

#9 Master Your Mindset, overcome imposter syndrome and cultivate self-worth with Dr Adia Gooden

Wambui: Hi there, Dr Adia. It's so nice having you on my show.

Adia: Thank you so much for having me.

Wambui: You're welcome. Tell me, when people ask you, tell me about yourself, what do you tell them?

Adia: Oh, good question. I generally say that I am trained as a licensed clinical psychologist, and now I coach high-achieving women around the area of self-worth that I'm really passionate about, helping people embrace the fact that they are unconditionally worthy. I also like to share that I'm married, I have a daughter who is just about one year old, and I'm originally from Southern California, but I live and have lived in Chicago for the last 15 years.

Wambui: Awesome. I love California. I lived there some time ago, I love the weather.

Adia: It's wonderful. I miss it a lot of the time.

Wambui: I'm sure you're in Chicago, the windy city. Awesome. You are one of the people who articulate imposter syndrome and self-worthiness, so perfectly. You have a highly-watched TED talk which has over a million viewers, which is great. You also have a course on imposter syndrome. I took that course and I was like, this course, I could have paid hundreds of dollars on this one, it was very helpful and you do have a podcast unconditionally worthy. Tell me why is it so hard for women to cultivate that unconditional worthiness?

Adia: Well, I think the first thing we have to acknowledge is that we live in a society where there's sexism, and as women, we get a lot of messages that who we are and how we are isn't worthy, isn't valuable. I mean, we know that women are underpaid in the workforce. We know that women are often doing emotional labour or kind of engaging in these soft skills or doing things whether that's in the workforce or their homes, that are undervalued and underappreciated. Women also get messages, that we need to look a certain way, we need to act a certain way, we need to be pleasant and nice and generous and selfless and put everybody else first, we get all of these messages starting from when we're girls that make us feel unworthy. I mean, even now we have, lots of laws that are regulating and legislating women's bodies and our choices around our bodies.

Which sort of inherently says you aren't trusted, to make your own decisions about what you wanna do with your body. I think it's really important to start with that context, that context of we are sort of socialized into a culture that unfortunately does not fully appreciate and embrace women and all of the ways that we can show up. That's kind of the starting point and then we may have different iterations of that in our families, and we then internalize a lot of these things and makeup stories, which is, you need to be perfect. I know that's what I did, I felt like something was off. Something was wrong with me. I didn't feel fully lovable so my conclusion was, well, you better be perfect. You gotta be the perfect friend. You've gotta be completely selfless. You've gotta get the perfect grades and get into the right school then we can just really sort of pursue that and then be reinforced for pursuing that. In a way that I think is unique to the experience of being a woman in this world.

Wambui: Right. Oh my gosh, that's a lot. Even just hearing all the conditions that we are under. It's exhausting. I always wanted my work to be perfect and I used to focus on whether is this the right font, how is this? That would just end up being procrastination. So I had to work with mentors and coaches and take classes like yours to say, okay, you know, done is better than perfect. I know that there's a lot of struggle there, how is imposter syndrome tied to self-worth? Low self-worth?

Adia: Yeah, it's a great question. First I realized I didn't define self-worth. Self-worth is really about how you see yourself, how you treat yourself, and how you feel about yourself. The core, of self-worth, is about your relationship with yourself. When we experience low self-worth, we feel that we're unworthy. We don't feel worthy of love, care, and respect. We often also feel that we don't have anything to contribute. That we don't have gifts or strengths to add, that we don't deserve the positions that we're in, the opportunities that we have because we don't feel worthy of them.

When you think about imposter syndrome, imposter syndrome is feeling like a fake or fraud despite evidence of high achievement. So this is getting into the school and graduating, getting the job, getting your promotion, but still feeling like you are tricking everyone into thinking that you are good enough. We can see the connection between low self-worth or conditional self-worth, where our self-worth is based on conditions and imposter syndrome because when you don't feel worthy of good things, of opportunities when you don't feel that you have anything to contribute that very closely aligns with not feeling like you deserve the job, not feeling like you, you are smart enough to be in your role, et cetera, et cetera. I think of imposter syndrome as one manifestation of low self-worth.

Wambui: Oh, wow. I've seen that a lot even with my friends and the jobs that I have worked, all that self-doubt. I see when people sometimes don't want to take a promotion because they're scared, they feel, Ooh, that's not for me. So what are some of the tools and strategies that, one can use to cultivate that unconditional self-worth and to feel like, okay, I can do this? What can someone do?

