

Kristin, welcome to the show.

Thanks so much for having me.

We got to talk a few years ago and it was an incredibly enlightening conversation about self-compassion in general and I loved it. And I see that you've turned a little bit of your focus towards women. And I'm curious, could you tell us a little bit about why?

Yeah my new book is called "Fierce Self-Compassion for Women" and that's basically because I found more and more of my research and teaching - that gender really plays a role in people's ability to give themselves compassion.

So believe it or not, even though compassion is part of the female gender role. And that, for that reason, only 15% of the audience I teach come to my workshops because compassion is a female thing. Ironically, women have slightly lower compassion levels than men because we're raised socialized to give compassion to others, but to be self-sacrificing, we feel less entitled to meet our own needs than men do.

So that's one thing. That's one area. And then also the thing about fear self-compassion is my latest work talks about fierce and tender self-compassion they're both self-compassion. But like that nurturing, caring energy can sometimes be gentle and tender, which is what we tend to think of. Like maybe a mother with her child, that type of compassion, but it can also be fierce like a mama bear, protecting yourself, standing up for yourself, speaking up, making change, taking action to help yourself, be well.

And what I've also found as a woman is that there's real gender role socialization, and that women are allowed to be tender toward others - not themselves, that they aren't allowed to be fierce. God forbid, a woman gets angry for instance, or does, or is too assertive or too successful. We have names for women who are too assertive or out there outgoing, forceful.

But men are also harmed. It's not a one way street. Men are harmed by their inability to be tender, but there's a reason why so few men show up to my workshops, even though the research shows self-compassion is amazingly good for wellbeing, mental health, emotional wellbeing, but they're not allowed to be tender and soft.

They're allowed to be fierce and angry and assertive, but they aren't allowed to be soft. So the reason I'm focusing more on gender is because, even though everyone needs self-compassion, everyone needs a balance of fierceness and tenderness. It's like yin and yang, right? Yin-Yang. We need both energies to be whole and complete, but gender role socialization, I think has really done a number on us in so many ways, including power and equality, sexual harassment, this goes on and on.

But one of the ways that harms everyone is by restricting our ability to be our full, true, authentic selves. And that's why I wrote the book for a woman. Partly because I am a woman. Partly as a response to the me too movement, which I see is that uprising of woman's self-compassion where rising up and saying no more, you aren't going to harm us anymore. We're done. That's an incredibly brave act of self-compassion. And just because it would've been too complicated to say for men, it works this way. And for a woman, it works that way.

I love it. So yeah, a lot of times, I guess we think about self-compassion as just the idea of being kind to yourself, but when you're talking about fear self-compassion and the me too movement being kind yourself as also having agency and speaking up, having boundaries and having limits, it's not just being the kind side of self-compassion. I think it can be really confusing.

It's even thinking of the mother. As a mother being kind, if she likes, protects her child from some stranger - when a firefighter jumps into a burning building as an act of kindness, an act of compassion, it's just tweaked. We only tend to think of tender acceptance when we hear passion.

But actually if you think of fierce mama bears, and by the way, that is the one area where women are allowed to be. And protecting their children, that's when we were accepted, but other rounds not so much. Yeah. And it's really, and that's for everyone because everyone, they think it's just about going easy on yourself, giving yourself a break.

Sometimes that's what you need. You're suffering. It's going easy on yourself, giving yourself a break. Sometimes what you need is to get off your butt and do something different or, stand up for yourself or speak up or rock the boat. That's also an equally important form of healing.

And so it's really just trying to correct that misperception people have about what compassion is. Why do you think women reach out to go to these self-compassion workshops? Do you think that they recognize it? They're struggling with maybe a high amount of self-criticism or pressure? What do you think?

What do you see as the biggest motivation? I think women partly because of where we're raised, we know the value of compassion, right? We've seen it. We've seen how compassion heals. We understand that compassion is a good thing that is powerful. If you are hurting, compassion has healing power.

I think women just are more open to the idea of it than men are. That's also, psychology, more women go to see therapists, et cetera, et cetera. So it's more than just compassion, but compassion makes it worse. Yes, but I think women are because of the way we're raised to be. Fairly self-aware and right. We understand we are more willing to acknowledge when we're hurting.

And we know the power of self-compassion and most women, when I tell them about self-compassion the common reaction of women is like, wow, I need some of that. It's almost like the idea makes sense. We just haven't been socialized to do it.

We just did a whole episode. Sue and I just did a whole episode on self criticism.

And so it was perfect timing to have a discussion with you about how difficult it is to turn off the self-criticism you could say, you need to be more self-compassion or integrating of your own flaws, but it's not always easy to apply, is it?

No. And the main reason is I think it's built into our physiology. So what happens when we feel inadequate or we make a mistake or, we feel unworthy or even just when something difficult happens, we go into threat defense mode, fight flight, or freeze, freak out mode to use a colloquial term. And by the way, when your friend makes a mistake or is hurting, you aren't personally threatened.

So you can access things that are also part of our evolution, like the care response, right? We evolved the care response, but it primarily evolved to care for others, for infants, for other group members, the fight flight or freeze response was more the evolved response to personal threat. And so that's why we tend to, so self-criticism is fighting ourselves, right?

Or we flee into shame. Yet we hang our heads against received judgments by this we flee, we withdraw, or we freeze and get stuck. We ruminate, this is all a very natural reaction. You don't associate with sympathetic nervous system arousal, all of that. So that's partly why it's challenging. It's not hard.

We know how to do it. It's not rocket. It's actually a lot easier than meditation. For instance, meditation is difficult. You've got to learn how to, work with the default mode network. The brain wants to wander. It takes time and training. Self-compassion is actually way easier. I gotta put your hand on your heart and say, oh, it was so hard.

What do I need right now? So it's actually not hard to do, but it is hard to remember to do it because it's not instinctual. That's the thing. Oh, that makes sense. I love how you're bringing it back to the sympathetic nervous system in that context, because it makes sense why it's so hard and just as you say it, the fight or flight and our body is completely activated in a defense mode.

