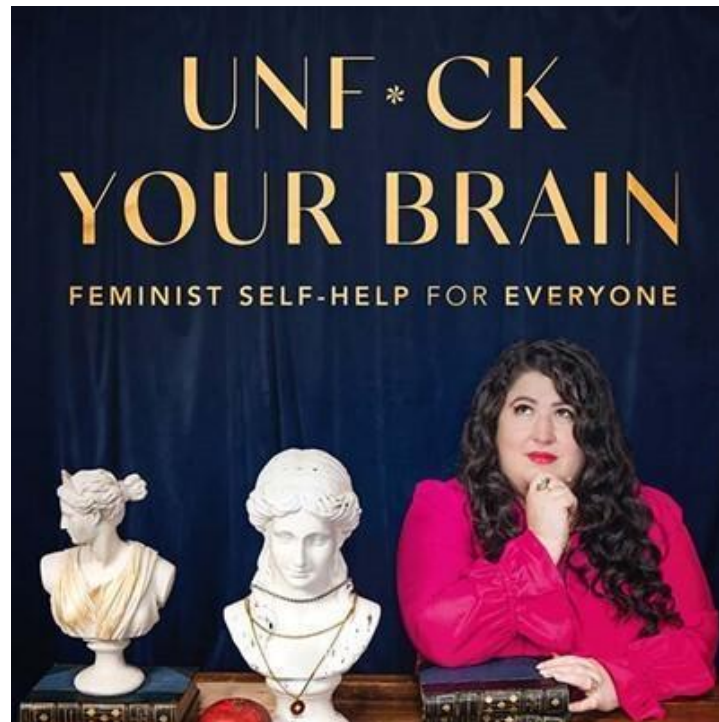


UFYB 514: Your Brain is a Storyteller, Not a Reporter



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

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

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If I ask you how many pieces of information or data your brain is perceiving every single second, what would you guess? 10, 100, 1,000? Maybe if you want to guess super high, you'd say a million. It's actually 11 million. That's not a mistake. I did not stutter. 11 million. That's how many pieces of data are coming at your brain every second. So in order to not go crazy, your brain ignores 99.9% of it. Way more than that, actually. I can't even articulate the percentage because out of those 11 million bits of data, your brain makes you consciously aware of about 50 of them.

So when I tell you that your brain edits what you experience of reality in order to make it feel more manageable, I am not kidding. A lot of that we want to stay unconscious. But given how often we talk ourselves out of going for our dreams or speaking up for ourselves or telling the truth about how we feel, based on what we believe is possible or what we believe evidence in our lives tells us, it's crucial to learn how to change which bits of reality your brain is allowing to reach your conscious awareness.

Today, I want to take you through an exercise to help you discover exactly how much your brain is just editing out of your life without you even knowing. And I'll explain why seeing this is the answer to overcoming the fear of speaking up or asking for what you want.

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.

Okay, so let's start with the premise that it's a good thing that your brain has a filtering system for information overall, right? Nobody wants 11 million bits of data in their conscious awareness. Our brains would explode. But when you consider that we're only aware of 50 of 11 million bits, you can see how a lot gets left out.

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I've talked a lot on this podcast about confirmation bias, which is our tendency to interpret whatever we see or hear or learn or experience to fit our pre-existing stories about ourselves or the world. This bias is such a little fucker because if we don't know how to change our thoughts on purpose, being shown evidence to the contrary of our beliefs can actually cause us to double down on our pre-existing ideas. There are famous experiments where people who don't believe in climate change are shown evidence that it's real, and somehow their brain turns that into strengthening their belief that it isn't.

There's a similar bias called saliency bias, which is part of how the human brain only notices things that confirm what it already believes. But there's something about the numbers that I'm giving you that really puts it into perspective for me, which is why I wanted to share this episode. It's one thing to know that your brain might be leaving some stuff out. It's another to know that your brain is discarding 10,950,000 bits of data to show you only 50 every second. It becomes a lot harder to really trust your brain when it tells you what is or isn't possible, or tells you that it's sure about exactly what's going to happen. Because you realize that in order to show you the evidence that supports its story, your brain has to suppress the vast majority of what it perceives.

Now, obviously, not all 11 million bits of information are relevant to the question of, say, whether your partner will leave you if you have too many needs, or whether you can speak up about dysfunctional team dynamics without being punished for it at work. But some of those bits of data are relevant. And when you have a pre-existing belief about what will happen if you speak up or you tell the truth, your brain is interpreting the world to match two distinct beliefs. One is a belief about what is happening around you right now, and two is a belief about what will happen in the future.

