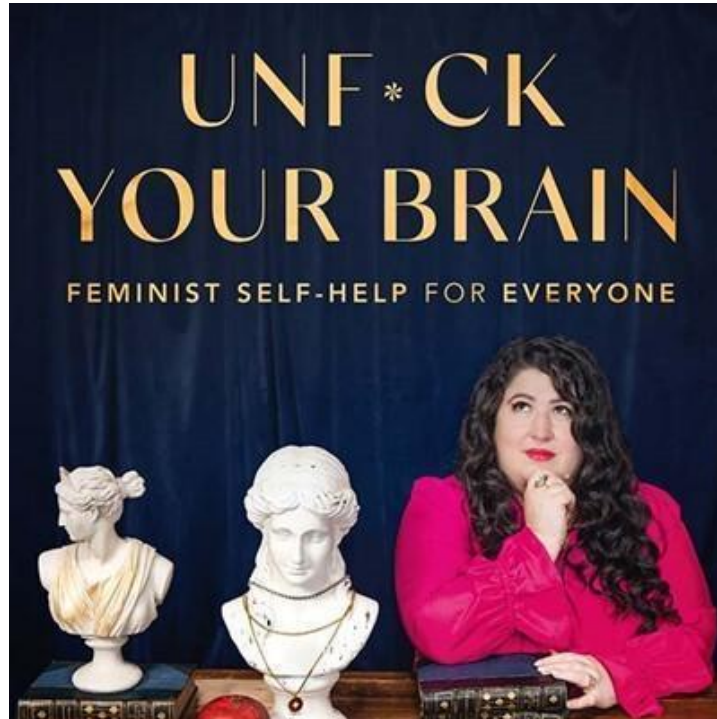


UFYB 488: How to Enjoy Sex More: A Conversation with Sex Coach Laura Jurgens



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

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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.

Kara Loewentheil: Alright, my friends. I am so excited today. I love to talk about sex and I think we need to talk about sex more, and we need to talk about how our brains are our biggest sex organs. So, today I'm really excited to be here with Laura Jurgens, who is a former student of mine, an amazing expert in this area. And as we always like to do, we're going to ask you to brag about yourself and tell us who you are and why you're so great at what you do.

Laura Jurgens: That's fun. I am going to brag about myself because I'm really excited I just published my first Substack this week on patriarchy and neo-tantra spaces and that was fun. But yeah, I hold multiple coaching certifications. I'm a somatic sex coach. I have training in attachment trauma release, mindset coaching, and my PhD is in evolutionary biology. And all of that kind of blends together into what has been the real perfect blend for helping people with sex and intimacy problems and attachment problems, because we actually are animals. We are animals, and we do have brains, we also have bodies, and all of the different layers need different tools. So, I feel like my big superpower is blending multiple tools in ways to help my clients best.

Kara: I love it. And that is for sure the first and possibly last time that the phrase neo-tantra will be used on this podcast. So, you're filling an important role here. So, your work is really at the intersection, as you've just been saying, of there's somatic work, there's cognitive work, but also a feminist perspective, since you're talking about the patriarchy in these contexts. How did you come to understand that patriarchal conditioning

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isn't, in your work and your perspective, just in our heads, quote unquote, but actually gets kind of experienced and processed in the body?

Laura: Yeah. Well, our minds, of course, are part of our body system. They're not the only thing going on inside of us, though, and when we swim in this soup of patriarchy, when we swim in a soup from even pre-birth, the conditions inside our mothers, the conditions inside our grandmothers also affect us and affect how our gene expression and our biology. But when we actually exist in patriarchal oppression in a lot of ways that it seeps into our formative and developmental patterns.

And so, whether we feel safe in the world, who we feel safe around, the messages we get about accessing parts of ourselves, parts of our body, who our body is for, who our pleasure is for, whether it's okay to say no, whether that will break connection with someone. Those all actually also get into our nervous system and our body's sort of bracing patterns, what tenses us up, what makes us feel safe. So, it's not just in our head. A lot of it is embedded in our head, but it's also actually comes through the brain and into learned patterns in the nervous system.