And then as you can't see Kristin she's put her hand on her chest as she is speaking, which, because, oh, this is really hard. And just as you're doing that, you're bringing your mind much more into a social caring place. Which we only really have access to when we get a little out of threat. I see what you're saying is a way of acting, activating a different part of your nervous system, if you will.

And the research shows that it reduces cortisol, increases heart rate variability, for instance. So it activates parasympathetic, deactivating sympathetic reactions. Okay. Because you had an issue. What you're doing is if I'm hearing you accurately, part of it is you becoming aware of self, right? If you're in fight or flight, you're very much activated by what's happening in threat outside of you, or of course the shame inside of you, which is again, Yes.

And so if you are slowing down and even being aware of self being aware of stuff already activated the different parts. So it sounds like the biggest act of self-compassion is to be aware of yourself, but also your voices, like they're aware of pain in a way, isn't it?

Yeah. In my model I've got three components. So the first is mindfulness, which is the awareness, the willingness to turn toward a beware of pain. Often we don't want to go there. We want to drown our sorrows and get back cookies, or, we want to fight it. We just can't, we can't accept the fact. This is really hard. So the ability just to acknowledge it makes some space for the fact that why I'm really hurting that's the mindfulness, that's huge.

And also give a little perspective, right? So ironically, because we're used to taking care of others, when we turn to ourselves and say, wow, you're really hurting. We're doing some perspective taking, which gives us some distance. From our pain, which helps you have a little more distance, a little more space, a little more awareness of what's going on.

So I wouldn't say it's the most important thing, but it really is the first step without mindfulness of pain. We can't do anything. We have no place from which to launch a self-compassionate response, but the other two components are equally important, right? So one is kindness that we've talked about.

That's the warmth. So for instance, we've had lots of long-term mindfulness teachers take our course and say I'm very mindful. I can hold my pain and spacious awareness and even be born for myself, but putting my hand on my heart and saying, I'm so sorry you're hurting Darlene.

I care about you. It just shifts things. And partly that is because you're intentionally more powerfully activating the sympathetic nervous system response, the care response. Sometimes it happens naturally, but when you do it intentionally, it really strengthens the response. And then last but not least.

Other people's sense of connectedness is one of the most powerful things about compassion. And that's also why, and like self-pity, which is not actually a healthy feeling, sorry for yourself. Normally when we're hurting, we exacerbate that hurt by feeling, it's just me, everyone else in the world, living a perfectly normal and a problem free life.

It was just me who's feeling humiliated or is having this problem or whatever. And then of course, when we feel isolated from human beings, because we're social animals, it makes us feel much more threatened. And so when you remember, oh, it's not just me. This is part of being human. This is actually to be expected.

I think it's wrong with me for having something like this happen. I'm not the only one. It's not just me. That actually helps us feel empowered because they feel less alone and it feels more, we feel more connected. So it's funny, my model, I got to say, I think I came up with a good model 20 years ago because it seems to me.

Yeah, you just put it on, it's like baking a loaf of bread. You need one part mindfulness, one bird coming, humanity, one part kindness, and then you gotta, then you can bake your goods, yeah. It makes it, there's a way that it makes it sound so easy. And like you said, it'd be the is, and yet it isn't. But if you keep a model, because if we talk about self-compassion just in general as a concept, I guess it can lead you, I guess you could be even at risk, a little bit of being self critical.

I can't be kind to myself. I can't get rid of these critical comments in my head over and over again. Yeah.

Yeah, so the mines, so I would say don't beat yourself up for beating yourself up. That's why we have to have compassion for our tendency to be self-critical because it's just a safety response.

We feel threatened or we're trying to survive or trying to be safe. So we've learned to fight or flight. People really think when they beat themselves up, they're helping not really logically, but emotionally. either helping by maybe the crack themselves and then what would make that mistake again.

Or maybe it won't hurt so bad when others criticize them, if they do it first, so it's or maybe it's like almost like a submissive behavior, maybe in their past, they were taught that if they're self critical or the people come down and maybe go hang with them, parents, or, other caregivers. It's very natural that we do it. We shouldn't judge ourselves for. It's just not very effective, right? So it's a natural, sometimes a natural first step, especially based on your history. If you were raised with a lot of criticism around you, or if you have a very, my son for instance, is very self-critical. He obviously was never criticized, but he's got an autism. He's got a lot of anxiety. So people's nervous systems are really high. They go into fight flight or freeze very easily. What she does is activated very easily. It's just this kind of natural response. That's a good way to put a good reminder. This is all not just nurture, not yet.

Not just parents, there are a lot of them, it's just physiology and evolution and the way we're wired and some people are wired differently than others. And we don't control it right. Once you say, you're just trying to be safe, then already you're softening and warming up a little bit.

And then it's that. It really changes the tenor of the relationship with yourself, which really, the research is just phenomenal in terms of how much it helps. It helps you be less overwhelmed by the negative emotions. You're more able to cope. You're more resilient. Okay.

Really? Can you name any, can you talk any more about the other kinds of research that you did specifically?

It's almost 4,000 studies now and several studies come out every single day. I can't even keep up with the literature. It's phenomenal. If you go to my website, I've tried to, I have a graduate student twice a year, and update it, and I don't know if I'm going to be able to keep it up anymore.

So organized by category. There's thousands of studies now, right? Yeah. So also just resilience. I'm just an example. There's a lot of research on veterans who came back from Iraq or Afghanistan. And what we found is veterans who are more compassionate about the con once you would actually see an action who had combat exposure, those who had more compassion, they were less likely to develop post traumatic stress syndrome.

They were less likely to turn to drugs or alcohol or even contemplate suicide. So we had to deal with all their pain, mobile function in daily life. We're able to actually grow from the experience. Quite a lot of research on COVID people who have more self-compassion through this COVID experience have been more resilient again.

So it gives you resilience in two ways. One way it gives you resilience is by. So I conceptualize compassion. It's like a continuum on one end. You're self critical, really harsh and self on the other end, you're self compassionate. So any movement toward compassion is the movement away from self criticism.

