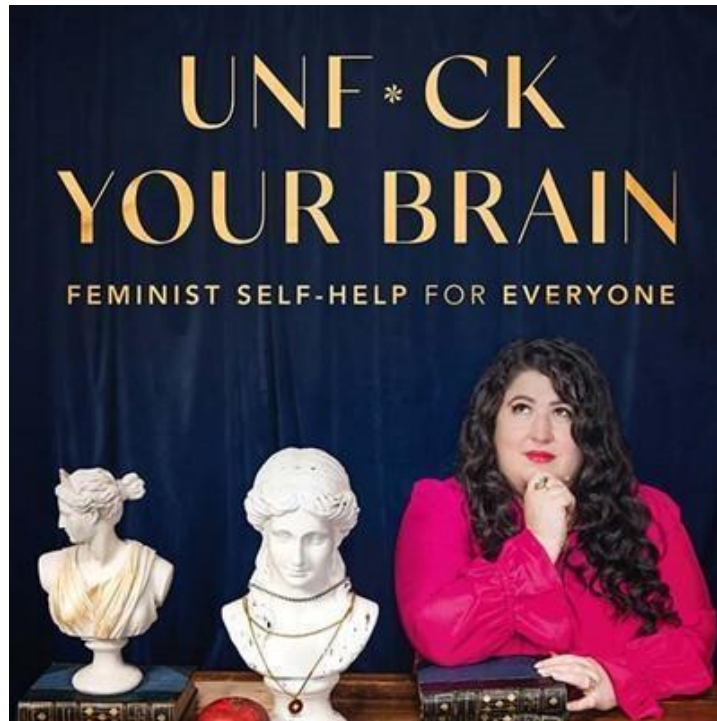


UFYB 442: Self Belief v Self Esteem (And Which One Wins)



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

[UnF*ck Your Brain with Kara Loewentheil](#)

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We hear a lot about self-esteem these days. Why it's important, how to get more of it, what happens when you don't have it. But have you ever heard of self-belief? Self-belief is actually more important than self-esteem. Today I'm going to explain the crucial difference between these two concepts and how you can use self-belief to propel you forward in your life.

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, yesterday I was coaching a client in the Feminist Self-Help Society, and side note, by the way, because some of you are messaging us about it. We're getting a lot of emails and DMs wanting to know when the Society will open for new members again, and I don't have a date for that because we're working really hard on an exciting new program that we're going to be launching in December. And this is going to be like a smaller group program, kind of akin to what I used to do when I first started out coaching, but with like all new teachings. So I'm super excited about it, and don't worry, you will all be hearing about it as soon as we're ready to share more, but good things are coming. So, that answers a question if you've been emailing or DMing us asking about the Society. Like keep an eye out, keep an ear out. Something new is coming.

Okay, so back to business. I was coaching my client in the Society yesterday, and she was experiencing this problem where she was trying to improve something in her life and she followed some advice she got about solving it, and the problem got worse. Now, from the outside, it might seem clear what to do, right? Just stop doing the thing that's making it worse. Like go back to what you were doing before, because at least you'll get back to your baseline, right? And then you could try to improve it a different way.

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But she was all up in her head about it, believing that the person who had given her the advice was the authority and they were right, and she must be doing it wrong or having the wrong thoughts or something. That it was not working for her because of something that was wrong with her or because of she was doing something wrong. So like she was at fault. And she wanted coaching on helping her keep believing that this process she was trying to follow would work.

But I did not really give a fuck whether that process would work, honestly, nor did I really care if she did or did not keep trying to follow it. Because what I cared about was how her self-belief was driving her reaction to this problem and her reaction to the solution she was trying and her reaction to that solution not working. And that really encapsulates like the difference between self-esteem and self-belief. So, let's talk about what self-esteem is, what self-belief is, and this story and why it's an example of why self-belief is so important.

