

UNCONDITIONALLY WORTHY

The Podcast

Unconditionally Worthy Podcast EP 59: How You Can Have High Self-Esteem and Low Self-Worth

Adia Gooden: (0:00:00) This episode is sponsored by Chris and Tiana taking the guesswork out of launching your podcast.

Adia Gooden: Welcome to the Unconditionally Worthy Podcast. In this podcast, I will guide you on your journey to connect with the true source of your self-worth. Each week we'll discuss barriers to unconditional self-worth, the connection between self-worth and relationships, self-worth practices you can apply to your life, and how to use self-worth as a foundation for living courageously? I'm your host, Dr. Adia Gooden, a licensed clinical psychologist, dance enthusiast, and a dark chocolate lover who believes deeply that you are worthy unconditionally.

Hello and welcome to another episode of the Unconditionally Worthy Podcast. Today's episode is a solo episode, and I'm going to be doing something a little bit differently. So I'm going to be talking about the difference between self-esteem and self-worth, and how you can have high self-esteem, but still struggle with low self-worth. And then I'm going to be answering a listener question. So back in July, I asked my audience, I asked you all to send them some questions that you wanted me to answer on the podcast. So today I'm going to be answering one of those questions. So I hope that you like this episode. Let me know what you think and let's get into it.

So when I think back on, you know, my life what I was like as a child, as a kid, it's sort of interesting to notice and observe the contrast between my self-esteem and my self-worth. So I've talked a lot about how I struggled with low self-worth, right? That was sort of a struggle for me starting at least around the age of 12. But I pretty much had high self-esteem for most of my life. And so there's sort of a disconnect between the fact that I felt confident in my abilities and what I believed I could achieve, that I felt confident, especially related to academics and my academic performance and what I could accomplish, and my underlying feelings of low self-worth. And I think this is something that a lot of people experience, I think, especially people who sort of achieve highly academically and professionally. There is often sort of a disconnect between kind of how you show up in the world, what you do, and your confidence in your abilities, and deep down how you see yourself, how you feel about yourself.

And so for me, what this looked like was, you know, I knew that I could do good work academically. I knew that I could succeed. I have two parents, both of whom have PhDs, right? So I was brought up in a family that was academically successful. So we can call it nature, nurture. It was probably both, right? But I had parents who could support me in my educational journey. And I almost always felt pretty confident in my academic abilities and my ability to get good grades. The one place where I did not have high self-esteem academically was related to standardized tests. So like the SAT, the ACT, I didn't take the ACT, but the SAT, the GRE, right? Like those tests often overwhelmed me. I did not perform very well, and I really struggled with standardized tests.

But other than that, like when I started a new class, I was confident I could get an A and I usually did, right? And so I really had high self-esteem in that area, in the area of academic achievement. And self-esteem is really about your abilities and what you believe you can achieve, right? Self-Esteem is about what you do in the world and feeling confident about what you do in the world. And it's about sort of skills and things that we can develop and all of those sorts of things. It's very outward facing, and there are definitely times when it's really helpful to have a high self-esteem, right? It can be very helpful to be confident when you're starting a new job, to be confident in the fact that you have the skills, you have the expertise, and you know how to do the work, or you know how to resource yourself so that you can be successful, right? There's certainly a place for self-esteem. And I think often we rely too much on self-esteem, or self-esteem is our only barometer for how we're doing, right?

In contrast, when we think about self-worth, self-worth is about how we see ourselves, how we feel about ourselves, and how we treat ourselves. And self-worth is often something that's neglected. And so even though we might be achieving really highly, we may still struggle with feeling good about ourselves, right? Have you had that experience of, you know, (0:05:00) accomplishing something that's really big, but still feeling like it's not enough? Or in the process of accomplishing that thing, you are beating yourself up, you're pushing yourself to work too hard, you're overwhelmed, you're exhausted, you're stressed, right? That piece, that sort of behind the scenes piece, that internal piece is where our self-worth comes through.

For me, I didn't realize that I needed to focus on my self-worth really until I had my ultimate academic accomplishment. So I had spent six years in graduate school, right? I'm not even counting the time at undergrad where I sort of overextended myself, but six years in graduate school feeling confident that I could be successful, right? I never really had a moment where I thought, I might not finish. I might not graduate. That's probably in part because I, both of my parents have PhDs at the same thing I got my PhD in. So I had the support, right? And I felt confident in my intellectual and academic abilities. I felt confident in my ability to work hard, right? Like I knew I could do that. So my self-esteem related to getting my PhD was high, but my self-worth was low. I was struggling with feeling good enough. I was struggling with feeling worthy. I was not treating myself very well. I was not taking care of myself well. I was being harsh and self-critical. I was putting myself down. I felt like nothing I did was good enough.