But one way it works is just by lessening the self-criticism that in and of itself. And it's the self criticism that's really feeding the depression, the anxiety, the shame, et cetera. So that in and of itself helps. You weren't feeding the negative spot. But also the positive emotions of kindness, caring and warmth there's so much work on positive psychology that it brought it in build.

Like you're able to see more opportunities you aren't. So you're so narrowly focused on the negative. When you add in the positive emotions, which allows you to look at, oh, maybe there's that option. I hadn't thought of it before. I couldn't, I was. So when I'm in my black hole, I can't think of my options.

Once you get those positive emotions going, connectedness, presence, kindness, then you can look at your opportunities and that also helps you cope that way. It actually enhances relationships with others. Because believe it or not, even though the word self is in there, you're a lot self, less, a lot less self-focused when you're, self-compassionate compared to when you're self critical, when you're self critical thinking of is you I'm so worthless.

And by the way it's not only self-compassion, it's human, compassionate, you just include yourself in the circle. So it actually decreases the focus on the self ironically, but it does, which means you have more resources to give to others. And it reduces things like burnout. And, it allows you to sustain healthy relationships with others. Good for physical health helps you sleep better.

And when I stopped to think about it. Go through the three steps one more time. So everybody can, because I love your three-step model. I use it. I've used it since you and I have spoken several years ago. I think of you often when I can, because of three steps, when you really think about it, it can be applied.

Like you said, it's a little bit easier than finding the 15 minutes to leave your rural area, to find a moment to meditate. And so the first one, let me see if I have it accurate. I'll step through. See if you can. So what I'm hearing is that the first step is mindfulness, it's awareness. It's awareness of self awareness of others, but it's awareness of, ah, this is hard.

I just experienced something. Yeah, it'd be being, yeah, because oftentimes you think we'd be aware of pain, but we either were in stone lost in it. We know we can't see. Or we're trying to like, just put, shut it down. And even though we're trying to just get through it. So yeah, this is hard.

I just said a simple thing. This is really hard. It's huge. When you make that shift instead of being lost in it. Now, your name is. You've got some space around it. It actually changes your brain. When you name the difficult emotion you're feeling. So you can be specific. We don't have to be, you can say I'm sad or a hurricane to say this is hard.

It doesn't even matter. You're naming the pain. And then remembering that you weren't alone. It's not just me. So you're embarrassed. If you can say I'm embarrassed or he did something stupid, oh, this is painful. And so that the ADE of mindfully being aware of pain and feeling it you're right. We think it's so easy to feel pain.

But I think especially in our Western world, we think we've been trained that we shouldn't feel discomfort. So when we feel it. We move so much into autopilot. Don't wait to get away from that one moment to get away from that experience. And that's also natural, right? So even, and then we'll move away from a toxin and a Petri dish, right?

This is the fundamental thing of life is when there's something negative, we move away from it. So again, we don't want to blame ourselves for that. That's also part of life. But unfortunately what we know is that sometimes it works. If you can move away from something negative. Great. That's wonderful.

But if it's the thought and emotion and it's here, if it's here. And especially if it's overwhelming you

And if you're fighting it and resisting it, when it's here, when you're not opening, obviously you do what you can to help in the future. But right now this is how it is so fighting, banging your head against reality.

It's just going to make it hurt more, so that mindfulness really is key. All of it would fall apart. I think without. But what I love is the next step of mindfulness, this hurts, but the kindness to self, because it's like that whoa, that really hurts. So it's, there's an

endurance to that. Isn't there. Oh, that really hurt. That's really hard. That's really embarrassing. That's okay. That's hard for you to deal with. It's hard.

Yeah. It's just like seeing your friend. Oh, I'm so sorry. This is the slight, the change in the, and by the way, so that's more the tender, the, oh, this is really hard, but if it's aimed outward, so if you're having compassion as you're being threatened, it's no, that's not.

Okay. That's also mindfulness. I love that. Standing up for yourself is also that kindness that is actually you, what I hear you saying is. Yeah you've you, you talk about self-compassion and both being tender and fierce tender and holding. And so if the first part is still recognizing yourself, like that's not okay with me, that hurts, then the second part could be externalizing.

You stop it's an ability then to have a voice and women often struggle with that part don't they? Yeah, absolutely.

They were socialized not to, or those of us who naturally aren't don't have a problem with it. We don't like it, because of it. I have no problem being fierce, but that doesn't go over so well all the time, so you need a lot of self-compassion just to be your authentic self.

Can you talk a little bit more about that part because in your book, you speak about the differences, the differences in our culture. You even talk about some research about how anger is experienced in men versus women and how that can add to a difficulty with women really feeling that no, that limits setting that fierce kind of self-compassion.

Yeah.

And so there may be some biological component. It's hard to say we need testosterone levels, maybe playing some little role, but the vast majority appears to be socialization. So for instance, little, the little girl is angry. The parents will often interpret her as being upset or sad. It's almost like they don't like little girls to be angry.

So that they almost try to, they don't really validate her and they don't tell her it's okay to be angry. Whereas boys, you don't want him to be too angry, but it's yeah, you go, it's okay. And so what happens is, especially as women grow up, we feel like it's something that's taken over me.

It's not, I'm not angry. It's, someone's like a, I'm not an angry person. And then when we do get angry, because we don't accept it as part of ourselves, we don't own it. It feels like this alien force has taken over our body. And it was like an alien invasion. Then we explode and oh my God, what happened?

And also, but there's also a reason we tend to reject our anger because other people reject our anger. That's true. Man, you get angry. If he has an opinion, he gets angry. People are more likely to believe an angry man, especially in this. I think of Brett Kavanaugh.

So I don't like someone like that. If a man's angry, they think he's passionate. He really, the more likely to be persuaded. If a woman is angry, they think she's crazy. She's crazy. She's angry, and yeah. We'll talk about that research actually in your book, you talk about, I don't want to put you on the spot if you're, if you talk about the research where you had one dissenting vote on, can you talk about that?