Kara: It's really wild to think about. I'm sure some of the listeners have heard that thing that's like, your mother is born with all of the cells that will become her ovum, right? So like you in some way existed in your grandmother. And if you think about the way that we know our thinking impacts our body as well, that it's like actually like what my grandma was thinking is like has impacted me today and who I am.

Laura: Yeah, how safe she felt, what was happening in her world. I mean, this is the basis of generational trauma. It's not nothing.

Kara: So, I think most women, especially if they've been listening to this podcast, if they are struggling with low desire or problems with what we

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would call their quote unquote libido, like, I think probably the people listening to this, they've Googled, right? They've read some stuff. They've listened to a podcast. Maybe they've tried the world of supplements we're constantly getting marketed on Instagram, like if you just take this one peptide or this one hormone or this one whatever, it's going to solve all your problems. I wonder what you think we're missing when we talk about sex drive, libido, desire as just medical or even just a mindset problem.

Laura: Yeah, so neither one of them are true. And unfortunately, what happens is a lot of people don't know what they don't know, including doctors. But the research is really clear on all of this. And what we see is that libido, you can take all the hormones in the world, but if your nervous system doesn't feel safe with sex because it's learned that it's either disappointing, it's a performance that you put on for somebody else that you feel obligated about, it's like disconnected or misattuned, somebody's not actually paying attention to your pace and what your body needs.

That person might be you that's not paying attention to your pace and what your body needs, might also be your partner. But when you have repeated negative experiences and things like shame and all that messaging, right, that comes from our minds and then goes into our physical response, because just like you talk about all the time in the model, thoughts create the feelings. They're not the only thing that creates feelings. Also, your nervous system, we can get feelings from the bottom up from repeated negative experiences in the past.

But the central thing is when you have bad experiences repeatedly, even just little disconnections, things that are not feeling good, you can't override that with all the hormones in the world. And it doesn't also get better just when you tell yourself. There's ways to use your brain, and actually there's some really great ways to use your brain to help improve your libido and use it as a sex organ, but just that self-talk of telling myself, I quote unquote

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should feel differently about this, or I find my partner attractive, why do I not want to have sex with them?

None of that is going to help. And even if you just stop doing that, you've stopped putting in a negative stimulus, a pressure on yourself, but you haven't actually figured out how to use your brain to generate desire. And that requires, one, you have to have the nervous system safety, otherwise it's not going to work to generate desire. And two, you have to know kind of how to use your brain in the right way.

Kara: Yeah, and I think you have to know your own brain. Like one of the things that I have been finding so helpful in my own understanding of my own sexuality has been paying more attention to and learning about how sensitive I am to sensory things that I don't like and the ways in which, as somebody who's got heightened sensory stuff, even things that most people would think are nice and wonderful during sex, I can find kind of irritating or distracting. I think this is probably particularly true for neurodivergent people, but not only. Just spending more time getting to know for me, desire and libido, it's not actually like I don't have that thing. It's like, well, there's actually this thing blocking me.

There's a way of getting into it that gets in my way, but it's very idiosyncratic and not something that I would even be able to find on an Instagram post. Somebody else wouldn't be able to tell me because it's so specific to me and like what sensations I like or don't like or find distracting or don't find distracting, and then having those conversations with my husband that are like, I know this is really weird and you're trying to touch me nicely, but like, please never do that specific motion again because it makes me like totally set my nervous system off in a way that's not super predictable.

