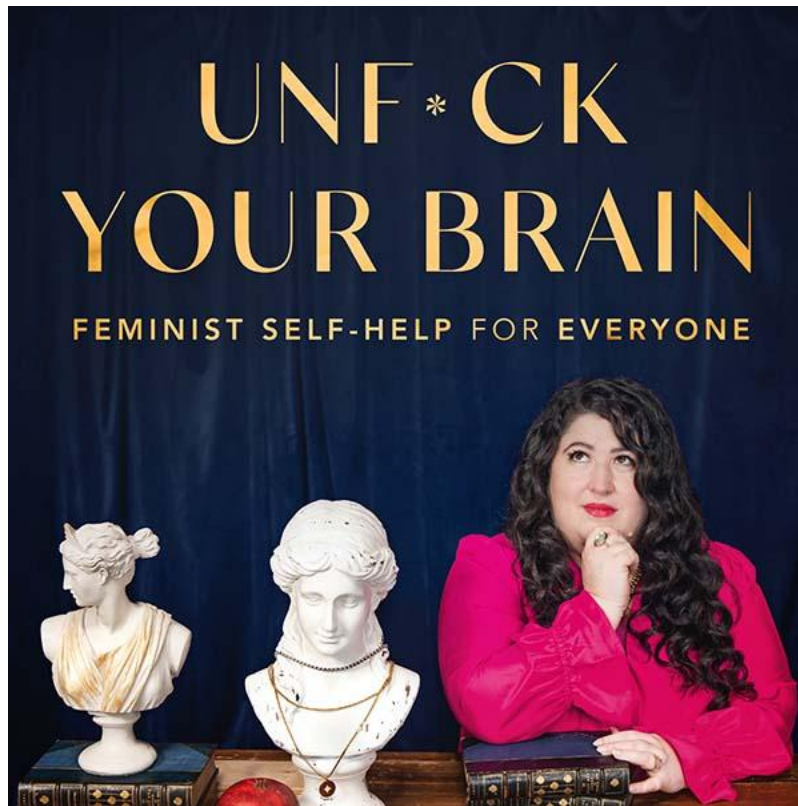


UFYB 454: Are You Afraid of Being Too Much?



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

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You know that sinking feeling you get in your stomach when it seems like someone is overwhelmed by you? When someone tells you that you're being too sensitive, you're being too needy. When they feel like you're just taking things too seriously, right? When they say, "Wow, you communicate a lot," or, "Whoa, you got a lot of opinions."

That fear of being, quote unquote, "too much" is one that I have found to be so common among my clients. And I think that it is a really small, insidious thought that holds us back from really living into the true, like size and scope that our lives could have. So on today's episode, I want to talk about this fear of being too much, where it comes from, how it gets weaponized against particularly women or people from other marginalized communities, and how we can start changing our thinking to embrace our full, whole selves and to build our faith that there's room in the world for us the way we are. 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.

So I don't know about you, but the feeling that I was too much was pervasive throughout my whole life until I found coaching, really. And it often didn't even have a clear definition. Right? It was a phrase that I used to describe the feeling that some people found me too intense, or that I had too many needs, or that I had too many desires, or that I was loud, or that I had a big personality, or that I wanted too much, right? It was like this sort of all-purpose phrase that could just apply to so many areas of my life.

And that's kind of by design because socializing women to fear being, quote unquote, "too much" is really effective because of its vagueness. Because we don't even really know what it means, we just know that we've

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been taught that it's bad. And that's such a fascinating insight into how we're socialized, that we don't even really know what the phrase means, but we just know that there should definitely not be too much of us.

And this is not a phrase that I really think you hear applied to men. There's something distinctly coded feminine about this idea of like a woman being too much. Too loud, too sexual, too opinionated, too vivacious, right? Too intent on taking up space, too public, too anything. Really being too much is just being more than what society tells you can be.

And for many women and people from other marginalized communities, what society tells you can be is small, quiet, staying out of the way, serving everyone else, and never, ever making anyone else uncomfortable. So the first thing I want to recommend is even as we go through this episode is that when you think about being too much, that you remind yourself that really just means being anything other than the minimum that society tries to socialize you into, right? Anything more than what society tells you should be is sort of by definition too much.

And we all experience this, I think, often as a personal insecurity. But it's really a structural issue, right? We're taught that safety and lovability lie in being small and quiet and low-maintenance. That's why we're afraid that we're too needy if we want responsive communication and respect for our feelings. Or we think that taking up space makes us difficult. So we really have to understand how society has programmed this fear into us in order to start reclaiming it.

And I think this conversation is important now more than ever. I have been really disturbed by the amount of Instagram content I'm getting that is sort of takes the demure and mindful trend. That one's kind of tongue in cheek, I feel like, into a not tongue in cheek at all direction. It's not exactly tradwife content. It's some third kind of content that is often sort of very polished-

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looking, conventionally attractive women in sort of wealthy-looking atmospheres, kind of. And they're usually doing nothing in the video.