Because I thought that was, if I remember, it's been a while ago, but yeah, I think so they had a mock jury trial. And so let's say there were 12 jurors and one person spoke up or was angry and just really disagree with it. No, this is wrong. Whatever, or this person did it or whatever it was a man.

The other jurors were more likely to believe him. If he was angry, if it was a woman, they were less likely to believe her to be swayed by her if she was angry.

So the only thing that changed is gender, but gender. Yeah. just like just written scenarios. The only thing is name, same thing, like competence as it's terribly depressing.

I am a really competent woman. The pluses are all performances about credibly successful. How much do you think you would like this woman? Jim, a personality profile women, especially I less likely to like a competent woman that they're more or less like a competent man. They don't, they're less likely to like a competent woman because we assume a woman's competent or agentic or forceful.

She must be nurturing. You're either competent or nurturing. Men are competent. Women are nurturing. Men are agentic. They're go, getters, women are soft and tender. They take care of the kids. Even these gender roles have barely budged in 30 years. Sadly. I think we're more open to people, not conforming with gender roles, but the gender roles or the gender roles we know which one goes with which gender.

Right. And so also like bifurcated in a way it's like when you speak to the ying and the yang, it's yeah. So if a woman is holding onto their fierce agentic component, they must have let go of their nurturing selves. It's our assumptions that we're yeah. That's right. And I think that's partly why men as well, can't be tender because if he's tangible, then he can't be fierce and strong and he's not going to protect me or go to war or whatever we need our men to do.

Historically. So what, and if you think about it and it means that we're all mentally ill by culture is trying to make us all mentally ill because we need you and young, we need both. If you're too tender, not fierce enough, you're going to be complacent. You get up, you're going to be run over.

But if you're too fierce, that being tender, you're going to be aggressive and start causing harm. And that doesn't look at our world in many ways, because it's been run by men. Weren't allowed to be tender, look at the world. It's partly, I think, why we are in the pickle we're in. Everyone needs both energies and everyone's gonna express it in their own unique way.

It's not all going to be exactly the same within genders, across genders, gender identity, the another thing, sexual, all these things, every single person has their own balance is going to express it in the unique way, but they need to be allowed and encouraged to be balanced and have both. We should. We're almost like culturally. We want these little caricature cutouts of people that aren't integrated. Because what you're saying is that it's the Cinderella and prince charming store. It had very high heterosexism. You need a man and a woman to be complete, and the woman is placed in the nurturing role, the man's that fierceness.

And then when they're together, they're complete and they're whole, and then, that worked out for a few people. Not for most of us, it's also incredibly limiting as well. It really is because then you have. I know that some women really struggle and I think men too, but some women really struggle with the thought of losing that agentic role in their husband or their spouse, if they're heterosexual or even if they're gay and one individual is playing more of that agenda, it also happens by people tend to play one more role as well.

That seems to be like bipolar polarity, yeah. Yeah.

And I think I see women for two things and see if this is consistent with what you've seen. One is the fear of taking on the competent agentic place. And then somehow that's questioning their more mothering, feminine side and just their fear that they can't really believe that I'm not the one that has that forceful agenda.

Individual, if you will. And then there's this other effect that I think the fear that if they take the more agentic role that the men in their life might feel threatened by that, like there's somehow they're losing their role in this sort of divided role. Is that something that

I hate to say based on my relationships, there's some truth to that.

A lot of men do feel threatened by it, and so again, I think it's just good to be aware of all this. It's not if people want to specialize in their relationships, that's fine, but it should be authentic. It should be based on what was true for people. What they want works for them, not what we think we're supposed to do to be worthy people.

Yeah. And I do think, I really think if we get beyond patriarchy and look at our world, this is largely a result of patriarchy, right? Unbridled consumption of goods by people. And, I'm just so out of whack, if we're going to get beyond patriarchy, we're all going to have to learn to balance yin and yang, masculine and feminine with every tender fear, whatever norms you where'd, you put on it.

If we're going to be healthy and be able to be sustainable, we're going to have to figure out new ways of doing relationships. Unfortunately the truth is I know I saw I'm a middle-aged woman and I have a lot of women, friends who are my age. It is hard. It's harder to find relationships because I'm not going to settle.

I'm not going to play that role. Forget that. And if I can't find a man then you know that I'm alone there and there isn't that. It seems to be that the ones who are balanced are all taken, this is something a lot of women are really facing. And w and I talk about this in my book.

Yeah. I like to have a good relationship. Of course I would, but I'm not going to let my happiness depend on it. So in the past, a woman's value was dependent on having that good relationship. Our worth comes from having a man, for heterosexual least having someone else adore us and love us.

And that's where we get our worth. That's where we get our status. And this is in our DNA as a woman. In the past, we were, the Creek without a paddle. If we didn't have a man to take care of us, you couldn't own things. We need an amendment to protect us. We had no social status without a man.

And so our value really was determined by our mate. And luckily now is for Suisse in the west. There's so many more options. Look at me, I'm successful. I've got money, I've got a career. I don't need that for status or anything like that, but I'm through it now. But I went through a time when I just wasn't finding the relationship that worked out.

It's you really have to look at those feelings of it doesn't mean I'm any less worthy. A man with a male would not have that thought. And men might be lonely. A man may want the relationship, but he's not going to feel he's less worthy because he doesn't have one. We are very sorry. Runs very deep that you were someone like Beyonce, she's got everything.

But she still needs to have a man. You know what I mean? It's this is, and I think it's, I've really tried to look at it as an opportunity. The question, all that to say, is that really the case? Is that, am I going to let my happiness depend on that? No, I'm not. As a matter of fact, there's many other sources of happiness, including for me more spiritual happiness, the bigger one is not the little oneness of a prince charming Cinderella, which we all want.

We all want that intimacy because it feels like that oneness that is merging. The one that's emerging, the real one is emerging. It's not about two people. It's about getting beyond the idea of separate self. And if you take it on a spiritual level, that's what, that's really what we're yearning for.

