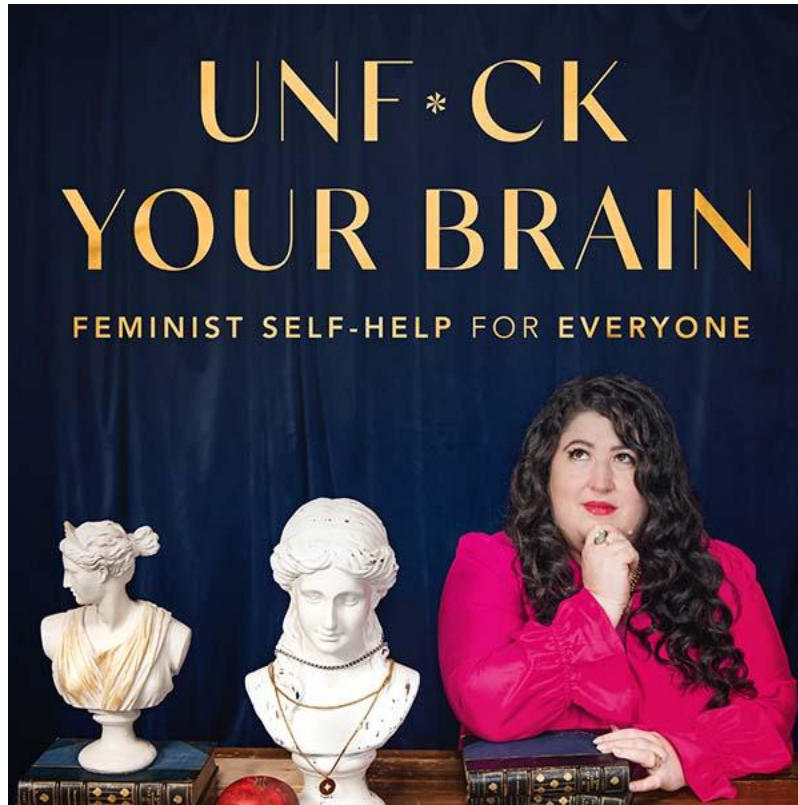# UFYB 398: How to Solve Insecurity

Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

<u>Kara Loewentheil</u>

<u>UnF*ck Your Brain with Kara Loewentheil</u>

UFYB 398: How to Solve Insecurity

The other day, I was being interviewed by a young woman in high school for a project she was doing. And she asked me, "What is the one word that best describes you when you were in high school?" I did not have to think hard to answer this question because the word "insecure" immediately popped into my brain.

And it really was not just high school. I would say that was the defining word of my life for many years, well into my 30s, until I learned how to change my thinking. So today, I really want to dive into what insecurity actually is because back then, I did not really know what it meant in the sense that I used it to describe a lot of different feelings, but without really having a clear idea of what I was describing. I just thought it meant feeling bad about myself. But it actually means so much more than that, and we have to understand what it really is to be able to understand how to change it. So that's what we're going to get into today.

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, so we've all used these words or this phrase probably: "I just feel insecure." Sometimes we're just saying, "I just feel insecure," full stop. And if we say it generally, without talking about something specific, it's usually a stand-in for, "I don't feel good about myself generally." It can mean I feel self-conscious. It can mean I have negative thoughts about myself. It can mean I generally don't feel good enough, even though I don't entirely know what that even means.

Or sometimes we're saying we feel insecure about something in particular. "I just feel insecure about my stomach." "I just feel insecure about still being single." "I just feel insecure about my career." In that case, what we're

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really describing is having a set of negative thoughts about ourselves in a given area of our lives. So being insecure, we mean we feel behind, we feel flawed, we feel lacking, we feel not good enough.

But where does insecurity even come from? Have you ever paused to think about this on a deeper level? It comes from thinking we're not good enough, yes. But how do we know we are not good enough? Really, let's think about that. How do we know that we're not good enough? Where did that belief come from? So it means we feel insecure because we think we don't measure up.