This was also a time when I was trying to find a sense of self-worth in romantic relationships. And so I was settling for relationships that didn't make me feel very good and feeling like I needed to just take what I could get because I didn't think I was worthy or lovable. And so if somebody showed some interest in me, then I really should just get on, like take it, right? And so I had sort of this outward facing self-confidence, you know, self-esteem, right? I knew I could do it. I knew I could graduate like I was moving forward, but inside I really didn't feel good. I didn't feel good enough. I didn't feel like who I was, was worthy. And my hope, my wish was that getting my PhD was going to fix the inside, right? The hope was once I made this big accomplishment, then I would feel worthy. And I think so many of us try to get to a feeling of worthiness that way. We try to use the external, the accomplishment, the relationship, the, you know, the job title, the promotion, the car, the house. We try to use the things outside of us to fix,

solve, heal, really heal the feelings of unworthiness within us. Have you ever tried to do that? Are you like me? Have you gone down that path, right?

So for me, I went down that path, right? Six years, grinding, grinding, grinding, always working, always pushing, always doing something. Because if I could just pass my dissertation defense and get my dissertation, then maybe I would finally feel worthy. That's what I told myself, right? I pushed and I pushed and I pushed and I pushed. And I worked on weekends, and I worked on evenings, and I didn't take this trip and I didn't go there. And I pushed, and then I defended my dissertation and I passed. The committee told me that I passed my dissertation with minor revisions. And I walked out of that room just achieving the biggest academic accomplishment of my life. And I walked out of the room and I sat in a chair and I sobbed.

Because what I realized was that it didn't work. I had worked my butt off. I had worked my butt off, praying, hoping, wishing that this was the thing that would finally make me feel worthy. I was desperate. I was desperate. I thought, this has to be the thing. This has to work. And as soon as I passed my dissertation defense, as soon as I walked out of that room, I felt the emptiness is still there. And I knew it didn't work. It didn't work. After all of these years, after all of this time, after all of this burnout and over extension and beating myself up, not even this, not even getting my PhD was going to make me feel worthy.

(0:09:52)

Have you ever considered launching your own podcast, but don't know where to start? Is your podcast idea (0:10:00) still taking up space in your head and your launch to-do list too long and tedious? You need a gentle push in the right direction, and I highly recommend you consult the team at Chris and Tiana, a podcast launch production company, helping entrepreneurs like you and I launch podcast without the overwhelm. That way you can focus on what you do best, talking, connecting and sharing your special message with the world. Chris and Tiana allow me to relax and focus on creating meaningful content that I'm proud of while connecting with all of you. They keep me organized and on tracks so I can spend less time on tedious tasks and more time in my zone of genius. Chris and Tiana's team will help you de-clutter your priorities, identify your most important podcast goals, create a plan for execution, and lead you to success. They'll provide you with the structure and accountability you need to thrive, which means you can use your newfound time to focus on growing your business, making a bigger impact and more money doing what you love. Whether you're a coach, entrepreneur, or lifestyle brand, Chris and Tiana will help you take your podcast to the next level. Book a podcast launch strategy, call today and start turning your podcast dreams into reality. Go to www.chrisandtiana.com/launchstrategy for 25% off a launch strategy session. You can also find the link in the show notes.

And for you, your accomplishment might have made you feel worthy for a little bit, maybe a couple of hours or a couple of days. Maybe you didn't have that immediate reaction like I did. But eventually the feelings of worthiness that are dependent on accomplishments always wear off. Eventually, we always end up chasing something else unless we say, I'm done with this game. And thankfully, that's what I did when I realized that even getting my PhD wasn't going to make me feel worthy, I decided I was done with that game. I decided I didn't know what I was going to do instead, but I decided that I wasn't going to get to that place of worthiness by another accomplishment. That was very clear to me, and it took me a while to kind of figure out how do I get there? What, what is, what is even the problem, right? Like, what is the problem? Why isn't this working? The world says it's going to work. I thought it was going to work, it didn't work, right? So I had to figure that out. That was a journey.