And from my point of view, at least what I'm yearning for is that larger sense of union emerging. And it took some work. I've got to say. What did you say? I'm in a good place with it? I can tell that. And I love that about you. I can tell that. And it's w I think I hear you saying it's about the integration of self.

It's not waiting for the young or the young of the other individual to be a whole, like I have if I'm a man, I need a woman to find my kindness and softness and nurturance, right? Like I, instead, I'm going to be out there being the powerful agent when I need somebody to come take care of me.

What I hear you saying is that the biggest part of self-compassion is the integration of both the awareness of self and your own pain, being able to own your own pain, right? Because if you're not owning, then you end up displacing it. We've talked a lot about self criticism, but there's also the externalizing element of the other criticism.

So if I'm feeling discomfort is because you've screwed me over, you've done something wrong, so that's another way, isn't it to avoid the pain where now, if you think about self criticism, you have your own experience. Fine kindness to yourself. So she's more self-aware in holding that pain rate and then coming to, which I think is the most favorite part of your model, that third step.

And that is I'm not alone. Which also is, I'm not so special, right?

It is both. Yeah, because we're funny. We all have to feel special and above average. But none of us feels good enough. Are we all just sorted out?

And also the other thing is, even though we all need to feel special and above average, we like to put others down in comparison to ourselves.

We're also really afraid of appreciating ourselves because it's lonely at the top. It's really, it's not very healthy. If you start looking at all these models, we have, we're afraid of shining. We're afraid of reaching our full potential at the same time that we're terrified of not being above average and special, so we're just very conflicted about it.

And so the nice thing about self-compassion is you don't have to compare yourself to anyone, whether you're better than them, whether you're worse than them. It doesn't matter. We are all not only flawed human beings. We're also all glorious human beings. I Everyone has wonderful strengths and gifts as well as challenges that are just the human condition, they're probably not totally equally the signs. I'm not saying all people are the same, but that is the truth of being human. We have good qualities and we have weaknesses and challenges. And so compassion is really about just the inward journey of how can I toward myself be my best self, not because I have to be just because I care except another term I talk about a lot in the book is the compassionate mess, right?

The goal of practice is simply to be a compassionate mess. You're always going to be a mess. You do your best to try, you go to therapy or you do whatever we need to do to try to be as functional as you can be. You'll still be mass flow will be a mess. Summer will really be a mess when we're old, because our bodies will be a mess.

But if we, if our goal is just to be a compassionate mass, and our goal is simply to hold the whole messiness of human life with warmth, with love, with connectedness, with presence, with joy, then you've achieved your goal. And again, it's going back to the thing is it's not contingent on circumstance.

It's not what is happening, it is how are you relating to what's happening so important? And that's what self-compassion is. You're relating to pain with compassion and by the way, lifestyle pain. So there's if you look at kindness, mindfulness, and connectedness about good things manifest, it's like appreciation and gratitude.

Compassion just by definition is aimed at suffering by that's the Latin root of the word, but it's really those three components you'll appreciate and gratitude enjoy as well as equaling kindness and tenderness. And that almost slept more sorrowful, compassionate, all it's yay. Aw, same time and everything in between.

Oh, I love that you bring that up, Kristen, because I think there are so many people out there that can relate to the idea that the celebration or the experiences of good can bring anxiety or guilt and so that you can almost feel it. Sometimes I can relate to that. Sometimes it's if I feel, ah, just if I take it, I could feel it.

And then I almost feel anxious with it when Gary, because first of all, I might start getting attached to this. And then what if I don't keep acting this way? And that's because where we're at again, we're identifying it. We're trying to say I'm only okay. My worth comes from. Reaching the highs and not the lows.

If you know your very best qualities, they're not what make you worthy either. That's true. It's like your worst, isn't it? Because you have these good qualities, your worst is intrinsic and you can celebrate your good qualities. You can shine as much as you're able to shine. And you've got these dots of good qualities and that you've put challenges and none of it's really our fault, even the good qualities, we can't really take credit for them.

It's like the coming together of your genes and your culture and books, you read of the people you knew in grade school and your teachers and your physiology and all of these things and every moment, and then you started putting off to the spiritual again, because then you start realizing that we are so separate and individuals, we think we are right now.

And then when you can do it. The usefulness of doing that. And it's not an accident that I came to self-compassion in my Buddhist practice, but the reason it's so useful to do that is because when you start taking the self a little less seriously, it also allows you to shine more it's because when we're identified with our good qualities, that's when it feels anxious.

Because what if I lose it? Or what if I'm a narcissist or, but if it's just like just free flowing, my good qualities, my dark qualities, it's just happening. And we're just trying to relate as best we can to health and healing as much as we can. Moment by moment. Yeah, so good. Rather than holding onto some identity of being a, I am a good person, or I may be like, what you're talking about is like realizing that we're transients in our lives.

Sometimes our good qualities are really shining and we can really live in them and can we celebrate them? But we can have a fear of that because we are never going to lose them. But by allowing, and by the way, you

cause in five minutes from now. So it was going to say something to piss you off and you aren't going to, you're going to lose that shiny, good quality, but it'll come back.

But also your bad qualities. This. I probably shouldn't even call them good and bad qualities. You don't show them all the time either. So when they do have a merged wasn't, we latch on to identity, we identify with the bad, not so good qualities. And we don't want to identify with the good qualities we're afraid of at the same time, we all want to be special and above average, she can see it's so square for the compassionate mess.

It gets messy in there, but like the compassionate medicine, the more you open your heart, the more all becomes workable. That's the thing. And it's also funny as well. I know we're laughing about it, isn't it true? Yes. Not that there isn't a real tragedy. Of course there is real pain and I'm not denying that but self-compassion allows you to take yourself a little less seriously.

It is less serious and more serious. Would that be true as well? But it's such a nice combination, right? It's less serious in the sense that I can really screw up and not be a horrible person. And what I love about your method, about how to get through it is it gives me hopefulness, right?

Instead I've been washed over this shame because I did this horrible thing. If I can have, if I know that I have a process of self-compassion and sometimes depending on how hard I am being on myself, it may take a little bit more exercise, a little bit more work to get through it, to integrate it to, I am not a horrible person, and this is hard.