Laura: Yeah, you want to jump out of your skin. That's really common with people who have some sort of like neurodivergence, including me, and a lot

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of people with sensory sensitivities. I think what you're saying is also applicable to everyone, which is that there's going to be specific things that you want that are your preferences and there's going to be specific things that you don't want. And there's also going to be a pace that your body wants those things that you want at and that could change from day to day. And the real skill is learning how to attune to that within yourself and allow it and not shame it and start being willing to learn how to listen to those cues in your body and then be able to communicate to your partner about it. So, it's getting your mind on board to do the job of actually really approving of your own preferences and your own boundaries.

Kara: Yeah, right. I think that's why the mindset piece is so crucial because even if it is coming from a somatic place, your mind is the one that has to be like, it's okay. You can say that to your partner. I'm willing to experience the discomfort of saying, I know you're trying to be loving, I hate when, you don't have to say it that way, but like please don't touch me that way, or do this instead, right? Because women have all this socialization around not taking up too much space during sex and not upsetting, you know, especially if they're hetero, not if they're heterosexual, but if they're having heterosexual sex, not emasculating a man, not telling him what you, right? All that socialization.

Laura: Yeah, and right, all that over responsibility.

Kara: And like, that stuff has to be mindset dealt with. I'm curious what you think about this, but as we're having this conversation, I'm thinking, one of the other big unlocks for me that was actually in recognizing the separation between the somatic and mind in the sense that things that I find sexy or fantasies that I have that I like conceptually, but then, sensorially, I actually hate them. And that being okay, right? Like having, I feel like women are not taught to have their own rich interior fantasy life the way that men are, but also, I feel like there's a lot of liberation in being like, because the way women are socialized, that their sexuality is not really just like their own

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thing they carry with them through their life that belongs to them, it's always like in relation to...

Laura: Is for someone else.

Kara: Yeah, it's for someone else. So like, sort of being like, oh, I actually have my own erotic relationship with myself that has to do with this set of fantasies that may actually have no relationship to the sex that I'm having with this partner, and that's totally fine. That doesn't mean I'm with the wrong person, something went wrong, I don't really like them, whatever.

Laura: Absolutely. So, I think actually the erotic relationship you have with yourself is the most important one and it's the place that you...

Kara: You're going to have to say that again because I feel like most women listening to this are probably like, I don't even understand the words you're saying. What are you talking about? My erotic relationship with myself?

Laura: Okay, so say it again, but then I'm going to say it a different way.

Kara: Explain it. Yeah, what is your erotic relationship with yourself?

Laura: So, all that sexual energy is, all that sexuality really, it's a life force energy inside us. It's a connection with our own genitalia from the inside of our body, not from the outside judging them or from the outside having somebody else touch them, but what your felt experience is of things that give your body pleasure. That can be your genitals, that can be the back of your neck. For women, often times, it's your whole body with maybe a couple exceptions of places, like for me, it is not my inner ears. Do not put a tongue in there.

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But the point being, feeling your aliveness from the inside of you, that is your birthright. And your erotic relationship with yourself includes what you just said, which is beautiful, which is your erotic imaginings, the things you love to think about. Hey, they are not necessarily things you want to do in real life, and that's okay. And some of them will be, some of them won't be, but the idea is your erotic imaginings help you get certain feelings that you love to get and those feelings are a way, and this is how we can use our brain best, to generate those kinds of imaginings for us that give us the feelings that we crave.

And those feelings are different for everybody. Not everybody wants to feel wanted. Some people want to feel humiliated. Not everybody wants to feel beautiful. Some people want just to feel free. Those erotic imaginings can really help us generate the feelings that we want and have a delicious experience of life and a delicious experience of our own pleasure. Now, if you're partnered, you can do that with a person. If you have multiple partners, you can do that with multiple people. And if you're not partnered and you don't want to be, you don't have to. You can do it with yourself.

Kara: Yeah, I mean, I love for everybody listening to this, like thinking about what is your erotic relationship with yourself? It's like when you, when I coach people who are like, well, I really love my partner, but, I have a crush on this guy at the gym and I feel so terrible about it. It's like, that's just your erotic relationship with your... It has nothing to do with that guy. If that person wasn't there at the gym, you wouldn't have noticed. It'd be someone else, right? It's like that you have that erotic energy and it needs a place to go. And sometimes that is an indication of like there's something not, you're not like accessing it in your relationship. Sometimes you are, and it's just you've got overflow and...