That's part of the reason why I have this podcast and my coaching program, because I want to help people on this journey so that you don't feel lost like I did. But the truth was that I wasn't going to find self-worth

in my accomplishments. The self-esteem wasn't going to do it for me. What I had to do was turn inward. What I had to do was start looking at how I see myself, how I feel about myself, how I treat myself. That is what truly got me to a place of believing and fully embracing the fact that I am unconditionally worthy. And that's what I want to encourage you to do. I don't want you to wait until the next accomplishment before you start trying to heal your relationship with yourself to understand that you are worthy. I don't want you to have to wait. I don't want you to have to suffer in the same way that I did.

And so this brings us to the listener question that we have today. And our listener question is from Benita. And this is what she says. She says, it has definitely not been easy. I struggle a lot with self-worth and basically have a lot of self-hatred and feelings of unworthiness that send from childhood trauma. I guess my question is, what are the daily things I can do to reduce my negative self-talk and feelings of unworthiness? Sometimes I feel as though nothing is helping, and the "self-care tips" are not working for me. I feel as though I need divine intervention or something. So thank you so much, Benita, for sending in that question and being so honest and vulnerable. And I'm choosing to answer this question on the episode because I know that some of you are listening and saying, okay, great, Adia, I sort of understand. I've experienced the fact that self-esteem isn't enough. I can't just focus on my self-esteem and what I do in the world. I need to focus on something else. I need to work on something else to get to my sense of worthiness, right? And our sense of self-worth is more about how we be in the world than what we do in the world.

But you might be thinking, well, how, right? Like how sway, right? Like, how do I get there? What do I do? Because this surface level stuff isn't working for me. And what I want to say is, if the surface level stuff isn't working for you, you're not alone. It doesn't mean that you're not worthy (0:15:00). It doesn't mean that something is wrong with you. It just means that you haven't given, been given the guidance and the tools and the support to get to a place of worthiness and believing you're worthy in a way that actually works, right? So that's why I want to answer this question. The first thing is, I just want to acknowledge that a lot of us experience self-worth issues from childhood trauma or from something challenging that we experienced in childhood. And a big piece of the self-worth journey is around healing that, right? So I don't talk about it as much as I probably should, but my unconditionally worthy group coaching program is a healing journey, right? You are guided to heal and uncover what caused the self-worth injury, right? Like what caused you to feel unworthy and then to begin to heal that.

But let me talk about some of the things that you can do, some of the things that you can practice, right? So this goes to Benita, this goes to all of you who are like, what am I supposed to do, right? Benita said, I feel like I need divine intervention. I'm not sure how to get out of this space of negative self-talk, right? I'm not sure how to get out of this space maybe for you of trying to feel worthy through accomplishments or through external things, right? And so what I want to offer you is ways to start to turn inward. And there are sort of a big thing that I want you to think about is practicing self-compassion. And now I know I sound a little bit like a broken record around self-compassion. I always talk about it, but I talk about it a lot because the research shows that it's helpful, right? Research shows that it's helpful in feeling more worthy and building resilience and motivation and feeling better about your body, right? We know there are so many benefits of self-compassion. And at the core, self-compassion is about treating yourself with care and respect and love. It's about practicing acceptance. It's about honoring how you feel, right?

And so when we practice self-compassion, we are treating ourselves as though we already believe we are worthy, right? And so what you're doing is you're engaging with yourself as you would with a loved one. You're offering yourself care, you're offering yourself love. And as you begin to give those things to yourself, you begin to feel more worthy. Not only does it heal the wounds of the past, because part of what happened in the past is that you probably did not get the love and affirmation and care that you desperately longed for, right? So you're healing that through this and you are communicating to yourself, hey, I love you. Hey, I care about you. Hey, I'm here for you no matter what. That is what you're doing.

And recently I've come up with sort of three ways to think, or a different way to think about the core components of self-compassion that I think will be really helpful and they're going to be easier to remember, right? So there's three core elements of self-compassion. And then I like to add a fourth.

