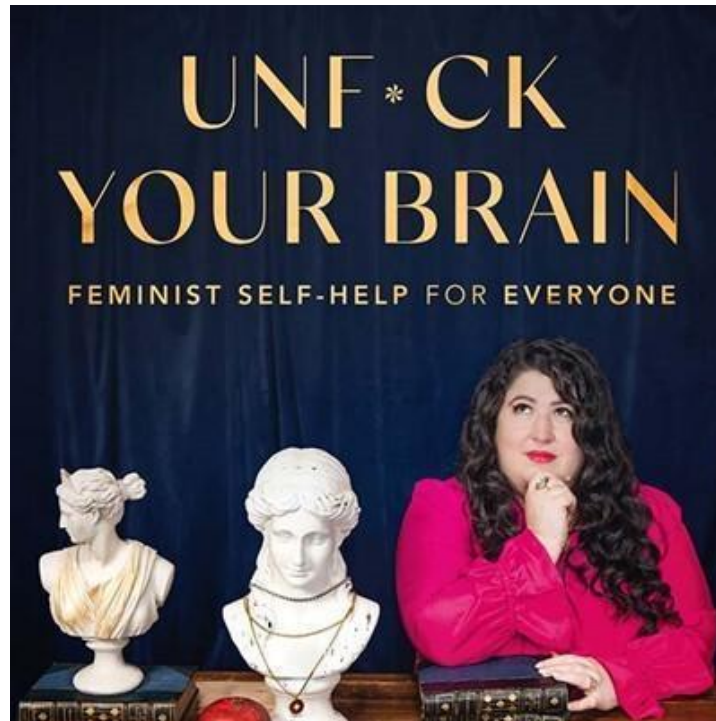


UFYB 394: Hopelessness Is a Lie



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

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If you've ever felt that sinking feeling in your stomach that feels like there's no point in even trying or like there's no escape, then you've felt hopelessness. Hopelessness is one of our most dangerous emotions in terms of the way it makes us behave and the returns we get when we invest mental and emotional energy in that feeling. But it's also one of the most misleading thought patterns that we can have.

I was recently coaching a friend of mine on this, and she's a master coach herself, and she said that this coaching on hopelessness blew her mind and that she insisted that I record a podcast about it immediately. So that's what we're going to get into today: the lie of hopelessness and how to respond when that's what your brain is offering you.

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.

All right, my friends, welcome to today's episode. We are going deep today. Given that we have 394 episodes, this is episode 394, which is also mind-blowing. I actually am surprised that I've never taught on this before. But the longer my journey with thought work, the more I learn myself and the more I see when I coach others. That's really the difference in working with a newly minted coach and with someone who's been doing this for almost a decade and has worked with thousands of brains. You keep learning as you go.

So, before I get into this episode, I want to specify that if you are experiencing hopelessness in a way that feels harmful to your physical well-being, or you are experiencing a loss of interest in daily activities of your life, or things that used to bring you pleasure no longer do. Basically, if you are experiencing any signs of clinical depression, please go get

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evaluated. I always say that thought work is something that everyone needs for their mental health, but it's not the only thing that some of us need or that some of us need at certain times. And since hopelessness can be associated with depression, I want to just give that caveat upfront.

So, we're talking about non-clinical hopelessness here. And I'm defining hopelessness more as a thought pattern even than a feeling. I think in terms of the physical sensation in your body, hopelessness feels often very heavy. It may feel like sadness, but kind of more numb sometimes. It may feel most present in your stomach or your lower body or maybe in your chest. It might feel almost paralyzing. Sometimes it's a sensation of your nervous system going into a state of freeze. Sometimes it's a little more of a limited emotion.

But what really sets hopelessness apart is the thoughts that create it. In the body, it could feel like sadness or overwhelm or the freeze response. But the thoughts that create hopelessness are very distinct because they are not just about being sad or overwhelmed in a given moment. We may feel sad because of our thoughts about something, while knowing that the sadness will pass. We may feel overwhelmed because of our thoughts about something, while knowing that once we get started and complete it, we'll feel better.