Laura: And you can just let it be hot energy.

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Kara: Yeah, right. That energy is yours and you're the one bringing that heat. It's not that person who you barely know in this scenario most of the time anyway, right? It's not that they're so impossible to resist. It's like you have this energy, but because as women, we're not taught to own that and allow it, it's like we give the credit for it to somebody else.

Laura: I think women outsource a lot about our sexuality. We want somebody else to be responsible for the arousal, we want somebody else to take care of all of it. And a lot of that is just due to shame and due to the fact that, we've been told it's not safe to be sexual, it's not acceptable. We're going to be shamed, we're going to be sluts, or that there's some sort of negative consequence. And a lot of us have just frankly had a lot of disappointing sex because our culture treats porn, which is entertainment for men, as if it's sex education. It has nothing to do with how real women respond. So, people are operating from the wrong manual.

Kara: And because we've been socialized, women are socialized that what's sexual is being desired is the experience of sexuality. I coach so many people whose partner doesn't initiate, who's, often the partner is very happy to have sex if they initiate. So, it's not a lack of interest, it is a lack of initiation for whatever mind drama the partner has around initiating, whatever. But for so many women, because of the way they're socialized, they think, well, I can't get into it if I'm not being desired. And that sort of like, that is the opposite of your own erotic force, right? Believing that, it's sort of like we're women are taught that desire is a thing that like somebody else has to almost visit upon you. It's like if they shine the light on you and desire you, then you can feel sexy. And that's why if people aren't actively desiring you, then you can't feel sexy.

So, if your partner isn't initiating, or you are aging and changing and you're getting different attention, the number of women I've coached who are like, why he did street cat calling, but now I miss it because it made me feel like I was attractive. There's just so much socialization that you're the object,

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and the way for you to feel desirable or for you to feel sexy, for you to just connect to that energy, is like somebody else, generally a man, has to be desiring you.

Laura: Yeah, and then a lot of times it doesn't even feel safe when they do. But I will say there's some nuance there because for some people, so we want to definitely do what you're talking about and check to make sure that we're not just giving away all of our erotic power and agency and that we are actually actively doing what we can to bring ourselves forward, and to bring ourselves into desire and to take responsibility for that. But we also want to be careful because for some people, actually, the erotic emotions that they most crave that are related to typically to related to childhood wounds, and those are not going to change, sometimes those are related to our partner doing certain activities or coming towards us in certain ways with certain energy, and we actually want to go ahead and lean into that, but do it in a way that helps our partner learn how to do what we want and what we need.

And that's one of the things that I do in my practice because I do work with couples, is I teach partners how to do the things and how to overcome some of those obstacles to initiate in the way that really turns on your partner. It's also good not to always rely on them to do everything, but you want to have some mix of tools in the toolbox.

Kara: How do you deal with the mindset objection that happens? Because I feel like one of the things that I see when there's mindset drama going on is that, I get if my partner did XYZ and then I would feel turned on. Okay, the partner does XYZ, and this can be in sex or out of sex, and then the brain goes, yeah, but it's not real. They didn't really mean it. It doesn't really feel real because you had to tell them to do it.

Laura: Yes. Well, this is a big thing that comes up for a lot of people. I'm so glad you brought it up. It's this idea that if I have to ask, it's not valid.

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Which, I have to say, this is often an early life wound, because if you really think about it, it's what infants do. We don't want to have to ask, we want to just, when we're babies, we don't have to ask, we just get given. But as adults, we can't expect our partners to be mind readers. Really, you can try that, but it's not going to work out super great for you.

Kara: It's been disappointing for generations of people.

