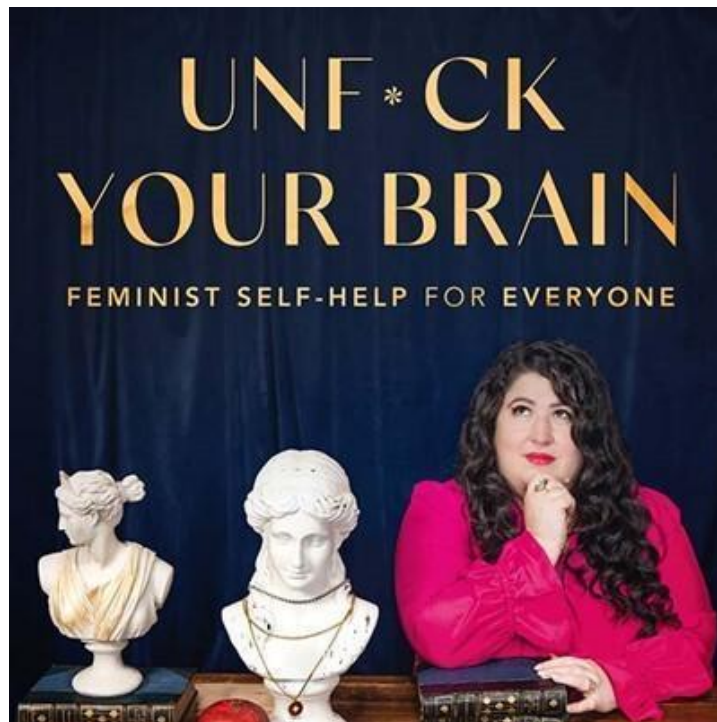


UFYB 448: How Your Fantasy Self Can Lead You Astray



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

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

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When you imagine yourself in the future, what do you see? Are you meditating at 5 a.m. before diving into the picture-perfect morning routine? Are you living by the beach with lazy mornings and a business that makes money while you sleep? Are you making holiday cookies with your kids without ever losing your shit or spilling flour all over the floor?

These are all appealing visions. But when you imagine these idyllic scenes, are you imagining your future self or your fantasy self? It's a crucial difference, and most self-help exercises about connecting to your future self don't even acknowledge this trap. So in today's episode, we're going to dive into what the difference is between your future self and your fantasy self and how to know which one you're talking to when you set your goals.

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.

I've been teaching women how to connect to their future self since I became a coach. Your future self is an incredibly powerful concept. It helps you set goals and figure out how to achieve them. It's setting the GPS on your self-development and your growth, so you know where you're going. And it's a way of accessing deeper wisdom and self-leadership that's already there in your brain but is usually drowned out by your daily concerns and self-doubt and nervous system activation in the moment.

But over the almost decade I've been teaching this tool, I've come to see that there's an easy slippage that can happen when you try to imagine your future self. And that is that you can very easily imagine your fantasy self instead of your future self. Your fantasy self is a perfect version of you that you think you're supposed to be. She follows her meal plan to the letter. She keeps her inbox at zero. She never loses her patience with her kids or

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partner. She never lets her emotions get messy. She never procrastinates. She never hits a wall of exhaustion and snaps at anyone.

This fantasy version is so enticing because she offers the illusion that you can just escape the messy reality of being an imperfect human if you just grow enough. The fantasy self has designed and executed your dream routines. She reads every night, she answers emails the moment they come in. She never leaves a dirty dish in the sink. She plans every weekend. She keeps up with her workouts and yoga and therapy, the reading list. She keeps up with professional networking events. She volunteers. She's wrapping the perfect birthday present, always sending thank you notes, hosting dinner parties, never stays up too late scrolling on Instagram, always in a perfect mood.

Why is this fantasy self so compelling? Why do we spend so much time imagining her? It's because society has told you that if you just do it all perfectly, you will finally be good enough. You'll be lovable, you'll be safe from criticism, right? You'll finally be enough for your family, your colleagues, for society, most of all for yourself.