So, self-esteem is a positive opinion of yourself, which is great. I think that's important. I am not against self-esteem, but self-esteem to me is like a static opinion. It's like an evaluation of yourself. It's having a good opinion of yourself. But it's kind of a static thing. It's like a snapshot in time of an interpretation, an evaluation, or your opinion of yourself. And I think you can have good or even great self-esteem for where you are now and still find that you aren't moving forward in your life in the ways you want.

Because what you need to move forward in life to make decisions, to take action that takes you beyond where you are now, is self-belief. And self-belief is not a static opinion about who you are now. It's an evolving belief in who you are capable of becoming. So self-belief is a deep trust that you can change and grow and evolve. It's a belief that you can handle whatever comes up. It's not a belief that you'll be perfect. Like that's what people think they need for self-belief. They think that in order to believe in themselves, they would need to be able to trust themselves to always make

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the right decision, never falter in their progress, and do it all "quote unquote" right, whatever that means. And so like my client, for her, she would have thought that self-belief meant she would believe that she knew for sure what the right answer to solving her problem was.

That's not what self-belief means. Self-belief is not believing you have all the answers. It's believing that you're capable of showing up as the person you want to be and that you are capable of having authority in your own life. Not all the time, not perfectly, but in a pattern of consistent growth over time. Self-belief is the third element of the Confidence Compass because it's where all of the cognitive change required to build your confidence and move towards your future self happens.

In that first phase of self-awareness, you're getting to know your current thoughts. And then in that second phase of self-compassion, you're working on your resistance to your current reality and your judgment of yourself, which is what's keeping you trapped. Right? So if you haven't listened to the last two episodes, like go back, do that, then come back here. The third phase, self-belief, is where you can start to build new and different thoughts. And that's why the skill of cultivating self-belief is so central to confidence. Because what makes you confident isn't believing you know what will happen, that you are perfect, that everyone loves you, and that nothing will ever go wrong.

What makes you confident is having rock solid self-belief. Knowing yourself, accepting yourself, being able to challenge yourself to continue to grow and evolve with faith that you can do that, and with self-love and support instead of self-judgment and rejection. So if you think about my client's situation, self-belief would look like having trust in her own authority and discernment to decide whether what she was learning was working for her, whether she wanted to continue trying it, if she wanted to adapt it, but like keeping her self-belief that she was a person who could solve this problem, who could grow in whatever ways were required to advance the

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goal she was trying to get to, and who would have herself in like a position of self-belief and authority and have her own back in that so that getting advice on what to do is totally fine.

It might be useful, but it wouldn't be above her own discernment, her own evaluation, her own self-belief, right? She that she wouldn't abandon herself or sort of prostrate herself to this other authority and assume that authority was always right.

Self-belief would mean keeping that kind of sovereignty almost of, okay, I've gotten some advice, I'm going to try it. If it works, great. If it doesn't work, maybe I'll troubleshoot, maybe I'll go back, whatever, but if it keeps not working, then I'm going to trust myself that it's just not working and I can try something else. And I'm not going to get paralyzed by trying to make the right decision or do it right or get someone else's approval.

So, self-belief, self-sovereignty, that authority, that all sounds wonderful, right? Like what's the catch? Why wouldn't somebody want that? There is no catch, but there are two subconscious kinds of fears about confidence that people have, especially people socialized as women or in other marginalized identities. And we have to bring those to light and dismantle them for you to be able to create more self-belief. Because otherwise, your brain is going to pull the emergency brake when you try to believe in yourself more and you're not going to be able to figure out why you're stuck or spinning. So, I'm going to get into next those thought errors and how to disarm them after this quick break.

So, self-belief sounds great, right? Like who doesn't want to have their own back? Who doesn't want to feel confident to go after their dream life? I'll tell you who, it's your subconscious. That's who. Your subconscious has one block to confidence about what other people will think, and then a block to confidence about what you will think. So we're going to talk about the block to confidence that's about what other people will think first.