Laura: Been disappointing, and it probably, if you're one of those people, you've already been disappointed in it for a really long time. So, might want to try a new strategy. And the new strategy is learning how to be even more excited that the person wants to do something because you asked. Like how delicious is that? They actually care enough to listen to what you're asking for and learn how to do something that's not already in their comfort zone. That's even better. And if you allow that to be even better, you can use some thought work to help you get there, then it's actually way more fun than waiting for somebody to read your mind.

Kara: Yeah, I think that's where the mindset work is so important because I think some of that comes from the socialization of, obviously not everybody is heterosexual, but I think there's a specific heteronormative socialization around sort of like that the paradigm is sort of that like the real man is going to act on his desire and sweep you away and whatever. And then if you, so if you have to like ask for what you want, that is somehow like means that their desire is not like real or is not, there isn't that intuitive, whatever. So, I think that's the part where you have to, as you're saying, reframe for yourself and is that the story I'm going to tell about asking for what I want? Or can I, right, see this as like, as something erotic, as a sign of strength, as a like, and I think all the socialization women get in general about just feeling uncomfortable having needs and not wanting to impose on people and not like all of that goes into this sort of hesitation or not wanting to say, XYZ, can you say this, do this, come this way.

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Laura: Absolutely. A lot of times it's actually I don't want to have to do the work of learning how to ask, so I want you to read my mind so I don't have to.

Kara: Right. I don't want to feel uncomfortable or embarrassed or vulnerable or like all of those things.

Laura: Whereas if you actually learn how to really ask for what you want and learn how to even let yourself have permission to want what you do want, it is so much more rewarding. You're going to have such a better erotic life when you actually take the reins on that and don't just outsource it to your partner. The sort of sexual realm is where we've often let, it's kind of where we play with things about how patriarchy has impacted us. And so, there can be places where maybe you do want to be topped or dominated by your partner. Most of the time, that's not what we want. Most of the time, we just want attunement and somebody who's really resourced so that we don't have to caretaker them. Women misinterpret that as saying, oh, I want him to like take control of everything. Well, you actually might not. What you might want is you just don't want to have to be responsible for his feelings. And so, there's a lot of confusion around what people want and it's really worth it to get specific for yourself.

Kara: I mean, I will also say as somebody who is kinky, like, in an actual kink relationship, everything is negotiated and detailed out. So, that if you actually are a sub with a dom, then they know exactly what you like and don't like. It's like a shopping list. Like they can decide which of the things they're going to do. And of course, you always have a safe word, but the fantasy of what that is, I think, you know, I think it's sort of right what you're saying is like, I just want to be always clear and I know you believe this too, there are people who are actually do want to submit, people who do want to dominate. That's a real kink. But for a lot of women, I do think that, right, that fantasy, since they're not necessarily even kink educated, is not

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actually about what the practice of kink looks like. I mean, caretaking, but also almost like logistics.

I feel like so many women are like, well, I plan everything and I manage everything, and I would just like something that I like to happen without me having to arrange it. It's almost like I don't have to throw my own birthday party. I don't want to have to like, right? I just want that to just be done. So, I'm curious for your take on one of the most common pieces of sex advice I think women get, which is like, women have responsive desire, so even if you're not really into it, you should just get started, and then you'll find that, you know, you'll get into it once you get going, just push through that first part. What do you say to that?

Laura: Yeah, so that's a really slippery slope there, and I would say that advice is really generally problematic. Now, it's not a hundred percent bad. There's aspects of it that are valuable, but we need to be really careful about how we implement. So, acknowledging responsive desire is useful and helpful. And there are a lot of people, and men over 40, a lot of times switch from having, I mean, really, the only people who reliably have spontaneous desire are people with penises who are under 40. And it's a real subset of the population that we've built our entire culture around. our entire understanding of sexuality in modern.

Kara: Not just sexuality, everything. How they like to work, what they like to do. It's the whole...

