about that all day.

Meghan: No, I mean, it kind of relates to what we're talking about.

Kara: Tell us about what inspired you to write this book and kind of the big picture of it. And of course, we'll talk more about the details.

Meghan: Sure. I mean, a little bit like we were just talking about this big idea of like, be okay with your singleness and be okay with feeling comfortable in your own skin, being a person on your own. I was like, that sounds great. I know that's valid. I know that's wonderful. But I was like, how do I do that day to day though, right?

So I really – it was the me search, right, that I wanted to find for myself. You know, I've been single most of my life. And in my late 20s, as I write about in the early part of my book, I had a series of breakups that really rocked me. They were relationships that were, you know, fine, good to fine, but they were both relationships where I was more concerned about being in any relationship than to be in the right relationship for me.

And so as a result, I was not asking really critical questions about my values. Do we have the same values? Do we actually want to build a life together? You know, things that are big questions if you are looking for a partner, right? Not just casually dating. But I was really scared to rock the boat because I felt like, oh, I waited so long to get into a relationship.

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I should just be quiet, just let things go. When I did speak my mind, it would erupt in a blowout. It was not constructive conflict. So I was dumped by both of those relationships, in hindsight, probably because we never did talk about those things and they realized it before I did that this was not going to work.

So I was feeling like, okay, how do I get out of this hole of knowing that singleness is wonderful? I have plenty of great positive examples of singleness. The rest of my life feels very good. Good job. I make nice money. I had a good apartment.

I have a lot of friends and hobbies, but this piece of the puzzle seems to be kind of glaring back at me. So how do I get from knowing to actually feeling that? And that's what I set out to do in the book.

Kara: Yeah, I think that's such a huge thing. And doing this work when you're single, it's like you have to do it while you're – almost like while there's like psyops happening around you all the time.

Meghan: Yes.

Kara: I did a similar huge amount of work on my body image first, and then I did my single-ness after that. But both times, it's sort of like you're trying to nurture this fragile little flower of new thoughts and new perspectives and self-belief, and you're just like, ah, I just need everything else to like, like, could I get in a vacuum for like six months and just try to like, this little this little plant that I'm trying to kind of nurture?

Meghan: Yeah, I feel that because I think for me, you know, I'm 35, elder millennial, and I was like, when I was growing up, I was like, well, I don't want to be a Disney princess. I thought I knew better. I did intellectually understand what it means to be feminist and to be your own person and to

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not settle, but I didn't realize how much the messages of culture can still seep in and how much you still have to confront and pause and just pause and think, what do I actually want before I move forward with any part of my life, right?

And that was also a big part of what I needed to do to kind of settle down. I call it the haze, the cultural messaging that gets kind of surrounded by – it feels like it's all you can see instead of just pausing, poking your head out to the side and be like, oh, there's a whole other world out here. It's a lot clearer.

Kara: Yeah. I think this is some of the deepest work. With body image stuff, it's incredibly deeply ingrained. But I think there's like, maybe it's easier to say what's harder about the relationship stuff is it gets so mixed up and conflated with what is a natural human drive for just intimacy in general, which doesn't have to be a romantic or sexual partner, but there is a natural, I think for most of us, primate connection of just intimacy and hunter-gatherers grew up in close-knit tribes. We're used to having that, right?

So the body image, there isn't that thing. I feel like you can be very deep in it, but once you can see it, you can see it. I think I found this area more challenging in some ways because those things are mixed up. Because there's this part that you don't want to get rid of, which is the instinct towards human connection.

Meghan: Yeah.

Kara: But it's so... With body image, you're just like, oh, this is all toxic. If I could get this all out...

Meghan: Right. Yeah, exactly.

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Kara: With the drive for human connection, it's like part of that is valuable, part of that is natural. But then the way it gets channeled into like, no, this only this kind of connection matters and it's gonna validate you and it's gonna save you and it's gonna give your life meaning and it's gonna mean you're good enough and everybody will respect you and think you're good. Like there's so much put on it. So I'd love to hear, let's start with the Disney princesses.