And then integrated into. Other people and bringing it back to their awareness. We're not alone in that, like you said, the common humanity, but I love the fierce part where it allows us to take ourselves as women. I think the me too movement seriously to say, wait, I can say, no, I can set a limit. I can be angry and live in that voice and feel good about it.

There's a, it's a combo, isn't it? It was. And, and what would also have to be aware, there may be consequences and you also have to be wise about it, right? If you were to lose your job, if you speak up, for instance it's not like you have to speak up either.

You have to be wise about what's safe for you. Some women are in a relationship where they may be in physical danger. I You gotta be, you really have to be wise and. But here's the thing, owning your knowledge, owning your anger, how you express it. It may, certain cultures, certain situations you may have to, you may not be able to express it like you.

And ideally that is just reality, but you can own it on the inside. It's on, you've got every single right to be angry and then you have to use your wisdom to figure out how to express it in a way that's going to also be more useful, most useful, helpful, et cetera. But in my situation, right?

The problem with gender role socialization is we don't only anger. We think we shouldn't be angry. I think there's something wrong with us. We don't see that it's wrong. We say, oh, that's just the way men are. Just think for years, that's just, he's just a creep. That's just the way men are.

No, it's not okay. We have to see. No, it internally owner anger own our truth, and then try to skillfully as possible, find ways to express it in a way that aren't going to, again, yeah, you don't want to lose your job or you don't, so th there's a great term I talked about in the book called gender judo, for instance, what women have to do at work.

And it's totally unfair because men don't have to do it. But gender judo means you have to be an agentic, powerful woman to get ahead in business, but they don't like you. If you're a woman with a strong agenda, that will limit you because they aren't going to raise you to the highest levels. If they don't like you, and they won't give you as much money, but if you don't ask for it, you're not going to get as much money either.

So there's Al. In a rock and a hard place. So gender judo means you're strongly dented, but then you intentionally, oh, how are your kids? You intentionally bring in a nurturing quality, the balance, the agenda quality. And then what you're doing is people who are, this is all unconscious people whose unconscious is thinking, wow, she's really agentic.

She must not be very nice when you say, oh, how are your kids doing? Oh, I guess she is okay then that's all right. And so we'll take less backlash, intentionally combining the unity, young, the fierce and the tender. Oh never really liked that. And then there's a little bit, yeah, you men don't have to do it sometimes.

I feel like I don't have time, but yet, but then it does work. So we have enough, men can just be their agentic cells and it doesn't hurt. At least in the workplace context, it doesn't hurt them.

What do you think? And one of the things I like about the title of your book, and so I wanted to tap on that before we end. You said that women can harness kindness to speak up and claim power and thrive.

So in some ways we, I love judo and we have to think about how many relationships with men that we do have somehow. Placate the emotions, whether they're the more knowledgeable one. We all know that, right? Not for all men. I think there's a lot of men out there that can own their own vulnerability and own their own kindness.

And then we don't, but there are a lot of men that we do have to do a little judo to not step on the ego where I think we have to do a lot less of that with men. But what I like about the title is that you're harnessing kindness to speak up and claim power. And so what I'm hoping as we're talking about this evolutionary transition that we've gone for, where it was the way it was way back when, because we needed it that way women needed men to be safe and men needed women in a tender role.

And as I wonder if we're evolving as people, would it be true to say that our leadership roles now are going to be called into this process of meeting kindness? Like maybe this is my. Maybe it is, but I feel like that men are going to be called into their own compassionate ways of finding their more kind connecting space rather than just their agenda in order to be effective leaders.

Because we can't have what we have now as leaders that are growing without that. And it is creating chaos. Yeah. It's not working. Yeah. I think species. Yeah. The biggest one that will come with it is global warming. I, so that kind of exploit takes the best. Secondly, we may not be around to see if we can change or not, but yeah, no, I think so.

I I think that's where things are moving. I think because men are harmed by it. So even though we're still in the patriarchy, in some ways men aren't doing as well as women, they aren't going to college as often. They're less happy, they don't know their role anymore. And because they are, they haven't been socialized to explore the inner worlds.

That kind of a little bit, a lot of men are just adrift because they aren't going to go to a therapist and try to figure out what's going on. And, they don't have the skills, the tools, the resources that compassion gives you. And they've been socialized to be that compassion we just sent to see a therapist as we, so that lack of self.

Insight. And I see it. I see a lot more relationships struggling where women are becoming less satisfied with the agentic quality of men and really ready for men that are going to tune into themselves their own pain. And that you have to do that in order to tune it into others. So it's if you can't tune it into your own and you can't hold your own self-compassion and awareness, you're not going to do it for your partner.

And so your partner will feel a lot more for the men out there knowing that your partner might feel a lot more lonely than you realize. If you hold onto this agentic kind of experience. If I have to be the most powerful and I don't tune into my softer, more vulnerable side, it leads to less effective relationships, but also less effective leaders.

Yeah. Yeah, no, it's true. I think that the research suggests that you really do need both qualities integrated to get some men. They aren't disliked if they fear being tender, but they're more effective leaders if they could integrate folks.

Can we say it another way? Oh, I see. Would you say that you were effective leaders? People like them, they don't dislike men who aren't both necessarily mink. You know what I mean? But they're more effective. So I don't know. I put it on. There's no backlash against demand. Who's fierce, but not tender. That is actually such an important statement.

So it's not that they're, I love that you're separating. There's no overt backlash. People tend to like them. They can PR, but they're not effective leaders. They aren't as effective. They're more effective if they can't, especially now that things are starting to change. And we're valuing diversity in the workplace, things like that.

And some of the kind of old hierarchical ways of command and control aren't really working anymore.

Where, which you're saying, is that women often are. Women are not liked as much if they are really presenting their agentic side first and that we don't want, we don't want women out there to say, Hey, get agentic and blow off your warmth and kindness.

That's why I love your title. By the way, there are a lot of women in the workplace. They out mailed the men. You know what I mean? Because to get ahead because they have, I can't express my feminine side because it's not valued in the workplace and it's not, and that's not healthy either.