Laura: Exactly. It's like that's who we built everything around. So, it's important to understand that responsive desire is totally valid and yet, at the same time, one of the things that happens for a lot of women, and a sticking point that I work with people through all the time, is this guilt over being a tease, that if you start something, you are now on the hook to have penis and vagina sex with your male partner.

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And this is really subconscious. It's often really internalized, and women really have a hard time stopping when they want to stop. If they're like, okay, great, I loved that makeout session. I'm done now. You know what? That's a hundred percent legitimate. And it's delicious and you're allowed to have that. But if you don't let yourself stop, then don't start thinking that you're going to stop when you want to. What's going to happen is you're going to have obligation sex, you're going to override your own body's boundaries, and that is the number one killer of libido that I see in my practice. It also can really ruin your sensation.

You can wind up having vaginal pain. So, it's really important not to just have sex for somebody else, because downstream, there's some real serious consequences. So, you got to be careful about what you say you're going to start doing. If you say, hey, let's just start playing, let's have sexy time, let's just make out, see where it goes, and you feel okay stopping, then actually it's a really good idea to have more of that in your life if you enjoy it.

Kara: Yeah, that seems totally right to me. I actually feel like that the sort of script of like, well, if anything happens, then sex, also operates to our detriment the other way because I feel like I have had experiences with male partners who almost hold themselves back from like being affectionate or a little bit sexual because they don't want to pressure me. And so, they're like, why didn't want to... Sometimes after, I'll be like, I feel like I was giving you all sorts of signals there. Like what...

Laura: And you just can't find their sexual energy anywhere and it's like, what is happening?

Kara: And then they'll be like, oh, I wasn't sure and I didn't want to start because I didn't want you to feel pressured. So, it's like, I feel like everybody would benefit if we dropped the script that's like, you know, it's like as opposed to a car that you can like start driving and then stop or take

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a left turn, we're like, I don't know, it's like the trolley problem. It's like on the tracks, you can't stop the trolley once it starts. Like if we could all imagine things are more flexible, we would have a better time.

Laura: Yeah, it's a big challenge for a lot of really kind men is they're so afraid of being associated with the creepy, exploitative people that they pull back all their sexual energy. And so, it's actually a big thing I do in my practice too, is to help men find it in a way that feels safe to them and like really grounded because it's actually not that hard for them to do once they re-learn how to do it. But they've kind of pulled back everything. So, they need to learn how to actually just use their words, but also how to actually inhabit their grounded adult sexuality instead of just like moving into this kind of passive place where often times it winds up feeling if you're in a heterosexual partnership, it almost feels like your partner is a child. Like they're coming to you...

Kara: Yeah, and then so many women who are like, and I have to initiate and I have to do that too.

Laura: Yeah, they're kind of coming to you looking for like a cookie. Like, I mowed the lawn. Are you going to have sex with me now? And you know, it's not hot. It's really, really not hot. But that's one of the things that can happen if men pull back too far out of trying to be like kind, but the solution isn't to be a jerk.

Kara: Yeah, I feel like I coach a lot of women who seem to be in that push-pull dynamic of like the partner is trying to be a good guy, is pulled back, then they're like, but I'm not going to be turned on unless he initiates. And then you're in this sort of like such a big gray zone. The thing that's interesting about that, this is like just Kara's confessional hour, but when I think about that like the getting started, one of the things I realized for me was the difference was, especially again, if you're neurodivergent, you may have trouble with transitions, changing contexts.

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And so, for me, that was a big like, I don't follow the advice in my own marriage of like, oh, we'll always just start and see how you feel. But there is a difference for me between, we actually have been implementing something my friend Vanessa Marin, who's a sex coach, teaches, a sex therapist, teaches, which is asking, just, are you open to sex as opposed to like, do you want to have sex? And that has actually, I found, been like a very helpful. Like if somebody says, do you want to have sex, my answer is almost always no because I'm almost always doing something else. Even if I'm just lying in bed reading a book and I'm relaxed, I'm like, my brain can't switch. But if somebody says, are you open to it, then I'm like, oh, I don't know, let me check in with my body. How do I feel? And I can tell the difference between like, absolutely not versus like, oh, there's a little hump to get over of like switching my context and like, whatever it is, I'm going to be cold in a minute or like I'm going to and moving on.