But the problem, of course, is that the fantasy self is a fantasy. She's impossible to ever reach. She's not someone you can ever become. And fixating on her actually makes things worse. First of all, you may simply feel worse when you imagine that fantasy self because she feels so far from where you are, and then you just want to give up altogether. This is something that's well-documented in the literature, that when we try to imagine the person we want to be, if it is too far from where we are and there's a lot of self-judgment involved, it actually feels worse. It doesn't feel motivating. It just makes us aware of the gap.

But paradoxically, if it feels good to imagine your fantasy self, that can also be a real problem. Because the positive feeling of a fantasy can numb and sedate us. It's like a drug-induced bliss. We imagine that we're going to become that fantasy self any day now, and so we don't need to grapple

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with our current reality. We don't need to dig deep and look at uncomfortable truths. We don't need to practice hard-won habits little bit by little bit and deal with our own impatience and perfectionism. We don't have to be uncomfortable.

The fantasy soothes our self-criticism and our emotional suffering. But it doesn't move us towards any real growth. And because the drug is always on tap in our brain, we can use, so to speak, any time we feel distressed by imagining how it's all going to be different once we finally become that fantasy self. So it helps us feel better in the moment, but we don't ever actually change. And we can stay in that haze of fantasy for years, decades, and never really change.

That fantasy self is an illusion. It's an illusion of irreproachability, an illusion of perfection, an illusion of constant happiness, and an illusion of control. And when we imagine her, we peace out of our current reality and imagine a future in which we completely control ourselves like a character in a video game. So it makes us feel safe, but we're disconnected from who we really are. No amount of imagining that fantasy self will ever help us get closer to our goals or be present in our own reality.

What we need to connect to is our future self. Now, the future self is a concept I've talked about a lot on the podcast. So I'm not going to get into all of the details here, but I just want to remind you what your future self is like and why she matters. And then what we'll talk about is how to check and distinguish whether you are imagining or connecting to a future self or you're fantasizing about a fantasy self.

So your future self, in short, is a version of you who is farther ahead in the future. She has whatever goal it is you're working on. She is the person you want to become. She's the VP, she's the six or seven or eight-figure entrepreneur. She's the engaged parent, she's the loving spouse, the accomplished novelist, the consistent exerciser, whatever your goal is. Your future self knows how you got from where you are to where you want

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to go. She has more perspective, more compassion, more wisdom than you consciously have access to right now.

Connecting to your future self, using the techniques I've taught in other episodes, helps you know how to think and act in any given moment. It orients you towards the person you want to become, and it helps you set yourself up for success in becoming her. Your future self knows that your challenges are solvable, and she's 100% sure you can get where you want to go. She doesn't share your self-doubt, your second-guessing, your self-questioning. She has total faith in you. Because she's looking back from the you who already has achieved or created what you want, so she knows you're going to get there.

For this podcast, the key question is how to know when you imagine your future, if you are imagining that future self, or if you are succumbing to the trick of your fantasy self. So that's what I want to teach you after this quick break.

Welcome back, my friends. Okay, so when you imagine your future, how can you tell if you're indulging in a vision of your fantasy self or you're actually connecting to your future self in a useful way? Let's walk through a couple of example goals and the difference between a fantasy self and a future self in imagining those goals.

So let's say the goal is to change your eating and your movement habits. Your fantasy self says, I'll wake up at 5 a.m., I'll run five miles, I'm only going to eat organic, I'm never going to eat sugar again. It's rigid, it's unsustainable, it sets you up to fail, and it's a huge leap from where you are now with absolutely no thought given to how you would get there, who you need to be to get there, why you're doing it. It's really just focused on like if I do these things, then I'm a good person and I'm doing the right thing.