And then there's a bunch of text about how your power, particularly with men, comes from being quiet, being mysterious, being reserved, and signaling in these like more subterfuge-y ways what you want, by how you calibrate your responses to men. And the underlying message seems to be that this is how you get money, or this is how you get commitment, or this is how you keep men interested in you. So it's very heterosexual coded and it's really just a maybe more modern, sophisticated version of playing games.

But it's disturbing to me the way that it's being marketed as this aspirational identity because I think it really appeals to the part of so many women that feels like they are too much. They're messy because they have emotions and they're not perfectly regulated all the time. And they're inconvenient, and they have needs, and they have feelings. And sometimes they yell at their kids or cry during a fight, or they feel like they want something from someone else, and they have that active desire. And they sort of are being sold this vision of being self-contained and quiet and mysterious as an antidote to that. And that makes it really compelling.

I remember really vividly when I was in my 20s and early 30s, when I was in the thick of my kind of dating drama especially, I had this belief that I couldn't even really explain, but it totally relates to this, that other women had something mysterious about them that was compelling to men that I didn't have. It's such a fascinating thought. I could not really explain what it meant. I didn't at the time understand that was something I was taught to think. I didn't see all the implications. But that was the form that my socialized insecurity took.

I'm too much, I'm too messy, I'm too human, basically. And other women have this removed detachment that is mysterious and compelling to men.

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So I feel like this is a very, very old trope, but it's being brought back and having a glossy Instagram filter applied to it. And it really continues the age-long socialization of women that the only way to get what you want is to manipulate and be small and hope to be rewarded or manipulate from behind the scenes.

And I don't think that's the way to get what you want. And I don't think that's the way to live your life. And so we're getting this message from society, we're getting it from social media, and it's showing up in other parts of our lives. If you were a kid who was called bossy, if you were a kid who was told you were overly sensitive, if you cry at work and people say something, or if you feel emotional in a fight with your partner and they're acting like cool rationality should prevail. There's just essentially so many moments of being just a human that we've been socialized to interpret as us being too much.

Because really, that's what it means, right? Being too much is not just being more than whatever society tells women to be. It's really just being human. Being, quote unquote, "too much" means existing fully. Having complex thoughts, having specific desires, having a physical presence that takes up space. Being physically too much is such a huge fear women have. That's why we have the hyper fixation on thinness, right? That women are always supposed to be shrinking and small.

And I find that this fear of too muchness is really amplified for people who don't fit the societal default. So body size, like I was just mentioning, right? If you have a bigger body, it's like you're already too much just by walking into a room. Like already at a disadvantage, already too much, already taking up too much space. If you're neurodiverse and your brain works differently and you maybe express emotions in a different way, you get very excited, or you interrupt, or your tone can be variable, your voice can be louder, or you have a lot of sensory needs. All of that is often labeled as too much right off the bat.

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And culturally, it can also vary. If you come from, let's say, an immigrant culture that values and expresses itself with a lot of excitement and valuability and hand gestures and dynamism, right? And you're coming into a more staid, corporate, white-coded, professional culture in America, for instance, then you're already too much. You're taking up too much space, you're being too loud, you're looking different, you're wanting to talk about things other people don't want to talk about. All of that makes you, quote unquote, "too much."

The problem with all of this is that we are socialized from so early on to equate being too much with not being loved, right? With being abandoned, left behind, and not loved. And for some of us, that is a message that gets reinforced in our family. If our family dynamic doesn't have space for big feelings or complex personalities, or whatever our neurodiverse issues might require, or if we come from a family where we are seen as disruptive and a problem and our needs and our feelings and our experience of the world are seen as an inconvenience and too much, then this social messaging we're getting is sort of magnified, right? It's doubled by that messaging we might get in our childhoods.

And because we are growing up as children, we are constantly scanning unconsciously to see what do I need to do to be loved? What do I need to do to stay alive, right? This fear of being too much gets really coded into our survival brain. And that's why it is such a deep fear for so many women and why it's such a pervasive thought that we have and we're constantly monitoring ourselves to see if we're being too much.

And all of that self-monitoring has a cost. The kind of cost we talk about a lot in this podcast. You don't act the way that you actually want to act. You don't say what you actually want to say. You don't interact the way you actually want to interact. You can end up living an entire double life where there's this version of you that goes out into the world and performs the way it's supposed to. And that's definitely true for neurodiverse people who

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mask, but it can be true for neurotypical people who are essentially having to mask just to perform as a woman is supposed to in this society, or for people of color who have to perform a certain way in society to be accepted or led to believe we have to.

And then what that also means is that we don't say the inconvenient truth, we don't have the hard conversation. We don't put ourselves out there to ask for the raise, ask for the promotion, bring up the injustice in the parental leave policies, whatever it is, right? So it shows up in our professional lives, in our personal lives. We really try to suppress our needs. We don't ask for what we want. We avoid conflict or we give in. We essentially lie to our partners about who we are. We try to act chill when we're actually anxious or hurt.

All of that blocks real intimacy. You can't be loved for who you are if you never show up as who you are. And it's this vicious cycle where you don't show up as who you are, and then your brain uses that as proof that you're not loved for who you really are. I'm only being loved the way I show up. That must mean that I can't be loved for who I am.