So I want to walk you through a couple of examples of how this happens, what your brain sees and what your brain ignores. And then I'm going to give you an exercise to practice this week to start to train your brain to see

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how many positive and encouraging bits of evidence you are probably ignoring every day.

So let's start with an example. Let's say you frequently bite your tongue and don't tell the truth about how you feel because your story is that whenever you do tell the truth about how you feel, you get in trouble for it. Someone gets mad, someone rejects you, someone calls you needy or withdraws their love. This could be something you experienced in childhood, if you were labeled too sensitive or if your parents reacted poorly when you shared your emotions. Or it can just be the socialization that women receive that tells them that their job is to be nice and easy and make everyone else feel good, and that asking anyone to care about how they feel is an imposition.

If this is your story, then that's all you're going to see around you. Your brain is going to remember the one time you told your partner that something bothered you and they rolled their eyes. And it's going to ignore the seven times you told them something bothered you and they apologized. Your brain is going to see examples around you of people complaining that their partners are difficult or needy. And it's going to completely delete all the examples of people happily meeting their partner's needs and listening to their emotions with an open mind.

Your brain is going to fixate on that one time you spoke up in a meeting about an idea not making sense and your colleague gave you the cold shoulder for two weeks. And it's going to ignore the four or five times that you spoke up and everyone agreed with you and made the change you suggested.

I know that as I'm giving you this example, you're thinking to yourself, yeah, but that's not true for me because those other examples don't happen in my life. But my point is that you can't know that for sure. You can't trust your brain when you ask it that question because it's been ignoring so much of

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the information that comes into it. The tape, so to speak, are impossibly corrupted.

So I'm going to give you an assignment to help you see this along with one more example of how it works and why it matters, right after this quick break.

Welcome back. So let's run through one more example of how this combination of biases makes us see only evidence that supports what we already believe. And then I'll give you your homework.

Let's say you have the story that it's not worth asking for anything your brain thinks is unrealistic. Okay? Whether that's being considered for a C-suite promotion, getting your partner to agree to take the kids on Sunday morning so you can have alone time, succeeding as an artist, making a million in your business, like whatever it is. All of those goals require you to ask for things, for time to yourself, for people's attention, for investment, for a chance to pitch.

If your brain believes those things are unrealistic, it will only show you evidence of things being unrealistic. It will fixate on how many entrepreneurs fail or it will remind you incessantly of the time you did ask to be considered for a promotion and your boss told you that you weren't ready yet. It will ignore all the people who succeed. It will ignore that your parents said they'd take the kids anytime you wanted. It will fixate on how much the average novel sells and ignore the fact that an average means some people sell way more.

So you can see why this is a problem. If you believe there's no point in telling the truth about how you feel, then you won't. And you'll create so much evidence that how you feel doesn't matter, because it's not mattering to you and you're not letting anyone else have a chance to show that it matters to them. If you believe there's no point in asking for what you want, whether it's asking another person or the universe or yourself, you're not

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going to ask for it. And then you create all of this evidence for yourself that you can't have what you want, because you're wanting it but you're not asking it, so it's impossible for it to happen. So both of these thought errors become self-fulfilling prophecies that just compound more and more as the years go by.

So how do we stop doing this? There are a few steps. Obviously, this isn't a one and done, but here's where I want you to start. We are not going to go straight to looking for positive evidence yet. Your brain probably isn't ready for that unless you're an OG podcast listener, in which case, go for it. But for the rest of you, I want you to start by just beginning to practice identifying the difference between the factual truth of what is happening and the story that your brain tells about it.

If you start just trying to convince your brain to tell a different story right away, it's hard going. But if you start just noticing how much story there is in general, you start to build a different relationship with your brain and your thoughts.

So this week, anytime you're irritated or upset or annoyed or feel ashamed or guilty or bad, like anytime you're having a negative emotion, I want you to just pause and try to articulate what happened in really neutral terms. I spoke to my child in a voice louder than my speaking voice. I asked my boss for feedback and they said it was fine. I told my partner I wanted to go on a solo overnight trip and they said, "That's a lot of work for me." You don't have to have a positive story about these things. But focus on simply sticking to the facts of what happened.

And then notice your story about those basic facts. Your story is I'm a bad mom. Your story is my boss thinks my work is mediocre. Your story is my partner isn't willing to support me. These are the kinds of stories your brain is constantly filtering evidence to support. So the first thing we have to do is separate the story and the facts.

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That's your homework this week. Leave me a comment on Spotify or shoot me a DM on Instagram and let me know how it goes. I'd love to help.