Because all of my listeners, I think, are like you and like I was, which is, yeah, I intellectually get this, but my emotional reactions to things happening around me, right? I talk about in my book, like, yeah, intellectually, I think, like, nobody should need a man and the patriarchy, blah, blah, blah. But like some dude named Chad has a profile on Tinder.

Meghan: Right, yeah.

Kara: And he gave me a lot of anxiety, even though I don't know his last name. But now he is the sole arbiter of my worth and self-esteem for the next...

Meghan: Yeah, the Chads of the world. Oh god.

Kara: There's probably some nice Chad...

Meghan: Yeah, statistically there's gotta be.

Kara: I'm not a lot of mess. I'm trying. So how do you think those stories, those kind of Disney stories that we grew up with, impact our view on romantic relationships and singleness?

Meghan: Yeah. I mean, I think that this is something that a lot of people have pointed out, right? I'm not the first, but like a lot of those stories end

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with they get together, right? And you don't see what's on the other side of a relationship. Now when a relationship's good, it mostly feels easy and like you can come to your partner and talk to them and, you know, but it's still intentional, right?

Rather than just now here is your adult coronation, this wedding, and now you will be happy forever, happily ever after, right? And I think there's obviously so many misconceptions packed into that. A big one is that happy is a destination, that it is a fixed state. Happiness is an emotion that comes and goes just like other emotions.

Kara: People can't hear it from their parents, but they can hear it from somebody else.

Meghan: Yeah, totally. But yeah, I mean, it is easy to think, okay, like you get this thing and then everything else is solved. When it takes, I would say just mostly intention, right, to build good relationships. And also a lot of those stories about how people come together and partner up are based on things that are like solely like the chemistry or how hot they find each other, right? And those are part of the puzzle.

But again, it also comes down to what kind of life do you actually want to build together? Do you have similar values? How are the ways that you feel like this person adds to your life rather than completes your life, right? And those are messages that are not neatly contained in rom-coms. And I read the book.

Actually, I love rom-coms. My favorite – you know, I actually have her book right behind me is Nora Ephron, books and movies because I think what those show is that friendship makes up a really good part of a relationship and you're kind of following love also with someone's personality, how they make you feel and like that ease that comes up where if it's just a, oh my

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gosh I used to hate you but now I like you kind of trope, that's not a lot of like ground for a relationship.

Kara: Also, it's such a weird trope. I feel like that's just socialization to women. If somebody seems distant or mean or weird, you should probably fall in love with them. It's almost like maybe it's a manifestation of what women are socialized and trained to do, which is feel bad enough about ourselves that if somebody can activate that in us, we become desperate for their approval and acceptance. So it's almost like dramatizing that. But it's just thinking about that when you were talking about your breakups, like one of the things that looking back, I'm like, I can see now is so fascinating to me.

So I'm like, oh, there were guys who broke up with me, where I thought they were like terrible assholes now and all my friends would have agreed and all that, right? And they were actually just totally right about... It wasn't about me being bad, right? It's like, why we're compatible. I had one other great love affairs in my life we broke up because he basically was like, I mean, he knew himself.

I don't approve of this choice, but it's not my values, let's say. But he was like, I kind of want to be a workaholic and I want someone who will be my wife and take care of the home and the family and isn't going to basically have too many demands on me. And he's like, you're someone who's going to want your partner to be all in on the relationship and have a really high intimacy and spend a lot of time and attention on it. Now, in retrospect, I'm like, 100% correct. Yeah.

Meghan: It's not the life that you would want. And you learned to be grateful for it being cut off.

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Kara: Yeah. But I was so in it, of course, that I was like, no, we're so – it's like how can you do this?

Meghan: Yeah. And it felt bad when I had these – like when I was blindsided and dumped, I felt like, oh, I took it as a comment on my self-worth and I really had to like work through what that actually meant because I felt so much shame about someone got to know me really deeply for the first time and then they said, I don't want that. Ultimately what it came down to was we were just working with a match. But when you're in it, it does feel awful.