They just cut that part off of themselves to be able to be successful. So they lose out or maybe they were never nurtured in this way to have the kindness and the more powerful, nurturing side that is essential for us to live to an integrated happiness. It just, yes, all of us need both. That is just, and I felt like I said that ad nauseum when the book and I probably got sick of me saying it, but it can't be said often enough, every moment we need.

And it has to start with ourselves because society, it may change. It may not, I don't know. Again, I don't even know who knows what's happening, what's going to happen, but we, every moment we can open to the fierceness, the tenderness, the it's like acceptance and change, single.

Do you talk about masculine and feminine? Left-brain right-brain, there's so many different ways of talking about this basic duality that needs to be integrated.

Yes, no, I like to do aloe T that needs to be integrated. That is a message out there that we can't go enough. I'm sure people on our podcast also get tired of talking about that, but it's how we do it, we become an evangelistic about it, because it's true. Because it works. It does think about self-compassion in a way that I love the concept of fierceness, because it isn't as easy as it sounds and to think of it as a feminine quality is just BS. It is a quality. It's, that's why I call it mama bear, because fierceness, even though it's male, it's actually a feminine quality mama.

There's a female. Look at it. Look at the Hindu goddess Kali Durga. At these fears, there is actually a feminine energy just, it's just culturally it's programmed out.

It's okay for us to be fierce if we're nurturing other people, but like our children, of course we don't want to give that up, but we want that fierceness in nurturing ourselves, right?

Yeah. But what I'm saying is that's also feminine quality in reality, it's just not stereotypically considered a feminine quality, but fierceness is not fully or part of being a female as well.

That makes a lot of sense. Yes. Yes. We're not taking that from the mail list of categories. It is very female to be fierce is what you're saying.

We just, mama bear. That's why I like the term mama bear. And I love having to say to the men in the audience, don't worry. You have an internal mama bear as well, because usually we use the male metaphors and women, men have a mama bear, but the mama bear that fierceness is actually, I think she really is the best metaphor.

Because it is integrated, and the parents, because you love your child so much that integration of the tender fierceness is in that moment when someone's threatening your child, there's your heart fully open at the same time that you will rip off someone's head. If you have to. And I talk a lot about this in the book.

You don't fierce compassion doesn't mean ripping off people's heads. It takes this very difficult thing of trying to separate the behavior and the person. My behavior may not be very good, even though I'm okay. Your behavior may not be good, but you're okay. So the fierceness is aimed towards stopping harmful behavior or harmful situations.

If the fierceness starts attacking people as bad then you're starting to undermine compassion and it's not compassionate anymore because then you're just actually causing harm.

Oh, you're using your anger. I think what you're saying is like fierceness is not using your anger as justification to act out with somebody that's created harm.

Exactly. Yes. Because that's causing harm. They are very easy to use. What's healthy? What's healthy anger, unhealthy anger prevents. That anger causes harm right? Much easier said than done. Of course, I can say that very easily, but I still lash out, because my nervous system and all that, it's hard to do.

But if you think about it, conceptually, anger is a perfectly valid, very useful emotion. It suppresses the fear response that focuses us. It allows us to be brave and courageous. It lets us know when other people that something's wrong. When it's aimed at preventing harm, it's an as a part of compassion, angers, and part of compassion because compassion is about alleviating horrible alleviating suffering.

It's just, it's not causing it. Yeah. It's easy to get lost once you start causing it, then you're no longer in the realm of compassion. You're on a slippery slope. You're more into yeah, that makes sense. You're more into retribution, right? If you're,

I didn't come up with this, obviously look at all the great social justice movements standing runs, king, non-violent resistance. All of it was like they were angry at the injustice, right? They were standing firm and resolute, but the whole thing was, if you make our pressors the enemy, you're just perpetuating the cycle of violence. So we're going to stop the violence by not maybe people are harming us, but we're still going to stand up to them and we can still be damn angry about, we should be angry at harm. If you weren't angry at all the injustice going on the world today, then what, what's wrong. It's not okay. But the people, and by the way, this, say both of us is white women. I had to try to explore this in terms of white privilege that you need to be able to own.

Just by your position of privilege, there's harm being caused. You don't have to take it personally. You don't have to hate yourself. You don't have to judge yourself. You have to be tender and compassionate to yourself, but you also have to be able to be really open to the reality of the unequal social structure and that's also fierce and tender.

Self-compassion, tender self-compassion. Wow. That really is. It hurts to own that I really, whether or not, and a lot of people, really, whether or not believe that racism existed in this country, and that's the, they're just trying to protect their egos and are also putting a power. I don't want to get too far off of the speak and see where I'm going.

We need the tender self-compassion to own the pain of. And own the fact that, wow, yeah, there's unfairness and I've unfairly inherited privilege out that hurts. I don't need to blame myself or judge myself, but I need to see clearly that the situation is not causing harm. And then we need fierce compassion to say, it's not enough to just acknowledge it.

What are you going to do about it? I really think self-compassion, I, one of my dreams is that we have a center for mindful self-compassion that we could come up with a self-compassion or maybe it's integrating with, there's a lot of training now on understanding like unconscious bias and diversity training.

I think self-compassion isn't there, not only for people who are victims of injustice, but also perpetrators, if we aren't able to hold the pain of it, to look at it, but also to see. I don't have to hate myself. If I hate myself, I'm not going to want to go there. If I have to think I am a bad, horrible racist, I'm not going to go there and say, wow, I benefit from racism.

Oh, that hurts. But doesn't that mean that I'm a bad person, then that actually gives me the freedom to use fierce compassion to see what might I do differently to help end the injustice? Oh, you're just so many places compassion can go race, but then gender inequality. And when I really think about the fear of self-compassion, that's partly what motivated me to write about it because of the social justice movements.

It's not enough to sit on your cushion and say, I'm okay. We're all. Okay. We're all God. We're all one. As people are being harmed.

