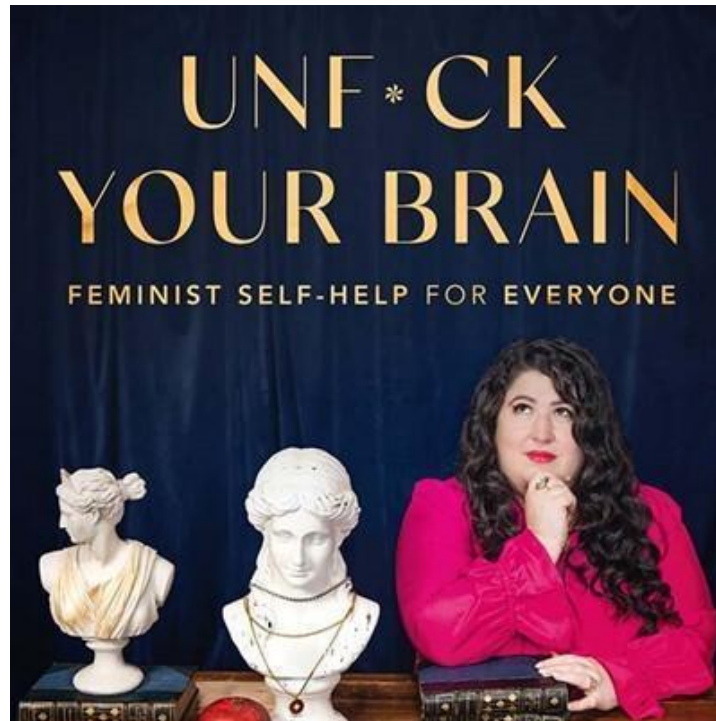


# UFYB 395: Why Women Care Too Much About What Other People Think



## Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Kara Loewentheil**

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## UFYB 395: Why Women Care Too Much About What Other People Think

Have you ever had a man ask you, why do you care so much what so-and-so thinks? And it seemed impossible to even answer it, really, because how could you not care what other people think about you?

Well, the surprising truth is that while part of caring what other people think of you is baked into humans as a species, another big part of it is actually created by our gender-based socialization. So when a man in your life seems confused about why you care so much what other people think of you, it's not because he's just naturally more confident or secure. It's because he's been socialized to be that way. Whereas your brain has been trained to fixate on other people's opinions.

In this week's episode, we're going to learn why you care so much about what everyone else thinks of you and why bringing more awareness to that is the first crucial step to being able to change being so fixated on it. So 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.

All right, my friends, we're going to be talking today about why we care so much about what other people think of us. So let's start with some evolutionary biology because there is some baseline human species caring what other people think for most of us. Not all of us, to be sure, it can vary for a lot of reasons, even among people socialized as women, depending on things like family history, childhood experiences, even your neurotype can impact how much you think about other people's opinions of you.

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But in general, as a species, humans are predisposed to care what other people think of us because we evolved in small tribes of hunter-gatherers where your community was essential to your survival. So your status within that tribe was a big deal, and the regard in which your fellow tribesfolk held you mattered to your physical survival. And we know that the brain gets really wired into anything that is relevant to its survival or that it even perceives as relevant, even if it's not.

So you can imagine in terms of evolutionary pressure that people who did not care at all about social connections, who did not participate in communal life, who alienated everyone around them, probably did not survive as well as those who were attuned to the expectations and opinions of those around them. If you eat more than your share of dinner before everyone has had a serving, that's not going to go unnoticed in a small community. If you break the communal norms or rules, if you seem to think you're more important than the collective, if you don't pull your weight in communal living, right? All that stuff would have been to your detriment in a small interdependent society.

So most humans have this baseline. It's why we don't like to feel in someone's debt, for instance, right? If someone does us a favor, we immediately want to do them a favor to equalize. It's why we have hospitality norms that make it uncomfortable to go to someone's house without bringing something. Shows up in a lot of different ways, right? This kind of instinctive desire to contribute and participate and not do less than someone else and be well thought of by those around us.