Adia: Yeah, it's a good question. It's something that I guide people through in my group coaching program and I talk a lot about it on my podcast. I cannot go through everything at this time. But I would say one of the most powerful strategies and practices that I've used on my self-worth journey, and then I teach others. Practising self-compassion and self-compassion involves a few things. One is acknowledging and accepting how you feel. Instead of judging and criticizing yourself or shaming yourself and blaming yourself, you just acknowledge how you feel. Maybe you made a mistake, you're experiencing disappointment, you've been rejected, or something happened. Just acknowledge, like tune in, allow yourself to feel your feelings and acknowledge it.

Then we wanna Remember that we're not the only ones, often when we struggle with self-worth and when we struggle with imposter syndrome, we feel like I'm the only one, everybody else has got it together. Everybody else knows what they're doing, knows what's going on. Everybody else is worthy but I'm the only one who is an imposter and is unworthy, and I shouldn't feel this way, and there's something wrong with me, we wanna counter that narrative and remind ourselves this is a normal human experience. Unfortunately, lots of people go through feelings of shame, feelings of unworthiness, and feelings of disappointment when something doesn't go right.

So we wanna just understand that this is a human experience, not that something is wrong with us. Then the last core part of self-compassion is offering ourselves comfort and encouragement. It doesn't have to mean that you're saying, I think it was the perfect person ever and I never make mistakes. But you're saying, oh, that was so hard and it's okay. I'm here for you and we're gonna get through this and it wasn't the worst thing in the world. You just sent the email to the wrong people and it's ok we can clean it up. You're encouraging yourself as you would encourage a friend or a child to help you calm down en sue. That's a really powerful practice and there's research that shows that practicing self-compassion can enhance your sense of self-worth.

Wambui: Oh, very good. would you also say crafting that self-worth, like having quotes or bible verses if you are a believer or things that say, I'm good enough, I can do this, that kind of thing, is something that you can encourage someone to use?

Adia: I think having reminders, having affirmations, and having quotes is helpful but I think it's not enough. I think those things are good, and it's really about shifting how we treat ourselves. It's about how you talk to yourself, letting go of this self-criticism. It's about How do you treat yourself. Are you engaging in self-care? If we really wanna get to that deep, sort of embodied sense that we are unconditionally worthy, the affirmations and the quotes are really helpful reminders and we do have to do some work to shift how we're treating ourselves and show up for ourselves if we're gonna get to that deeper level.

Wambui: It is work but it's worth it. I also find that most of us look for external factors to make ourselves happy how does one cultivate unconditional self-worth within instead of looking for external factors like shopping, nothing wrong with shopping, but excessive shopping or going for things that you think are going to give you that worthiness, but then after that a little bit you feel empty.

Adia: Well, I think the first thing is just to know that these external things aren't going to work to give you a lasting sense of worthiness. Kind of like what you're saying, shopping, may feel good at the moment, that's fine, but it's not gonna make you feel worthy. Having a new wardrobe may give you some confidence, it may give you some energy, but it's not gonna fill a whole of worthiness. So I think the first thing is, letting go of the expectation that anything outside of you is going to give you a lasting sense of worthiness. That can be scary because people can feel like, well, that's what I've been trying to do for so long, and like, what am I gonna do if I don't do this external thing?

I think that's part of it and that's also where using a practice like self-compassion can be really helpful. I also think it's, seeking to give yourself the thing that you wish others would give you, we often spend a long time longing for other people to love us unconditionally, to support us, to buy us things or take them to nice places or do things for you and we withhold that from ourselves. And as women, we are often socialized to feel like we don't deserve it. We don't deserve to treat ourselves. We don't deserve to indulge ourselves and have fun and just lay because we're told that that's selfish, so then we feel like the only way to get those things is for a partner to give it to us or someone else to give it to us. It can be a really powerful shift to start pouring in love, care, and acceptance. Make time for fun, et cetera. Pour into yourself that, not wait for other people to pour into you, to give that to yourself, and not just from a materialistic, I'm just gonna buy things, but from a holistic place of tuning in and saying, well, what is it I need or what is it that I want? Then how do I offer that to myself from a place of love?

Wambui: I agree with you. Gonna tell you a story. I recently turned 57 years, two weeks ago. My family is not in this state. They are in a different state and I said, okay. I am not sitting in my apartment alone during my birthday. So I drove to Santa Fe and I went hiking. I did such fun things. I met people on the hiking trails and made friends and I'm telling you, I felt so good because I wasn't waiting for my family to be with me so I agree with what you're saying. Give yourself those things that you expect others to give you do it for yourself.

Adia: I love that. I love that you did that and celebrated your birthday, in a way that felt good for you, and that you weren't waiting for someone else to permit you to do that.