And like what we were talking about earlier, because we are conditioned to want intimacy, but I think what we get a little shielded from is the message that a lot of different types of intimacy is important. And I would love to see rom-coms, but only about friendships, right? Like, you know, deep platonic love is really important to our health and happiness, not just the marriage, right? And we seem to know that when it comes to friendships, we know we have all these different types of friends and we get different types of intimacy from them. But when it comes to romance, we're like all or nothing. And it's like, oh, okay, maybe we should tip the scales a little differently so we can see all the options we have because it ultimately will serve us better.

Kara: Yeah. I mean, I think that women are so – we're so socialized to put our value and worth on the like acceptance by a romantic partner, especially if it's a man. So even though if you think about it logically, it's like if you were interviewing for a business partner or even just friends, of course there's a bunch of people you don't get along with. Like when you walk into a room, eight out of 10 people you probably don't even want to speak to again. But it comes to a relationship and we're socialized so we can be like, oh, no, this is an objective arbitration of this man who I've

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picked because he smells good or seems hot or my hormones liked him is now the person in charge of deciding my worth and value.

He is the universal currency, he's going to decide, and it is that personal rejection of me. I think that that is entirely down to how we teach people to think about what relationships are and what romantic relationships are for women. It's like so, so deeply embedded. And I think one of the things you're touching on is like the shame that some people feel about being single and how much – and I for sure like – and when I used to imagine like having a partner, one of the things I imagined a lot was like going to family events.

Like my friend group was maybe a little more diverse in lifestyles, but my family, it's like, okay, most people are partnered up. I mean, my family was politically liberal, but like fairly traditional in terms of like, you know, most people are in monogamous marriages. And like, yeah, that was what I would imagine, right?

And that was not because that's like, first of all, it's like 1% of my life I spent doing that. It's not even like it's the most fun thing I do, but it's the place where my shame was activated. So I'd love to hear, I know you write about like how the shame that society puts on single people is kind of preventing all of us from like really fully enjoying our lives.

Meghan: Yeah, totally. What I kept realizing in my research is that Everything came back to shame. Not to sound like Brené Brown, but

Kara: Listen, she's Brené Brown for a reason. She's right.

Meghan: Exactly, yeah. But I was like, oh, okay, I want to think about like rumination or like managing emotions. And what I realized was shame prevents you from actually just feeling the emotion or just having the

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neutral thought and then processing it, which is actually the thing that's going to get you through that hard time more regulated, right?

And I noticed for me the times when like let's say it was like a Friday night and I didn't have any plans and people were busy and I was down on myself like, oh, if I had a partner we could just hang out at home and it would be easy and I feel bad. And I was like, oh, I'm putting – it's called a secondary emotion.

It's the feeling you have about the emotion and for a lot of times in this conversation, that thing is shame. Where it's like, oh, I feel bad because society is telling me to feel bad that I'm alone. And I can't help me actually get to just like, I just feel sad that I don't really have any plans tonight and I wish I did because those are two different paths to walk down. That's an example where it's like a one-off, but it can build to like it keeps you from not wanting to do the types of vacations or travel you want to do or maybe even like making a big change that would be amazing for you.

Kara: It's like I don't want to go on that trip because I want to go to Italy with a partner. I can't – I want to move to the city because what if there's no one to date here? So I got to wait until I find a partner.

Meghan: Yeah, exactly. A big thing for me was I was waiting to get a dog before I had a partner. And then the pandemic hit and I was like, it's looking pretty lonely in this apartment, extra lonely. It's time to get a dog. And I'm really glad I did because what happened once I like stopped waiting was I actually made friends. I made friends with people on the street, one of whom became a really close friend of mine because our dogs met and she was really inspiring because she was like, I have like a backyard, you know, it's October, 2020. And I was like, you have a backyard in COVID and you're a new friend I could have in my neighborhood. Great.

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Yeah, exactly. So I was like, oh, I'm so glad I didn't wait even longer because, oh, it actually ended up positioning me to open up for connection. Yeah. So it's a lot of waiting that, you know, prevents you from doing things the shame, but I think it also prevents you from letting the pressure come down when it comes to dating.