But just because there's a baseline of that does not mean that your current experience of how much you care about what other people think and in what ways you care about it is inherent, is natural, or is necessary. Because the other huge impact on how much we care about what other people think is how we are socialized. Men are taught that they have

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inherent worth and value. They are taught that they have the right to exist without having to justify that existence by pleasing or serving others.

But women are told in a million ways, subtle and loud, visible and invisible, that they exist at the pleasure of other people. We feel acutely that our belonging, our worth, and our safety are contingent on keeping other people happy and on what other people think of us. And historically, this was really true. If you're a group that doesn't have your own social, economic, or legal rights, then your whole life is contingent on other people deeming you worthwhile, deserving, or acceptable.

And there are very clear, although often totally conflicting, standards that women are supposed to meet. They are contradictory often, but they all feel real, true, and significant, and we get feedback reinforcing them from society all the time. We're supposed to care about how we look, but not too much, right? You certainly shouldn't be vain. We're supposed to want to have kids and take care of them, but you also should not expect financial support from a man, then you're a gold digger. You're supposed to want to work, but also be a full-time mom and somehow do both of those things at the same time. You're supposed to like sex, certainly you don't want to be frigid, but don't like sex too much, then you're slutty.

Right? You should be generous and giving, but not a doormat and don't be a pushover. You should age gracefully, right? It's pathetic to try to stay young. But also, once you're older, you're going to be invisible and irrelevant, so make sure you try to look young all the time. You should be confident and work hard, but also be a team player, but also stand up for yourself, but also don't be too assertive. I could go on and on. We have all felt the impossibility of living up to these norms.

But what I think we aren't really as aware of is the insidious impact they have on the way that we process our experiences and think about our lives.

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And we don't always connect those impossible to satisfy norms and how deeply they're embedded in our subconscious or our conscious minds. We don't always connect that to our preoccupation and fixation with what other people think of us because our brain always comes up with a whole bunch of reasons that it's very sensible to care what everyone else thinks of us. And our brain is always coming up with reasons that it matters what other people think of us. And we aren't really aware most of the time that the reason we're so focused on this is because it's gotten linked up, hooked up with our survival drive.

Right? And that historically, until very recently, it really was a matter of survival for women. So what I want to do in the second half of this episode is really help you understand and explore more deeply how this is showing up and impacting you in your life. And I'm also going to give you an exercise I want you to do this week. So all of that is coming up right after this short break.

So, we're back and let's review the ingredients of this mental stew. We have evolutionary bias towards caring what other people think. Then women are socialized to believe that their worth and value depends on what other people think of them. And what other people think of them is based on how well they live up to a huge number of impossible social norms, many of which actually conflict with each other.

So these three ingredients in this bad, bad stew produce the eternal sense that so many women have that they are always doing everything wrong. Right? We feel we are always doing everything wrong. And if you ask yourself or someone else, another woman, how she feels she's doing in any area of her life, she will probably say that she is not doing well enough, or she'll say, oh, I'm doing pretty good except blah, blah, blah, right? Here's the things that aren't good. Here's the things I have to fix. We don't even

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recognize this as perfectionism, but so much of the coaching I do comes down to women just assuming that however they're doing it is wrong.

And whatever they're doing is wrong, and whatever they're thinking and feeling is wrong. Whoever they are is wrong. And not only that, not only do we constantly feel we're doing everything wrong, or there's something wrong with us, but we also believe that everyone else is noticing and judging us for that wrongness, for all of these failures. So our brains fixate on constantly assessing how other people might be evaluating us based on all these conflicting impossible social expectations.

And because this is wired into our brain as a life-threatening danger, evolutionarily speaking, we can't stop thinking about it. We can't just ignore it. Our brain is focusing on it the same way it would focus on a threat to our physical health or well-being or survival. So when somebody says, oh, just don't give it so much weight. That doesn't really cut it, right? We would give it less weight if we could, if we knew how to get our brain to do that right now.

And there's this compounding problem, which is that women are also socialized to believe that we are frivolous, shallow, vain, obsessed with other people's opinions of us in a neurotic way, that we're weak or silly, right? For thinking about this. So, a lot of us both care desperately about what other people think of us, but then beat ourselves up about that. Right? We tell ourselves that we shouldn't care what other people think of us, or we know it's not supposed to matter what other people think of us, or we argue with ourselves about whether or not the other people we're imagining do really think the things that we fear they think about us.