So the three core elements are mindfulness, common humanity, and self-kindness. And then I add honoring your body. And so here are the phrases that I want you to take with you and the sort of practices that come with those phrases. So the first related to mindfulness is I see you, I see you. Most of us desperately want to be seen, truly seen, right? Seen for who we are, seen at a soul level. We want people to understand us. We want them to offer us empathy. We want them to see us. And often when we are chasing accomplishment, it is because we desire to be seen. And we think, okay, maybe if I just achieve that next thing, the world, the people in my life will see me, right? And so we chase accomplishments to be seen. And then often what we do is we dismiss those accomplishments. We invalidate them, we ignore ourselves, right? I know this was a struggle for me for years, is not seeing myself. And so this first component, I want you to start seeing yourself. Honestly and compassionately with kindness, right, seeing yourself can look like tuning in. How do I feel in this moment? Instead of, I don't feel anything. I shouldn't feel anything. Keep moving. Keep pushing. Tune in. Slow down, take a breath. What if I were to truly see myself? How would I acknowledge my feelings? What do I feel? I feel sad. I feel frustrated. I feel exhausted. I feel hopeful. I feel excited, right? Can you slow down to truly see yourself?

Then the next component is common humanity. This is the, the phrase I want you to remember for this is, I accept you. Common humanity (0:20:00) guides us to remember that we are not the only one struggling in the way we are struggling. Our experience is human and normal. So I want you to accept yourself and your experience. I accept you. I accept that I'm feeling tired. I accept that I'm feeling stressed. I accept that I'm feeling sad. I don't judge myself for it. I offer myself acceptance. This is where I'm today, this is how I feel right now.

The third is I affirm you. And this is connected to self-kindness. And this is a little different than like standing in the mirror and saying, I'm the most beautiful person ever, if you'd like to say that, more power to you. This is more about offering yourself encouraging words where it's okay, I'm here for you. I'm here with you. I love you. I'm not leaving you, right? It's okay to learn. It's okay to make mistakes. You're still worthy right to say some encouraging words to yourself, right? I affirm you.

And the last is I honor you. And this is really about honoring your body, honoring when you need rest, honoring when you need nourishment, taking the time to nourish yourself to rest, can do a host of wonders with overcoming anxiety and depression, which feeds into negative self-talk and feeling unworthy. So I honor you as about, I honor my need for rest. I honor my needs to move my body, get out and take a walk. I honor my needs for nourishment. And so I want you to think about practicing these things. I see you practice seeing yourself not with that negative self-judgmental voice. You may even notice, okay, my mind is going there, right? I'm noticing my mind criticize myself. I'm noticing that, but I'm not getting caught up in it. We're not going to be able to get rid of the negative self-talk right away, but we can notice it and choose not to believe it. That is the choice you can make, and you may have to do it over and over again, and it may be challenging, but it is something you can do.

This is one of the reasons why we really focus in on this in My Date Yourself program. My Date Yourself course really focuses on how do you address and challenge and overcome negative self-talk, overcome self-criticism. So if you are struggling, like Benita said, she was with self-criticism and negative self-talk, consider My Date Yourself course will link it in the show notes because we dive deep and I share a lot of really helpful strategies drawn from evidence based practice of therapy that you can use to help overcome the negative self-talk, which I know so many of us struggle with, right? But the first is, I see you and then I accept you, and then I affirm you, and then I honor you. So I want you to see how you can incorporate

these things into your daily life. I want you to do an experiment, practice them for a week and notice how you feel.

The idea isn't that this is another performance or that you need to do it perfectly. And so if it feels overwhelming, just choose one. Choose I see you and spend a week seeing yourself without judgment, but acknowledging how you feel and truly seeing yourself, right? And notice how that feels. How does that shift things for you? Do you start to feel more worthy of being seen? Do you start to feel more worthy of taking up space when you offer that to yourself? That's the whole idea. Offer to yourself what you want the world to offer to you and you will be communicating to yourself that you are worthy now and you'll begin to connect more to your self-worth.

So I really hope that this is helpful for you. I hope that this resonates, this idea of high self-esteem with, while struggling with self-worth, and that these practices, I'm offering help to get you to self-worth. Again, if you're interested in diving deeper, you might consider My Date Yourself course four weeks to a healthy relationship with you that's going to guide you to overcome the negative self-talk, to practice self-compassion in a really tangible way, and to engage in sustainable specific self-care that's designed just for you, guide you to design your own self-care regimen and routine. So that's a really great course. And you can check it out. You can start anytime. And that's, that's a great way to get started. So I'm hoping that this is helpful. Send me an email info@dradiagooden.com. Send me a DM at Dr. Adia Gooden and let me know do you resonate with this high self-esteem, low self-worth thing? You know, how, how does this feel for you? What do you think about the practices? And let me know if you try the experiment. Thank you as always for listening, and I can't wait to connect with you until next time.

(0:25:00).

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This episode was produced by Crys & Tiana and the music is by Wataboi.