So if you are someone who is open to doing this type of work, but then you also are still, you know, hoping or would like a partner, it is tough I know to kind of like weigh those scales. What I had to do was remind myself, okay, if the shame can come down, I can be the person in control in a dating situation that it's not that, okay, you know, people dump you, it happens, like you're not always in control, but like you can be a more active participant in thinking, do I actually like this person? Rather than being so where, do they like me, right? You know, thinking about how you feel in your own body around someone rather than just hoping they like you. That really helped me.

And then also thinking too, because then when you're not hanging every text interaction with the Chad that might leave you on read as part of your soul worth, you feel like, okay, these people might come and go because I've already built this other great life and great stability. And I could have a future where I have, you know, a partner. I might meet them 10 years from now, who knows, five years, next week, and that could be beautiful.

I could also have a life where I'm mostly on my own but still have a rich life full of connections. And so it's not a do or die situation when you learn to kind of like wash away the shame.

Kara: We imagine, as you were saying, that like when we get to the relationship or we get married or whatever it is, now we're in this like other universe. Like we've somehow moved over into another strand of the multiverse and we are like in a whole other version of being. But what

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happens is like I see this in coaching all the time, your brain just goes with you.

So if you manage to get married while living through enormous dating anxiety and stress, which some people do, you then just start to stress out about whether your partner is mad at you or going to leave you or what's going to happen. It just comes with you, right? It doesn't dissolve. And I coach so many women who are getting divorced and maybe it's quieted while they're married, now it's right back up. Those thoughts are right back there.

For me, it was like I had to do the work to be happy in my single life fully. And then I found a partner, which is nice. I like him. But if something got – knock on wood, I don't want him to get hit by a truck. If something happened to him, obviously it would be terrible in a grieving sense, but I know that I think of myself as I'm in my own life and I am the main character in my own life, and my relationship with myself has really nothing to do with the circumstance of whether I'm in a relationship or not, or I'm married or I'm single.

And women are so socialized that we are not the main character. The main character is our romantic status and we are like a sidekick at best to that. So then our whole relationship with ourselves and our whole concept of our lives depends or revolves around what is our romantic status. And I think that is like the deep mind fuck of the socialization. Yes. Right?

Meghan: Oh, completely.

Kara: It leads to what you're describing where you're in a relationship being like, okay, if I can just keep quiet and fake it for long enough, I can get married. And then my prize will be being married to someone...

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Meghan: And faking it for the rest of your life.

Kara: Right, right. When you're in it, that seems logical. You're like, yes. The point is to get validation and feel okay by getting married. And so like whatever I got to do to get there, which of course is a Pyrrhic victory because you don't feel okay because the person who got validation is the fake version of you you've been pretending to be.

Meghan: Exactly. Yeah. I know. It's so true. And like what you said earlier too about it feels like in coupledness, you might be like transported to a different like multiverse, right?

I would love for couples to also read this book because I think there's a lot of lessons about what your single friends are going through and how you can be better to them and how you can also retain like personhood in your own relationship because I think when we take down the pressure and the shame about what it means to be single, if we just see that as just like a state someone happens to be in or a deliberate choice for some people, it benefits everybody because I think that when you hear a lot of comments from married people about like, oh, I couldn't date, you know, now, like I wouldn't know how to do it, like all these kind of like condescending things. I think that comes from a place of I am so scared that if I was ever single again, I wouldn't know what to do, right?

So it's like if we make single so horrible looking to everybody, then people stay in relationships they don't want to. They alienate friends, right? And then friends then don't feel like they're getting support from people.

So I feel like just recognizing all this different type of relationships and love that you can get and how we can work together on this also to kind of take down the shame. It just benefits everybody.

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Kara: 100%. I talk a lot about like I went through a real grieving process of like grieving being single when I got married and when I partnered up, which I don't feel like people talk about because women are not socialized to value autonomy. We're socialized to value like service and interdependency or codependency.

And for me, it was like very not traumatic. It was like, well, it brought up, I mean, when you, that's the other thing. It's like you imagine it's going to be all happy. Actually, if you're really doing the work and having a real relationship, it brings up all of your shit. And then you have to work through a whole bunch of stuff that you were able to ignore when you were emotionally unavailable and dating because you were just so fixated on your own...