But measure up to what? What is the standard? According to whom are we not meeting the standard? According to whom is the standard a good standard? We don't really think about any of that. Because the truth is that it's all made up. Society invents impossible standards for women to try to achieve. And as we talk about often here, they're often essentially contradictory. So don't be a prude, but don't be too sexual. Don't let yourself go, but don't be vain about your looks. Don't always be dieting, but also don't eat too much. Don't be too ambitious or care about making money, but don't be lazy. Don't want a man to just take care of you either. Don't be a gold digger.

And also while you're doing all that and making sure that you follow those impossible standards perfectly, you also just need to make sure that everyone who knows you or has heard of you or met you once 10 years ago, thinks highly of you in all areas of your life at all times. So, we have all these impossible standards that we're trying to live up to all the time. And we feel insecure because we are not managing to meet them. And of course, we're not managing to meet them. That's by design. It's absolutely impossible to meet them.

We only know that we're supposed to feel insecure about something because we've been taught to compare ourselves constantly to everyone

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around us and to an abstract impossible set of ideals that society gave us. If you imagine if you just grew up in the forest, raised by wolves, you wouldn't have all these ideas of who you're supposed to be and how you're supposed to measure up and how you're competing with everyone else and you need to compare yourself to everyone else. You would be free of all of that.

So it's really important to understand that your brain has been programmed to feel insecure. The way we think it works is, "Oh, I compare myself to others or I compare myself to who I think I should be, and I see all these places that I'm lacking, and so I naturally feel insecure." That makes sense. But that's not actually how it works. That's actually backwards. We do not do an objective evaluation of ourselves and then feel insecure about the areas where we don't measure up.

It's actually the other way around. Your brain is programmed from the beginning to feel insecure. Before you even know why, you are absorbing the message from society, from your family, from media, from everything around you that you are supposed to be perfect and you aren't worthy unless you are perfect. A very gender-based message that people socialized as women get. So you have an existing sense of insecurity, an existing pattern of thinking insecure thoughts, an existing habit of feeling bad about yourself.

Those things actually predate having these specific places you feel that you are lacking. You have this habit well before you even have a career to evaluate. You are taught to think of yourself this way well before you even have romantic or sexual interest in anyone. You are programmed to have this belief system from the beginning, and then your brain goes around looking for different circumstances to attach it to. So your brain is actually on the hunt for anything to "quote unquote" justify this feeling of inadequacy that society programmed into you before you even know how to compare yourself to other people or to these more adult social standards.

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So the upshot of this is that our natural instinct about how to solve insecurity is absolutely wrong. It's natural that we think that the way to stop feeling insecure is to fix the area of our life where we feel insecure. Just try to change the circumstance or at least hide it from ourselves. So if we just don't wear anything that shows our stomach, then we won't feel so insecure about people seeing it. If we just can get a partner, then we won't have to feel insecure about being single. If we just get promoted, we won't have to feel insecure about where we are in our career.

It all seems to make sense, but it actually doesn't fix the problem. And if you think about it, I bet you have experienced this. You change your circumstance and yet you still feel insecure about it. Or you change your insecurity to something else. So, maybe you find you're insecure about dating, you find a partner, but you still feel insecure because now your brain is telling you, "Yes, but this is your first real relationship and everyone else has already been married for a decade, and if you had found a real relationship earlier, then you would already be living together, already be married, already have kids. It's still shameful that it took you this long. Maybe there's something wrong with him that he does want to be with you." Your brain just is doing that.

Or sometimes what happens is, okay, you find a partner and your brain thinks, "Check." And then you start obsessing about something similar in a different area. So you start obsessing about your friendships and feeling insecure about not having enough friends or the right kind of friends or your friends don't like you as much as you like them or your friends don't initiate hanging out with you. You're always the one inviting them somewhere. So your brain either just keeps on with the same insecurity or it just transfers it to a new circumstance.

And that's very perplexing, normally, but now you can understand why because your brain was preset, programmed to create this insecurity and it's just looking for a home. It's just looking for a hook to hang it on. This is

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so important and it's something that most people never understand their whole lives. Even if they get coaching or therapy, if they aren't going to someone who understands how socialization impacts women's brains. If the insecurity predates the circumstances, changing the circumstances does not change the insecurity. The specific insecurity is just the flavor of the day and the brain will just find other flavors of the day if that one's not available anymore.