Hopelessness comes from the specific belief, often subconscious, that things will not change. Hopelessness is the thought that there's something wrong now that is not going to get better, that will not change. The belief that things will always be the way they are, and so there's no point in trying to change them.

In fact, when I was coaching my friend about this word, hopelessness, the thoughts she was presenting were thoughts that there was no point in trying to solve a problem she had because even if she could make some progress on it, she couldn't fully solve it. Or the progress she could make

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wouldn't count or didn't matter because it wouldn't fully solve the problem forever. And so when I said, "Okay, it sounds like you're feeling hopeless," she was like, "Oh my God, yes." I didn't realize it, but that is what it is. It's hopelessness.

So, even if you don't consciously know that you feel hopeless, you want to be looking for places in your life where you think that a problem can't be solved, or a negative thought or feeling or circumstance can't be changed. And when you think about it, you feel heavy or overwhelmed or paralyzed.

If you think, "I'm in a money crunch right now, but I just need to really cut back on my expenses and maybe I'll ask for more hours at work or maybe I could ask my brother for a loan. I know I'll be able to get back on my feet eventually." That's not hopelessness. You might feel a lot of anxiety or stress or overwhelm in that scenario, right? But it's not hopelessness because it doesn't have the specific thought pattern of thinking that you cannot ever change it and it's not worth even trying.

It would be hopelessness if the thoughts were more like, "I don't have enough money now and no matter what I do, I won't be able to get out of this. Even if I ask for more hours or I get a loan, it won't be enough and I won't be able to keep it up or pay it back. There's no point in even trying, nothing can really be done."

Or for another example, if you think, "I've gone on so many dates and I just keep ending up in dead-end relationships, and I'm worried there might be something wrong with me. But I also really want to find a partner, so I'm going to try to keep working on this." That's not hopelessness. You might feel a lot of shame, you might feel a lot of self-judgment, you might feel anxiety about whether you'll ever find a partner, but you're not hopeless.

Hopelessness would sound like, "I've gone on so many dates and I just keep ending up in dead-end relationships. There's no point to this. There

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are no good people left to date. I'm too old, I'm too much. There's something wrong with me. It's just never going to happen. There's no point in trying."

Obviously, this can be in any area of your life, and those are just two examples. But I'm highlighting that the hopelessness is not feeling stressed, feeling shamed, feeling even overwhelmed. It is the thought pattern around, "There's no point in even trying to fix this. This cannot be changed. Any progress I make won't even count or isn't worth it." Those are the hopelessness thoughts.

And remember, it's very important to remember that the thought and feeling go together, right? Every thought that we ever talk about, the question is how does it feel in your body? So for instance, if you've been wanting someone else to change and they won't, thinking the thought "this person or this relationship will never change," it's not inherently a hopeless thought. It could feel liberatory and helpful, either because it helps you accept the person better and love them more unconditionally, or maybe it helps you walk away from the relationship if you don't want to be in it the way it is.

But either of those are you changing the outcome, right? You're changing your feeling about someone or you're changing the relationship. So it's the combination we're talking about with hopelessness is the combination of the negative, overwhelming, paralyzing feeling, the lack of change, the thought pattern that there's no point to trying, right? No point to trying to fix it, no point to trying to change.

It's when your brain tells you there's no point to trying to do anything because nothing will ever change, and you feel overwhelmed, paralyzed, sad with that thought pattern, right? That's hopelessness.

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Now, I said at the beginning that hopelessness is a lie, and it is. I'm going to explain why it's a lie and how do you respond to your brain when it is offering you this thought and feeling combo after this short break.

So why is hopelessness a lie? Hopelessness is a lie because your brain is assuming that it is omniscient and it knows what will happen, and it knows the outcome of not only your own efforts but everything in the future. So your brain tells you that it knows ahead of time that there's no point in trying, and that because your brain can't see how everything will work out from here, then the only alternative is the certainty that nothing will work out at all.

But your brain is not omniscient. Your brain does not know everything. Your brain actually knows very little when it comes to the future, especially. Your brain cannot predict what is going to happen. Your brain cannot predict how other people will behave. Your brain cannot predict world events. Your brain cannot predict the kinds of opportunities that might come your way. Your brain cannot predict the kinds of ideas it might come up with if it believed there was a point to trying.