When you are in that dating where you're myopically subconsciously just focused on your own self-worth, you're not actually really, not that much actual intimacy is happening, right? Because you can't be vulnerable, you can't really see the other person as a person, they're mostly an arbiter of your self-worth and like the barometer you're using that day to see if you're okay or not. One of the things I end up coaching a lot on is women who think that they are super emotionally available and all these men are just emotionally unavailable, but they're not really available because they're all focused on themselves and their own worth and value and how dating is reflecting that.

Meghan: Yeah. Yeah, that grieving thing is really interesting because I think that what probably came up for you was like, oh, that chapter of my life is now officially over and I didn't maybe get to savor it as much as I wanted to potentially or like you just can't go back, right?

I mean, I can't go back, but like it's like – it is a – I mean, it's like a demarcation, right? And it's like, oh, I didn't even realize that I was in this

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really special time in my life of singleness until you're out of it sometimes, right?

Kara: I think so, yeah. I mean, I think I did feel pretty acutely aware of the great parts of being single because I'd done this work. But I think the grief for me was about possibilities

Meghan: Yeah, sure.

Kara: That people underestimate about being single, I think is that freedom and autonomy and possibility of your life can turn out any way still in this very significant manner.

And then for me, I think specifically also because I was location independent and my business is self-supporting. So I really was like, who knows? I could marry a Duke of Monaco. I could be single forever. It was literally just completely open.

There was a grieving process of being like, oh, those alternate versions of me are not going to exist in the same way. But I do think a lot of people – yeah, I think that's – all of it is like you – it's like the youth is wasted on the young side.

Meghan: Right. Yeah, totally.

Kara: It's wasting on the single who are trying to get married. And you still have to do that work. I do that work in my relationship now. There are ways in which our autonomy triggers each other. And it's really important to both of us to maintain more autonomy than most people in relationships have.

And the resolution of that is not to enmesh. It's just to be like, oh, this is still uncomfortable. I'm married to this person, and I'm still uncomfortable with

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their autonomy, and they're still uncomfortable with some of my autonomy. Not because we're controlling, but because that's a tension in healthy intimacy, I think, is like allowing an amount of autonomy in the other person that may trigger your control stuff, but that you kind of respect. But nobody imagines any of that when they're in the fantasy of it.

Meghan: No, of course not. Yeah, and I think that's – it's good to hear because when you are, as you know, in the trenches of singleness, it is easy to be like, well, married people have it all figured out. And there is a lot of endless privilege that comes with being married, right? And I think single people do have the opportunity, though, like you're saying, to imagine life in all these wonderful ways. And I know it's a popular term to romanticize your own life, right? It is cool to think of all the possibilities that are in front of you. And that is a huge, wonderful thing that I think goes ignored sometimes for some people.

Kara: Yes, it's striking to me how many women who get divorced are like, oh, no, I'd never get married again. Because a big part of it is that validation is like, done, now I don't want to deal with that. That's not everybody, but the statistics are pretty clear about remarriage rates and about single childless women being the statistically happiest group in society.

So, I think picking up on that and coming back to the thing we always talk about in this podcast, obviously our relationship with ourselves is like the longest relationship we're ever going to have and usually the most neglected one. So, how do you think that we can get better at sort of being our own partner through – I mean that's a huge question.

Obviously it's the purpose of the whole book in some ways, but what are some ways you think people can start – since we both love that kind of concrete like here's a thing you can actually do or think. Like what are

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some ways people can start, you know, paying that attention to themselves that they wish a partner would pay attention to?

Meghan: Yeah. So one big thing I talk about in the book and I've mentioned here is values, which is also an idea that I think can get tossed around. And be like, what does that actually mean? And so I think where values comes in is thinking about the difference between a goal and a value. And this is something I learned from Dr. Pooja Lakshman who wrote Real Self Care.

Kara: Oh yeah, she's been on this podcast.

Meghan: Yeah, she's wonderful. And this idea that a goal is – it's like an outcome, right? It's something you do, but the value is how you like express it. And so we rarely, she says, kind of identify the values underneath our goals.