So we have to change it another way. And yes, of course, if you've listened to more than one episode of this podcast, you know I'm going to say, "Well, you got to change your thoughts." But I'm going to explain specifically how your thoughts need to shift in this arena for this problem right after this quick break.

So if changing our circumstances won't change our insecurity, what do we need to do? We have to go to the root of the problem. Yes, it's helpful if you're insecure about being single to work on thoughts about being single, sure. But you also have to have awareness of the bigger picture insecurity and how to address it. Otherwise, you just end up doing that insecurity whack-a-mole.

So what's the antidote to insecurity? What is the opposite thing that we want to feel? If we stop being insecure, what do we start being or what do we need to become? So I think most people would say confidence, and I don't think that's wrong. In fact, I think that's right in terms of that being the kind of feeling we have when we heal the thought patterns that create insecurity.

But confidence is the outcome. It's the dish at the end of the recipe. It's the fruits of the thought work labor that you need to do, of the skills you need to build to produce it. So what are the ingredients that make it up? When you break down the word insecure, it means not secure. And that suggests that the opposite of insecurity isn't exactly confidence, but security. Or we could

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say that security is what underlies the feeling of confidence that we all want when we feel insecure.

But security in what? What do we want to be secure in? We know security is not going to come from basing our self-esteem on these social standards and just living up to them better or just feeling better about not living up to them. Any of that is just still defining us by or in opposition to those social standards.

I think that when we feel insecure, what we really need is emotional security, which means safety with ourselves. So yes, we do want to feel confident, and feeling confident is the outgrowth of that. But the bottom line, what's missing when we feel insecure is security. We feel secure when we know that our own self-acceptance is not conditional on living up to any particular set of standards, even our own standards for ourselves.

And that doesn't mean that we don't have our own values or standards or goals, but it means two really important things. First, we have to be sure that any standards or goals we have really are ours and that we like our reasons for having them. So we're not just regurgitating standards that someone else—our parents, our peers, or society—set for us that we aren't even sure if we value. And second, we have to have a compassionate relationship with ourselves whether or not we're currently achieving those goals.

Being nice to yourself if you aren't living up to your own standards doesn't mean you will become a lawless sociopath. It means giving yourself human grace. If you have those two things, if you have standards and goals you've set for yourself based on your own values, and you have a compassionate relationship with yourself, then you don't feel insecure. You know why you have a goal or a standard or a value. So you're only trying to live up to things you actually care about, which already removes a lot of insecurity.

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And that allows you to have compassion for yourself if there are some you aren't able to reach yet.

Because when you've chosen it for yourself, you understand why you have it and why it matters. When society gives you a goal or a value or a standard, the reason you want to live up to it is just to be good enough for society to validate that you're worthy. So of course, anytime you're not meeting it, you feel insecure, you feel unsafe because your very worth is in question. But when you've chosen your own values and standards and goals, you've chosen them for better reasons than proving to patriarchy that you're good enough to exist.

If you have a value of being kind, for instance, and you're not kind, you can have curiosity and compassion about why because you don't regard yourself as fundamentally unworthy just for having an unkind moment. So thinking about security as the opposite of insecurity requires you to create emotional safety with yourself by changing your relationship with yourself. That's where confidence can spring from. We have to feel safe before we can feel confident. We have to feel secure before we can go adventuring. We have to feel stable before we can dream big and show up bigger. So, when we feel insecure, the question is, oh, how do I create security for myself?

So if you feel insecure a lot, here's what I want you to do. Pick an area where you feel insecure. First, get really clear with yourself on what the standard is that you're measuring yourself against and feeling insecure about. So ask yourself, where did that standard even come from? Do you want to believe in that standard? Do you care about it? Is it really something you want to spend your life trying to live up to?

And if you do, or even if you don't, but it feels like you don't know how to change it yet, what would it look like to create more emotional safety for yourself right now? What could you practice thinking that would redirect

your brain from insecurity to creating more security with yourself? How can you start believing just a little bit in your value and your worth beyond those social standards? Or even if it's your own personal standard and you're not quite living up to it.

That's where security grows from and that's how we solve insecurity for good.

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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 guarantee it. Come join us at www.UnfuckYourBrain.com/society. I can't wait to see you there.