No, what that means is all you've offered out for love is the person you're pretending to be. No one has even gotten a chance to love the real you. There's no way to know if this person would love the real you because you haven't tried. And then we see the same things in friendship and family. You're trying to be the easy friend, you're trying to be the low-maintenance daughter, right? And all of that breeds resentment because you're doing all this work for other people, you're doing all this emotional labor of suppressing yourself, you're not telling the truth, you're trying to shut down your feelings, but they're all going to come out eventually.

So you're not going to be surprised to hear the solution to this fear is to start rewiring your brain around it. But first, we actually have to get clarity. So the first thing I recommend you do to work on this pattern is really just

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start paying attention and questioning what it means when you feel, quote unquote, like you're being too much, or you worry that you're being, quote unquote, "too much."

Really write it down. What is it that you're actually afraid of? What is it about you that your brain is telling you is too much? What are the consequences you fear? It's sort of like an audit of this vague, unexplored area in your brain, or maybe it's more like mapping it, to figure out, what am I even talking about? Right?

And you're going to find, of course, that often you're using too much as a label for a set of insecurities that come up in other areas in other ways with other names. Normally, we have the few things that we think are wrong with us, and our brain just constantly returns to those. But it's useful to see that on paper. Like, "Oh, right, of course, I know that I tend to think that if I tell the truth about what I think, other people will not like me." So of course, my brain tells me I'm too much if I share my true opinion.

So awareness, always the first step. Then we have to work on changing those thoughts. And here is where I think connecting to our values is really important. Because if I have a value of being authentic, then even if telling the truth means someone doesn't like me, it's still more important for me to tell the truth than to have that connection between that person and the pretend version of me that they're getting.

So connecting to your values, thinking about who you want to be in the world, and then being willing to accept that there could be some cost to it. It's more effective to start with accepting that there could be a cost and then doing the experiments. I feel like a lot of kind of self-help advice goes wrong because it says, "Just give it a try. Be yourself and see what happens." But if you haven't prepped your brain, the minute someone responds negatively, your brain is going to be like, "See, I told you. Shut it down." And you're going to stop trying.

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And a lot of self-help stuff ignores that we live in a sexist, racist, fatphobic, classist, et cetera, society. So sometimes when a woman, especially if she is a woman of color or neurodiverse or in a fat body or other, you know, is intersecting marginalized identities, sometimes people do respond negatively when we express our full emotions, tell the truth, take up space, believe that we have just as much a right to exist and participate in the world as anyone else. Sometimes we do get negative reactions.

So we need to prepare that could happen, right? And we need to be kind of grounded in and connected to our values and who we want to be in order to feel brave enough to try. Now, often, that's not going to happen. People are going to be glad you told them the truth. Some good change will come out of saying the thing no one wanted to say. You will find other beautiful weirdos just like you who also want to yell about trains for 45 minutes or whatever your special interest is, right? When we show up as ourselves and we stop worrying about being too much, we can find our people.

But we need to mentally prepare that some people aren't our people and there may be rejection when we do this and be willing to experience that in the pursuit of finding the people, the opportunities, the profession, the place, whatever that actually has space for all of us. The kicker of all this is when we stop repressing who we are, we actually usually chill out. Now, I'm not saying chilling out is the goal. But for instance, if you've been repressing your emotions, when they finally come out, it can be really volcanic and dramatic and intense for you and everyone around you.

That's okay, that's a part of life. And it's also true that when you stop suppressing your emotions, you don't really have such big outbursts. When you stop reacting to them and judging them and trying to stop them. My meltdowns were much more epic when I was constantly trying to not have them. Now that I'm really just fine to cry if I need to, no matter what else is going on, it's usually over in a few minutes and it's just not that big a deal.

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So sometimes I think that fear of being too much is almost this fear of ourselves and the power of our own responses to things. And some of that is socialized and some of that can be because we're trying to repress so much that then we explode. So the irony is after you do all of this work and you're willing to be yourself, take up space, be inconvenient, be messy, have needs, be human, and connect with other people and opportunities on that basis, you actually often do end up a little bit more chill. But you get there naturally, not by trying to force yourself to be something you aren't.

And listen, if you are tired of living your life out of just the fear of being too much and attempting to constantly make sure you don't cross that danger threshold, I want to tell you, cross that fucking threshold. Be too much. Be as big as you want. For some people, that will be too much. And for some people, you'll be just right. And by people, I mean jobs, careers, friends, partners, even your pets. There are so many beings and spaces and opportunities in the world that need you to be up to your fullest, right? Living your fullest life in order to meet them, take advantage of them, experience them, grow with them.

If you want to make 2026 the year that you do this, our program, A Confident Life, is still open for a few more days for enrollment. We're kicking off next week. You can join us by going to unfuckyourbrain.com/life or text your email to +1 (347) 997-1784 and the code word is life. It is a year-long deep dive with me into how to improve your confidence in the five core areas of your life. And you will learn how to embrace who you are, show up fully as yourself, and reap all the rewards that follow. I'll see you there.