Laura: It makes a lot of sense, and I think the context switching is important. And I also think in modern life, look, unless you're completely privately funded and living on an island and you have no children and no responsibilities...

Kara: I love privately funded. Like, is that something I can apply for? Can I get...

Laura: I'm thinking like, like you have like a gazillion dollar trust fund or you're a Saudi Prince or whatever.

Kara: Living on a farm with nine children that you're taking care of all at once.

Laura: Yeah. So, let's say you have, if you have no outside responsibilities, fine, you can have spontaneous sex. But most of us actually, it's really helpful, and this is where the scheduled sex advice needs to be more

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specific and nuanced is like, it's actually a good idea to schedule time, intimacy time to connect with your partner based on what both of you feels available for and open to in the moment. Schedule that time. Don't have it be I'm scheduling sex because then you're going to feel on the hook because now you've got that patriarchy brain in there, in your nervous system, and it's going to make you feel on the hook and you're not going to use your words, right? So, give it a hack. Let yourself not schedule it as sex, but do schedule intimacy time because if you don't, life gets in the way.

Kara: Yeah, and if you have a neurodivergent brain, you're just going to automatically be like, nope, now it's a demand, now I don't want to, even if I was before.

Laura: Or if it's on the calendar, you actually can kind of prepare and be like, I think I'm going to put on, I'm going to take a shower and put on something sexy and turn on my whatever, Al Green, or whatever it is that does it for you. You can tell my brain is in the 70s.

Kara: And I just want to say it's not sexy to do that, just remember when you were dating, that's what you were doing, right? If you were going on a date, you knew that you were getting all dressed up to go over there for that purpose. So, you've always been planning time for that.

Laura: Totally planning intimacy time, yeah.

Kara: So, I always like to end with something that's sort of, what can somebody start working on if this is something they want to work on? So, what for women who are resonating with this and want to start rebuilding a sense of safety in their own body around desire and intimacy, what is something small that they can start paying attention to or practicing?

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Laura: Yeah, absolutely. So, the real thing is paying attention to what you are actually a yes to. You don't have to be a yes to everything. But paying attention to what your body is a yes to in the moment. And you can practice this in tiny, tiny ways. Am I a yes to a hug or am I a yes to a kiss on the back of my neck? Am I a yes to touching my partner? Where would I like to be touched? Just start following the kind of breadcrumbs of yes without any sense of obligation. And that will also help you start connecting to your actual body and listening to what your body wants and get out of the like should brain that is really unhelpful when it comes to sexuality.

Kara: I feel like that would combine really well with the idea of scheduling some open intimacy time. So, having that time on your schedule, having the understanding that you're just going to hang out together and see what you feel like, and then you have a little bit of this window of time to practice, like feeling into that yes, connecting to what actually feels like it might be nice in that moment.

Laura: Yeah, absolutely.

Kara: So that's your homework, everyone.

Laura: Yeah, that's the thing.

Kara: Where can people find you if they want to learn more about your work?

Laura: Yeah, so the easy place to find me is either since you're already a podcast listener, you can find my podcast, Pleasure Uprising, or you can find me at laurajurgens.com. And I have a guide there for people to starting to get out of their head into their body that I think is a pretty good place to start and gives you some basic exercises to get going.

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Kara: And laurajurgens.com is spelled with a U.

Laura: Jurgens with a U after the J.

Kara: J-U-R-G-E-N-S. Thank you for sharing your expertise with all of us today.

Laura: Thanks so much for the invite. It's been fun.