Let's say you want a partner. It's like, okay, it's kind of asking like, why five times? And being like, okay, well, maybe it's like, yeah, of course you want intimacy, of course you want connection, but then it's like, oh, do you see how like, these are things that the values underneath that, like I value connection, I value community. Those can be expressed more flexibly than just a marriage because the problem with a goal is that you're either passing or failing automatically. And values are much more flexible.

So I would say for anyone, get really clear about what values you are actually expressing now. Like, how does your behavior indicate your values? Because sometimes I look at a list of values. I'm like, well, technically all of them, right? Like those are all good things. Obviously bad. These all seem positive.

Kara: All good things. Obviously bad. These all seem positive.

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Meghan: There's this great psychologist at the College of William & Mary, and he has this great values inventory that you can take on. It's like the life values inventory. It's really great because it's like – it helps you boil down what values are you actually paying into right now in your life? What are you paying less attention to? What do you want to pay more attention to?

What do you feel more neutral about? It's not like – you know, it's not shaming anyway. It's like actually giving you a really clear picture about like what is actually important to you right now and what do you want to work on. So I think that's a great way to start getting really clear about what's important to you, how you can build that extra stuff in that maybe takes up some space in your head about what a relationship you think might do. So it might be things like traveling or getting involved in your community more, taking up a hobby.

I feel like single women have the most hobbies. It's amazing. Like, you know, they know how to do this. But like I'm reminding you all that like that is not for not. Like filling your life fully is very important. And so I think that's a big thing. And then I would also say thinking about how you talk to yourself and the story that you tell yourself, I think one of the hardest parts about just being a human is that you really are like locked in with your own brain.

Kara: I've had 400 podcast episodes about that.

Meghan: Yeah, exactly. Yeah. Exactly. And how we talk to ourselves really impacts our mood and the weather of how we experience everything.

I was telling myself a really damaging story about how I was the rebound girl. I was the person that someone dated right after a really big, supposedly more important relationship and then I helped them get over it and then they would move on. That was not very helpful.

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Kara: You can tell a beautiful story, right? You're like, I can tell so many stories.

Meghan: The one. Yeah. As a journalist, I love theater. I love novels and movies. Like I know how to connect the dots, right?

And like make a narrative. And sometimes it's not about creating the narrative. It's about, okay, this is just a thought that I'm experiencing, not giving it a lot of weight. And I feel like that has been a really helpful thing with me and just finding what tools work for you. And it's usually a bundle of them rather than one single thing that helps you find ways to talk to yourself better.

And it's not about just being positive as you know. It's about like kind of maybe even like neutralizing the thought and seeing reality and then moving forward. I love radical acceptance where it's like I don't have to like what's happening, but this is what's happening. And then being like, okay, what can I do now to nourish myself? I think asking that question a lot comes from mindfulness, this idea of nourishing versus depleting.

And so if you're thinking about like, okay, this activity is nourishing. I should do that. It will make me feel good rather than just like spending like I do like hours and hours being like, why do I feel this bad? Why do you know, like asking why, why, why? Thinking what can I do to like nourish myself? And I think that will get people off these paths of kind of spiraling and feeling better about being non-partnered.

Kara: Love that. There's two things you said I want to pick up on before I ask you our last question. So one is I love the values. We talk about values a lot on the podcast in the sense that women are socialized to try to live up to certain social standards for our value and our worth, and a lot of women don't even know what their own values are if they're asking themselves

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truly, right? So you all have heard like just 100% cosine. And I used values actually for me, that was a big part of my dating work was what are my values in dating?

Because what you are in that very like, everything is going to determine if I'm ever going to be okay and loved enough. You make impulsive decisions in dating, because it's just chaotic in your brain. It's just kind of like, how did I feel today? Did they text back fast enough? And did I make that mean something about myself?

And that's what my current husband who is obsessed with me is a terrible texter. And I would never have gotten through the first week of our relationship without having been able to go back to the values because I had so many models of like, if somebody likes you, this is how they text and this is how they – they do everything the way I do it. If they like me, they do exactly how I would do it, right?