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Women are socialized that being likable is the most important thing. Being accepted, being validated, being desired and approved of. And part of that for people socialized as women is being humble. That's what we're taught we're supposed to do. Women are not supposed to think they're smart or talented or creative or attractive or anything else positive. Now we sort of think like little girls are supposed to, but at some point when they become women, then it's bad again. Even things that society tells us to be, we're not supposed to think we're good at being.

Like a woman is supposed to spend a lot of time and money and effort being attractive, but if she knows she's attractive, then she's vain and stuck up, or she's, you know, using sex to get ahead. Or the best kind of mother according to society is a like selfless mother who has no identity outside of her kids. So she certainly can't think she's great at being a mom. A woman who is supposed supposedly to want to let a man lead and be willing to stay home and not, you know, emasculate someone by making more money than him. But if she doesn't want to work, she's a freeloader and a gold digger. There are these impossible double standards. And they conspire to make women feel like the only relative safety they can find is just being small, never thinking too much of themselves, never putting themselves out there in too big of a way.

And what's really fascinating about this is it's all relative. I've coached women who have never gone for any big goal at all because of this. But I've also coached women who have pretty high-powered careers, who are law firm partners or principals at design firms or seven figure or eight figure even entrepreneurs, and they're still struggling with this just at their own level.

I went through this myself. My coach once made me want to throw up by trying to coach me to accept the idea that I was brilliant, which I will tell you the truth, I put it in quotation marks when writing this podcast script because I still am not totally there yet. It feels more comfortable than it

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used to; the first time I felt this like almost sickening feeling of revulsion about like claiming that word. The idea of giving myself that much credit and more importantly signaling to other people that I thought that highly of myself was so uncomfortable, and I'm still not all the way there, although I've made a lot of progress on it.

So when we're building our self-belief, we have this fear that if we like ourselves too much, other people will like us less and we will be rejected. And evolutionarily rejection by the tribe, very dangerous. And even until fairly recent history for women, being rejected for like thinking too much of themselves or having too many opinions or wanting too much in their lives or whatever, or going against the norm was physically dangerous. We didn't have economic rights, we didn't have legal rights, right? We really were dependent on the people who did have rights, who were mostly men, to care for us since we didn't have our own rights, or not care for us, but like their kind of legal protection. So this fear that other people might not like us and we might be rejected feels very, very scary.

And here's the god's honest truth. Some people may not like you as much when you are more confident. It's not as many as you think. When we're truly confident, we move through our lives with a lot of self-possession and grace. Being self-confident doesn't make you aggressive or dismissive of others. Like the stereotype of a confident woman being an aggressive ballbuster is actually a patriarchal stereotype, and aggression is more likely to come from insecurity, really. But there still are people who cannot handle a confident woman. And to that, I will tell you all what I once told a client at an event I was hosting. I was coaching her and she said, "I'm afraid if I really love myself, I'll be too much for people to swallow." And the coaching that I gave her was, "So let them fucking choke."

The people who can't swallow it are not your people. And there are many more people who will be drawn to it who want to swallow it, to continue this metaphor. I think I'm proof of that. So yes, some people may not like you if

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you're more confident. But when you love yourself, you're not going to give a shit. You're not going to be angry at them even. You're just not going to care. And we have to teach our brains that it's not dangerous. For the vast majority of the time now, speaking up in a meeting, going for your goals, learning to love yourself, creating self-belief and self-confidence are not actually physically dangerous for women. The vast, vast majority of the time now.

The other subconscious block we can have to building more self-belief is internal. It's our own opinions of ourselves. And those that's kind of the twin fear that being self-confident, having more self-belief will make us arrogant and or delusional. So let's address arrogance first or kind of selfishness, self-absorption. When you don't like yourself, you think about yourself constantly. There is no one more self-absorbed than someone who doesn't like themselves. You are constantly evaluating whether you sounded stupid in the meeting, why did you eat that cookie? How does your hair look today? If anyone you've ever met is mad at you, whether your partner still loves you, whether your ex has moved on, if you're fucking up your kids forever, it goes on and on and on.