Wambui: It felt good. You recently co-authored a book and it's gonna be out this month. Is it out yet?

Adia: Yeah. I did co-author a book. It was supposed to be out this month. We've recently learned from the publishers that there's a little bit of a delay. So it's gonna be out in July. It's called Promoting Black Women's Mental Health, What Practitioners Should Know. It's a book about the experiences and nuanced experiences that black women have, and particularly those living in the US. The challenges that we face, the opportunities, the strengths, the resilience, the ways that we can heal, and the ways that people who work with us can understand our experiences, the ways that practitioners, coaches, therapists, physicians, you know, all sorts of clinicians can help to support us on our healing.

Wambui: Oh wow. Awesome. So it's for anyone who's experiencing, maybe even mental health issues. Right. It's for anyone. I would say really,

Adia: Yeah. We feel like it's gonna be a book that helps black women themselves. Helps people who wanna understand black women and certainly we talk about black women's mental health, but the way the book is organized, there isn't a chapter on depression or anxiety. Stereotypes that black women have to deal with and navigate and the strong black women phenomenon, how that shows up for black women, black women in relationships childhood developmental experiences of black women, and black women in trauma. We sort of organize the book around life experiences that black women may have and give insights into those experiences. Talking about the challenges and then also talking about sort of ways that black women can heal from some of these. Challenges.

Wambui: Good. You do talk about that thing about a strong black woman. Now without going to your chapter on strong black women. What do you think about that? Why is it that we hear, oh, you're a strong black woman? Is that a negative thing or a positive?

Adia: I would say it's mixed, I think some black women draw a lot of strength from owning the identity of a strong black woman and that can be positive. We also know that adopting or feeling like you have to adopt the strong black woman persona, Often keeps black women from asking for help, from feeling like they can be vulnerable from prioritizing themselves and taking care of themselves. It can also cause people in their lives to feel like they don't need anything. Like they're taking care of everyone else. They don't need to be taken care of. I don't think that it's a wholly bad thing or a wholly good thing, but it's something that needs to be examined, it's something that we need to reflect on. If you're finding yourself operating as this strong black woman, is that self-protection?

Is there a fear of asking for help? Have you been in places and spaces where there was no room for you to be vulnerable or need help from anyone? Are there ways that you can shift that? Are there relationships that you could build where you can also receive help and care? And are there ways that you can better take care of yourself? Because even if you, do identify as a strong black woman, you're still human, and you still need nurturance and support and encouragement. I think it's about sort of understanding where it comes from and then sort of being reflective and honest about how it's working or not working for you, and then making conscious, intentional choices to do something different if it's not working.

Wambui: Awesome. What's the title of the book?

Adia: The title of the book is Promoting Black Women's Mental Health, what Practitioners Should Know and Do, and it's written by my colleague and friend, Dr Donna Baptist and me Adia Gooden.

Wambui: I think also your mom wrote something in the book.

Adia: Yeah. So my mom wrote a book, my mom's name is Kameer Shorter Gooden. She wrote a book called Shifting the Double Lives of Black Women in America. She co-authored that book in 2003. We have a chapter in this book where my mom and I co-authored a chapter on the clinical implications of black women shifting. We drew a lot from the insights and the wisdom that she highlighted in her book, and we put it into the context of how can clinicians understand shifting for black women and support black women around shifting. So it was a lot of fun to be able to write a chapter with my mom that was sort of based on her book that came out 20 years ago now.

Wambui: Oh, 20 years ago. Wow. That's, that's good. Awesome. I'm sure it's gonna be very helpful to everybody and a lot of us women. Once your book is out, I'll get in touch with you and I would like to, talk about that too in July. Tell my listeners where they can find you.

Adia: I have a website, which is dradiagooden.com. I'm on Instagram at Dr Adia Gooden. I'm also on LinkedIn. You can search for Dr Adia Gooden. If you're curious about some of the things that I shared about self-worth, I'd encourage you to grab my free e-book, which is on four practices to connect with your self-worth. I sort of went over one practice, but there are four other practices in that ebook, and you can go to them. dradiagooden.com/free-ebook and grab that copy of the book. I'd love to hear from you.

Wambui: I'm gonna link again that to my show notes. , you do have courses and group courses that you do. I'm sure when my listeners get in touch with you, they'll learn more about that.

Adia: Yes, yes,

Wambui: Listen, I could talk to you all day. I look at your, Instagram page and all the content that you give, and it's very invaluable, so I thank you.

Adia: Thank you so much for having me on the podcast. I appreciate it.

Wambui: You're welcome. Thank you so much. Take care.