So when your brain tells you that there's no point to trying at something, at anything, that is a lie. Your brain cannot know that. You don't have to believe that it will definitely all work out, but it is definitely a lie that your brain can know for sure that it won't.

This is true for personal life things and it's true for big picture things like the economy or politics or anything else. One of the examples I gave my friend when I was coaching her, this is an example that unfortunately is a reality for some people in the world right now, was imagine that you're living in a town and it becomes unsafe to stay there. There's oppression, there's danger, there's some kind of threat to you. And you know that 10 miles away is a town that has a port where ships leave from and a train station. So boats and trains leave from that town to go to a safer place.

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In this scenario, we're imagining you don't have any money for either of those things right now. You can't pay for a boat ticket, you can't pay for a train ticket. Hopelessness would tell you, "Because we don't have the money in our hand right now, because I can't tell yet how I can make it happen, there's no point in trying. There's no point in going to the town. It won't make a difference anyway. I can't afford to get out once I get there. There's no point in even trying."

It's a lie that your brain can know ahead of time that there's no point in even trying. You don't know who you might meet on the way, who might have an extra ticket, who might know someone who's working on a boat or on a train. You don't know whether you might be able to convince someone to let you on for free or to trade work of some kind. You don't know what kind of idea you'll come up with on the 10-mile walk to the town, about how to make some money when you get to the town, or how to be a stowaway, or how to come up with another alternative idea. You make the decision to start the walk so that you have the opportunity to run into other options, to come up with other ideas, to make other decisions to move yourself forward.

I always think about the story that the actress Alex Borstein told. She was accepting an award. She's been in many things, but she was in *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*, and she was accepting an award for her role in that show, I think. And she told the story about her grandmother. So, Alex Borstein is Jewish, her grandmother was Jewish. Her grandmother was a Holocaust survivor. And the reason that she survived the Holocaust is that she was in line to be shot by the Nazis into a pit, which is one of the ways that the Nazis exterminated people. And she asked a guard, "What happens if I step out of line?"

Just imagine that. You're in line, everybody is walking forward to be shot into this pit. Can you imagine a scenario in which your brain would seem more accurate to tell you, "There's nothing you can do. This is hopeless."

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She asked a guard, "What happens if I step out of line?" And he said, "I don't have the heart to shoot you, but someone will." And hopelessness would have said again, "See, there's no point in stepping out of line. Someone else will shoot me even if he won't." But she did step out of line, and she didn't get shot. And she survived. And so she survived, and now all of her descendants are alive because of that. I cannot tell the story without tearing up.

As Alex Borstein said, "She stepped out of line." Thankfully, most of us are not facing that kind of circumstance. We are actually hopeless about things that have much better odds of being solvable or survivable than being in a line with Nazis about to get shot into a pit. I never say that to shame us for our thoughts or feelings. The human brain is the human brain, and it will apply how it works to your life, whatever it is.

But the principle is so important, right? Hopelessness is your brain telling you that it knows everything that will happen, that nothing new or unpredictable could occur, and therefore, no change can be coming or at least no positive change. But you cannot know that for sure. Right? If that story tells us anything, it tells us that.

And on a more philosophical level, right, or even a metaphysical level, or quantum mechanics level, the universe is nothing but change. Right? On a material level, we are all molecules in motion all the time. And we all interact with each other and the world in ways we cannot possibly predict ahead of time. Chaos theory tells us this too.

So when your brain tells you that something is hopeless or there's no point or nothing can change, here are some simple thoughts you can practice: I can't know that's true. Surprising things happen all the time. I have no idea what might happen if I try. I don't have to see the full solution now to know it's worth trying. Hopelessness is a lie. The universe is always in motion and always full of change.

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Our brains do not know what will happen almost ever. And that's sometimes scary, but it's also the most beautiful thing because it means there's always hope for the future available to us. We just have to choose to access it and to reject the lie of hopelessness. Have a beautiful week, my friends.

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.