When you don't like yourself, you are obsessed with yourself. Obsessed. When you have self-belief, when you have self-confidence, self-love, self-trust, you really don't need to think about yourself that much because you're essentially in a securely attached relationship with yourself. If you think about dating or friendships, if someone's hot and cold on you or they reject you and you want to be close to them, you think about them a lot because you're so anxious about it. If someone is just reliable and loving and secure, you can go about your day thinking about lots of other stuff. The same is true for your relationship with yourself.

So, having more self-belief and having more self-confidence does not make you arrogant or narcissistic, which is like really wild that we're trained to think this because we don't think that being baseline respectful and nice to

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our kid or our partner or our friend is going to turn them into a narcissist. So it's not going to do that to you either. The second part of the fear is the fear that we will be delusional. Like we will think we are better at something than we are. Okay, so why is that so terrifying? Our brain thinks that we will miss something and then there will be some kind of negative consequence. So if we think we're better at something than we are and then it turns out we weren't that good at it, we worry that we'll fail or feel humiliated. And this is perfectionism, right? The fear of ever failing and the idea that if you fail, it's inherently humiliating. That is like definitional for perfectionism.

But here's the thing about self-belief. It's not about believing you're already flawless or an expert or perfect. It's about believing in your own ability to try and learn and grow. Stumbles and failure are a part of that and you do need to get comfortable with them. But when we worry that we're delusional, it's like we're imagining that self-belief would mean having the thought, I already know exactly what to do to become a successful entrepreneur right now, or I can perform neurosurgery even though I haven't been trained. And that's not what I mean by self-belief, right? Self-belief is I believe in my own ability to learn new things and try and fail and keep going and become a successful entrepreneur if I put in the work and keep managing my mind and building my self-belief. Or I believe I'm capable of becoming a neurosurgeon and learning what I need to know to do that if that's something I really want.

It's not believing in some sort of like fantasy outcome immediately. It's about believing you have the capacity. It's growth mindset, right? Believing you have the ability to learn and grow and evolve and move towards your goals. And it means having a definition of what successful would mean that's about you and your journey, not about what everyone else thinks. That you have the capacity, the qualities, the potential to become the person you want to be or achieve the goal you want to achieve.

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So part of this work is teaching your brain that it's safe to believe in yourself. That self-belief is so important in order to move to self-actualization. That is the fourth part of the Confidence Compass. It's the part where you actually start to act differently in the world and produce different outcomes in your life. That's what we're going to be talking about next week. So you're going to want to tune in for the podcast, but you can also work on this with me live in person.

I am teaching Create More Confidence, which is a pop-up coaching program that's just a few days long, but we are going to go deep on confidence. I'm going to be teaching you what the science says about what really creates confidence. We're going to be exploring your definition of confidence and where you are strong on confidence in your life and where you maybe have some skills that could be stronger. I'm going to be giving you some evidence-backed assessments of your confidence so that you know exactly what to work on in order to create more confidence afterwards.

These live pop-up programs, challenges are super fun. We're going to have a regular tier where we're just going to be doing our trainings together, which I teach live. And then we also have a VIP tier where we have live Q&A and coaching calls right afterwards to get help with your questions, get everything answered, get coaching on your confidence. It's going to be a great time. We're going to be doing this in early December so that you can really get that confidence up going into the holiday season, which can be a little confidence challenging for folks sometimes, and certainly to get you really well prepared for like an incredibly confident 2026.

So here's how you can join. You just go to unfuckyourbrain.com/confident or you can text your email to +1-347-997-1784 and the code word is confident. 347-997-1784, code word is confident, or go to unfuckyourbrain.com/confident. I highly recommend signing up for the VIP tier when we did a similar pop-up program when I was launching my coach

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certification. We had such good conversations in that VIP room and I was able to do so much coaching. It was just like a really fun, interactive, intimate element to add on to the genius that you will already be learning in the trainings. Let's make sure that by the end of this year, you are more confident than when the year started. Come join unfuckyourbrain.com/confident. I'll see you there.