Your future self is going to be thinking much more about the how and the why. Your future self might talk about learning to listen to your body,

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figuring out and connecting to reasons to move your body that are about how you feel or even health, right? Your future self reassures you that you totally will miss a workout sometimes when you've got a cold or you have to work late, but that it's no big deal. You get back to it the next day without drama. When you imagine that future self, missing a workout isn't a problem, eating a cookie isn't a problem. You're looking at someone who is flexible, sustainable, who has self-care routines that are able to adjust and fit their life and that are connected to intrinsic motivations.

Or let's look at a scenario where you have a goal of starting a business, let's say. Your fantasy self is the woman who launches the business flawlessly, makes six figures immediately, everything goes smoothly, everyone applauds her bravery and loves what she's doing. She is perfectly coiffed at every moment, never makes a wrong decision, perfectly self-possessed. It's like watching an Instagram reel of someone else and their business.

Your future self, when you connect to your future self and talk to her about starting a business, she's got actual advice. She talks about feeling uncomfortable. She talks about getting comfortable with failure. She talks about not caring as much about what other people think and really connecting to your why, to your intrinsic motivation. She has helpful things to say about how to deal with problems that come up because she assumes and she knows that challenges will come up and that the work is to figure out how to solve them.

So these are very different conversations you're having. So let's talk about how to know which one you're talking to. Right? I'm going to kind of distill those differences into a little bit of a checklist.

The easiest way, and sometimes this just takes care of it with one question, is are you passively imagining or are you actively mentally engaging? So dreaming of your fantasy self is often like watching a movie. You're not even really interacting with that fantasy version of you. You're just watching

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her be perfect, right? You're just imagining yourself doing all the things perfectly. You're reveling in the bliss of what it will feel like to finally be perfect. So it's like very external and you're not even interacting. You're just watching and imagining. If that's what it feels like, you are in fantasy land. So sometimes super easy to tell.

But it's not always that easy to tell because sometimes we think we are connecting to our future self. We are trying to have a conversation or ask ourself for advice, but it's actually a fantasy version of us. So here are some other clues to look at.

When you imagine her, is she perfect? Did she get to wherever she is without making any mistakes, just by knowing the right thing to do and doing it? If so, that's fantasy. Your future self absolutely made some mistakes, learned from them along the way, had challenges, had days that she didn't do what she meant to, fell back sometimes, right? She did not get there by knowing exactly the right thing to do and always doing it.

When you imagine that future self, does she have negative emotions? Does she have anything useful to say about them? Your fantasy self doesn't have negative emotions, right? If your fantasy is I'm in an incredible relationship, that fantasy self never feels lonely. Her partner's breath is never bad. She is never pissed. She's never not in the mood. She's just in this fantasy. She feels amazing about herself at every family reunion because now she has a partner. That's all fantasy.

Your future self who's in a relationship probably has a lot more to say about you and who you have to become to be in the relationship you want. Your future self is not trying to sell you on this version of absolute perfection and bliss. Your future self is trying to give you much more concrete advice about who you need to be and how you need to grow and how you need to show up.

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Right? Your future self is always going to have advice and perspective on your growth. Your fantasy self is just fixated on the thing. So is the focus on having done the thing or having the circumstance? That's much more likely the fantasy self. When it's really just about, but I made the money or I got that promotion or I had the wedding or I bought the house or whatever. Is the focus on that, on like the circumstance is different or I accomplished the thing? That's the fantasy self. Is the focus on who you had to become to create the outcome? How you weathered the absolutely normal challenges?

Your future self is much more often speaking to your emotional state and perspective. She may totally have advice about what to do, right? Sometimes your future self will say like, stop trying to make everyone happy and get out there and tell the truth about how you feel. So like there could be some actions in there, but it's really more often focused on your mindset, your emotional state, your emotional and character development. So there might be some actions mixed in, but she is really focused on helping you grow into the person who she is, right, who you become in order to create the outcome you want.