No, I love how you're integrating. That was a very important point in your book when you were talking about social justice and how integrated this is. And just as you say that the ADA and I think that's been, I think that's been so exploited in the last many years, our difficulty taking in the pain of our own privilege.

And I feel like me, I obviously, we're both a little tempted to get into politics, but we'll just skirt. But I think that there's been so much exploitation of that in the sense that if we can. Own our own privilege and the pain and having our privilege. And we can't take in the pain of it and acknowledge it without shame, but without blame raid.

So it seems like self compassion is not about feeling bad and awareness, but if I die into shame or right dive into blame, I can't be relational with you except in my own pain of my privilege. And then connect with you. Someone else in the world that needs Y what we can do to make a difference.

And when people actually have, the people who often shame others are I noticed white people shaming other white people for their privilege, or for maybe making a microaggression or something like that. The second you get into shame and blame, then you're actually, you're preventing the process from unfolding because then people, they get ego defensive and they can't think of they're full of shame and blame.

Yes. Again, the more we can aim this at the heart, we can call the heart, we can call out the microaggression. We can call out the privilege. You can call all that out. But as people, we're all human beings doing the best we can, we don't have to hate or blame anyone including ourselves, especially ourselves.

If we want to be able to. Effective change. It makes a lot of sense.

Yeah. So I, and would it be also true that I think if that individual is trying to call something out in a very shameful way, it may be that they haven't done enough. Internal kind of self-compassionate look at their own shame for their own privilege.

So instead of coping with that in the pain of their own, they can place it out on other people too, to call out. I'm not the, I'm not the bad one. I'm, I'm not the bad one because I'm calling you out. Yeah,

exactly. I've just noticed that, that pattern that sometimes I'm like, there's this woman, Sydney spirits who is part of her board and is she does she's African-American woman professor, and she does a lot of diversity work.

She's just so compassionate. And it's so easy to hear her, she's afraid, we don't want to mess with her, she's afraid, but it's just It just, it's just so much more effective when no one is blamed or shamed. And it's we are all human beings doing the best we can and here's the problem. What are we going to do about it, it's just a lot more effective. I don't know how we got there. That's interesting.

I don't know, but I'm so glad we did. And I think there's going to be that we did. And I love it because of what we're going to have to wrap up. I think I could talk to you for a lot longer, but I think the the idea of really holding the fierceness has been so outlined here and I love it because there's such an idea of even when you put a title on something that's so self-compassion, it can be so misleading that what we're talking about is just, oh, just take care of your little self.

But what you're talking about is so much more powerful is it, we have the same stew and I am focused on right now. And I can't remember who we heard it from recently. It's just simple, but it's. Care about somebody you don't know today. And it feels connected to this, like the idea of having self compassion and then getting through that last step of I'm not alone in, it allows us to then bring our care of other people more active in social justice rates and gender campaigns, et cetera.

This way of finding care for yourself is the most integrated way to be able to be fiercely caring of others and their character.

You're less self-focused ironically, you're more connected and you're more self-compassionate. And by the way, if any of my Buddhist friends don't like the term self-compassion you can just call it inner compassion.

If you don't like the word self itself, the word self's problem is called inner compassion. You know what passion is omnidirectional. It wouldn't have gotten people wouldn't have been as catchy. If I had that real ask really what it is in your compassion.

You know what? I love that because there is something about the self that makes it sound like I'm only doing self-help where the inner compassion and it's where our passion is right now.

It is compassion for self, for others and becoming more fearful and more fierce and action oriented. And there's something about that, that, yeah, inner and outer, inner self other I'll hold omnidirectional compassion. I see what the Buddha taught. He taught 360 degrees on directional compassion for everyone, all sentient beings.

So yeah, including ourselves, I love that this has been so dynamic and I really appreciate you coming on the show with us today. How could people find you if they were interested in learning more about self or inner compassion and doing some work about honing those skills, where would they find you?

Easy Google self-compassion I got an early stall though. You'll come up to my website, which is self-compassion that, or and so I've guided practices on there. I've got some stuff on fierce compassion, just explaining what it is. I've got fierce practices, I've got tender practices, the self-compassion tasks that you can take to find out your level of self-compassion by Ted talks on there and research.

If you're a research nerd, I've got literally hundreds, probably thousands at this point of articles organized by category on my web. If you want to do a little dive into the research and also links to the center for mindful self-compassion, which is like the training arm of what I do, it's a nonprofit I founded with Chris Groomer and you can take a mindful self-compassion training online.

I've also, we've also written a lot of books. She can take it and book workbook format so that it's easy, more easy today than it ever has been before to get training. And self-compassion, if this is a skill you'd like to develop, and I hope it is one, because it's a skill that is going to make the world go round in a whole different way.

This is according to our beliefs. And again, I want to do a shout out for your new book. Feel fierce. Self-compassion: how women can harness kindness to speak up.

Sorry. I was getting some feedback. I didn't want to lose that part. Yes. I didn't hear it. So he didn't. Yeah. I want to do a big shout out actually to your new book, too fierce. Self-compassion: how women can harness kindness to speak up, cleaning their power and thrive. And I want to do one thing. If you look at some reviews of your book, there's several by men.

I was very happy to see that they had gotten it. And as a gift of thinking of two, they'd gotten a gift for their wives and they read it and they said how powerful it was for them. So I want to do a big shout out to men to grab this book, read this book and harness your own kindness to claim your power in a way that is going to be the most effective and caring.

But I think it's a wonderful place to go.

Yeah, for men tender, self-compassion how men can harness tenderness to claim their power and thrive anyway. And All of the information that Dr. Neff just shared will be in our show notes. So you can access a lot of it to her website and things like that. We'll have live links on our show notes. All right. Thank you guys. Thank you so much for joining Kristen. I appreciate it. You're welcome.

It's been a lot of fun.

Thanks so much for joining. If you found this helpful, which I think you have, please take the time to send it on to somebody else that can, could gain some wisdom from Dr. Neff's experience and thank you very much for all of our patron listeners out there who help support this program.

And we'll see you again. We'll see around the bend.

All right. Great. Sounds good. That was fun.