And we spend a lot of time trying to interpret those people's words and actions to constantly be trying to suss out what they really think about us. And we're discussing that with all of our friends and trying to figure it out as

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if it's this mystery to be solved. And all of this keeps us spinning and focused on trying to manage everyone else's thoughts about us.

So next week's episode, I'm going to go into what you can do to start changing these thoughts. But I separated these two parts of the lesson because it's really important to understand why this is happening. We tend to try to rush past true awareness and acceptance of our thought patterns because we think we shouldn't have them. We think they're silly, that we should be more confident, we should be stronger, we should have a better mindset, we should be doing our thought work more or perfectly.

So we try to pretend we don't have these concerns or fears, or we tell ourselves that we shouldn't, or we try to rush to reassuring ourselves that we don't have them, or asking all of our friends if they think that someone else thinks a certain way about us, right? We just have all of this drama around it. So it's important to just take a deep breath and sit with the understanding and awareness here.

If you have a brain that is like 99% of the brains I have coached in my career, you do care what other people think of you. You care about it too much. And that's not a criticism. That's just a reality based on how you were socialized. It might be in your professional life, it might be in your romantic life, it might be in your social life, your creative life, maybe those closest to you, maybe it's strangers on the subway. It might be all of the above.

The reason you care so much is that you've been taught that those opinions are the barometer by which you can measure your worth and value and safety. So, it's absolutely sensible, reasonable, smart for your brain to be obsessed with what other people think of you, given the premises it has been taught. This is the crucial thing to understand. It's not



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actually true that other people's opinions are a matter of life and death in 99.9% of situations today that you're in.

It doesn't actually matter nearly as much as you think it does what other people think of you. But it is absolutely reasonable that your brain is thinking that it does because of how it's been socialized. It's not weak, it's not silly, it's not frivolous. It actually makes total sense. Your brain's been trained to do this. And we need to be able to acknowledge that, to acknowledge how profound the impact is of this socialization on our minds and our lives and really take it seriously.

Right? If we just try to pretend it's not happening or that it's not a big deal, we are not able to do the deeply powerful transformative work of changing it. It's like if you had a deep wound and you just tried to pretend it was a surface scrape. Putting a bandage on it isn't going to solve it. The way you treat a surface scrape isn't the way you treat a deep wound. So this week, what I want to invite you to do is just practice taking an honest and compassionate self-inventory of how often your brain starts to think about what someone else is thinking about you.

Just jot it down on your phone. Every time you worry about why someone looked at you on the street and wonder if there's something wrong with your dress or your outfit doesn't look good or they think you look too old or whatever. Every time you think about what your boss thinks of your work performance, you worry about what your colleagues think of your report. Every time you feel guilty for not baking for the bake sale and you imagine the other parents thinking that you don't contribute.

Every time you say no to sex and you worry about your partner thinking you're not fun anymore, or you ask for sex and your partner says no, and then you worry about your partner thinking you're not attractive anymore. Right? So many ways this comes up. Just bring awareness and self-

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compassion to this and get curious about how often these thoughts are running through your brain. If you just take the time to start to pay attention to this, you will be shocked how much it's happening, and you will start to see how deeply it's impacting you.

Don't be afraid of that. Okay? This is solvable, and I'm going to help you solve it. But we have to take the problem seriously and give it the respect that it deserves. It's not small, it's not frivolous, it's not shallow. It is a deep conflation in your brain between other people's opinions and your survival. And your brain takes that very seriously, as it should. Your brain should take survival threats seriously.

The problem is that this isn't a survival threat anymore. And that's what we're going to have to change your brain to resolve. But minimizing it to yourself or judging yourself are not going to help you solve this. We need to take it seriously, give the problem the respect it deserves, really get to know the scope of the problem in order to be able to solve it. So that's what I want you to work on this week. And then you can come back next week to next week's episode for the first step of changing it, the first important piece of information you need to know about how your brain works in order to change it.

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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

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