Whereas your fantasy self doesn't really have any helpful advice about that. A fantasy self, the extent of their advice is like, be more disciplined, get the right answer, right? The fantasy self, you're really focused on just that circumstance and not the emotional growth. You can also clue into how does it feel to think about her, right? That fantasy self again feels good to imagine, but there's not really any good advice coming other than just like, do better, be different, buckle down, get your shit together, just do it perfectly. Like it's not helpful.

Your future self tends to have advice that's compassionate, that's realistic, it's encouraging. She knows you can create new big things, but she really cares more about who you're becoming. Again, right? It's that your future self is really much more focused on your identity shift, whereas the fantasy self is just like the Barbie who's existing in that future fantasy circumstance.

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She doesn't really know how she got there. Someone just put her down in the Barbie house.

And the last thing you can think about is when you're connecting to that vision, does it feel like an escape or an expansion? When you are fantasizing, your fantasy self is an attempt to escape your current life and your current set of feelings. That's why I compared it to kind of like a drug. It's almost like a way to numb out. It's just a fantasy to get relief from all your self-criticism and all your negative emotions that you don't know how to handle.

Your future self is not checked out. She's probably calmer than you are for sure, but she is trying to help you expand your capacity. She is not trying to tell you to numb out. She is not advertising herself as an escape from the human condition. Your future self wants you to expand your capacity to cope with your negative emotions and tolerate them so that you can grow and move forward. Whereas your fantasy self is just there to be a fantasy, not to really connect to your reality.

Anytime that you are thinking about yourself in the future, I want you to check in with yourself. Is this the fantasy or is this my future self? And if it is the fantasy, then you want to check in with yourself on what you're trying to escape right now. And then see if you can connect to your future self to help you develop that capacity and shift that identity, right?

If you are fantasizing about your future self who has a huge speaking career and always feels comfortable with public speaking and is making a million dollars doing it, and you realize you're trying to escape from your fear of public speaking, the insecurity that comes up when you talk in public, your money mindset and your belief that you can't make more money, whatever it is, that's an opportunity to try to connect to your future self. Your future self who is an in-demand speaker, what does she have to tell you? How did she get there? Who did she have to become? What did

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she have to grow her capacity to deal with? What negative emotions did she have to work through? What mindset shifts did she have to make?

You can see that when you try to connect to a fantasy, there's ultimately nothing there. But when you try to connect to your future self, you can ask yourself much more productive questions that actually help you grow. So this week when you are drifting into fantasy, try asking your future self a more active, helpful question.

If you know that you want to grow into that future self in 2026, then you need to come check out A Confident Life. This is a brand new program that I have created that is going to be taking place all throughout 2026, and I'm going to be teaching you how to grow into that future self in the six core areas of your life: in your relationships, your career, and your professional life and your financial life, your time and time management because that's the resource we can never get more of, your family life, your romantic life, your goals. We are going to be diving into how to create the confidence you need to become that future self you want to be. I'm going to be teaching you a brand new tool called the Confidence Compass that you can use to build your confidence, to get to any goal, to become any future self.

This is the first new program I have offered in years. It is incredible, next-level work. I'm so excited to be offering it in a smaller group than I've been able to offer my work recently. And I encourage you to come check it out. You can go to unfuckyourbrain.com/life or text your email to +1 (347) 997-1784 and the codeword is life. unfuckyourbrain.com/life or text your email to +1 (347) 997-1784 and the codeword is life. I am teaching this program live myself all year. I'm teaching, I'm coaching. We've got incredible integration calls and a wonderful community, and we are really going to make 2026 the most confident year that any of you have ever had.

So if you want to meet that future self of yours, you want to know how to connect to her. You want to leave that fantasy that keeps you stuck behind once and for all. You are going to want to come grab a spot in this program

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before it fills up, my friend. unfuckyourbrain.com/life or text your email to +1 (347) 997-1784. I'll see you there.