So using values in dating of like these are my top three values, whatever they are, like, you know, curiosity or fun or connection or whatever actually helps you navigate that process and how you relate to yourself and how you relate to other people.

The other thing I'll recommend for people, I often feel like I have guests come on who are like, here's the positive. I'm like, here's a negative option you can do. It's sort of there's two different routes, both of which are important. There's focusing your mind on the positive things about your current experience and being single. But then there's also I think what I'm calling the negative, it's not really negative, it's like de-fantasizing the experience of being partnered.

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And so one of the things I'd recommend is like make a list of all those things that you want to experience in partnership. Like let's say you want to experience connection. Awesome.

Now think about how being with a partner is also going to make you experience the opposite. I get to experience connection with my husband and then I get to experience really devastating disconnection when my brain decides to hijack my day and tell me that I can't believe he forgot to do this thing and therefore he doesn't love me and therefore blah, blah, blah. I don't think that means anything. He does love me. I love him. This is having a human brain. But we never fantasize about that part. It's all a trade-off.

There are parts of being single and having that autonomy and having that freedom and having all your resources for yourself in that way that can be lonely and also can be amazing. But being partnered is not a consolation prize. There's really trade-offs in both things. And so really thinking through like here's all the things I want.

Like people want to be in a relationship because they don't want to feel lonely. Anybody in a relationship can tell you the loneliest thing you feel is when you have a partner and you feel lonely in a relationship, right? Because you don't even have the fantasy that like someone will be leaving you, right? Like that fantasy is gone. Yeah. Well, It's the same thing, right? It's like de-fetishizing kind of the...

Meghan: Yeah, it's just getting real. It's having a more realistic picture. I think that's so important because then you're not, yeah, pinning your hopes on one thing will solve all your problems.

Kara: Yeah. Was there anything else you wish I'd asked you or that you want people to know that you didn't get a chance to share?

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Meghan: I would say in pursuit of building that life that you love, thinking a lot about friendships, this phrase that I keep hearing these days is, it's always your turn. And what that means is like, it's always your turn to reach out. Yes. I read about this book like be the starter is how I phrase it because in a time when people do feel lonely, you know, regardless of relationship status, no one is proud enough to be like, ugh, why did that person invite me to something? Even if you're busy or you can't go, you're still touched and honored that someone thought of you.

And you can give that to someone with an invitation. It doesn't have to be to a big fancy dinner or you block off something for a whole day three months from now or maybe a year from now, right? It can be something short and sweet. It can be running errands with someone. It can be like I'm in your neighborhood. Do you want to come out and walk the dog with me for 20 minutes. Thinking about all these ways you can invite people into your life creates a reciprocal effect, right? Then people are more likely to come to you and be like, oh, you invited me to this. You should come to this, right? It just becomes this beautiful concentric circles of connection.

And I think that understanding that loneliness too, it really is this like more, it's a neutral signal telling you you need connection. It is not something to feel shame about. And I think understanding that can help you get what you need faster. And it's okay to feel lonely, but it is a signal saying like, hey, you need to reach out to someone. And I think that's, you know, there are very real barriers in our society about how we live, who we interact with, right? That can prevent us from feeling more connected than we would like to. But there are opportunities to find connection and build it even in these little spurts.

Kara: Yeah, I love that. It's almost what's coming to mind is like hunger. Like there's the natural... then there's all the cultural baggage we put on top of what we're thinking about it. You feel a desire to connect natural

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human need. That's not a natural human need to be married and living in with a white picket fence. That's the social construction on top of it. The need can be met with any kind of human connection.

Meghan: Yes, totally.

Kara: Yeah. So good. So people can buy your book everywhere. They should do that. But is there somewhere in specific you would like people to find you, follow you, get the book?

Meghan: Sure. Yeah. I'm on Instagram, @DameKeane, Keane is spelled K-E-A-N-E. You can also find the book and order it through <https://MeghanvKeane.com>, again, K-E-A-N-E. And then listen to Life Kit on NPR, anywhere you get your podcasts.

Kara: Amazing. Thanks so much for coming on today.

Meghan: Oh, thanks so much for having me. I appreciate it.

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