

Supporting Girls Playing Big

Transcript from Sunday Sessions with Tara Mohr (May 16, 2021)

Tara: Hi, everybody. Welcome. Good to see you all this morning or this evening, whatever it is for you. Welcome, welcome. Some of you may be here because you are Sunday regulars. Some of you may have caught the word that we're going to have kind of a special focus today looking at the inner critic, and self-doubt, and particularly how we support the young people in our lives around their self-doubt and their internal critical voices.

And because my work is geared at women, this comes up a lot in terms of girls. But of course, with what we're going to talk about today, you can support any person in their life, any young person in their life, no matter how they identify in terms of gender. But you probably will hear some things today that may particularly show up for girls.

So, welcome. Feel free to share a hello in the chat and share where you're calling from. If you're here because there is a young person in your life, a student, or a mentee, or a niece, or a daughter that you're particularly thinking of today and wanting to support through what you learn today, feel free to share that in the chat. If not, you are, of course, more than welcome here, too. And really, everything we talk about you're going to be able to bring to your own relationship with your inner critic, so it all applies all the way around.

Great. Daughter, niece, nieces. Wonderful. Great. Goddaughter. Dance students. High school students with a high school teacher. Teens in a creative writing camp. Fantastic.

So, as I'm sure many of you know, for me, all this work that I do around helping women share their voices is rooted in very early experiences of coaching for me when I had just started my coaching practice and those first few clients, and really hearing from them in the privacy and the container of that coaching relationship, who do I think I am? Who would really trust me to do that? Or, yeah, maybe I'll be ready for that later, but not now.

And hearing this very strong inner critic in women who I was 100% sure were phenomenal, brilliant, not only ready to lead but people whom we desperately needed as leaders to improve our institutions, our society, and our culture. And so, that gap of seeing both their enormous capability and how they saw themselves was really painful and also really galvanizing for me because it felt to me like we have got to figure out what's going on here and what we can do about it.

And of course, as we have talked about many times in different ways in this community, we are each teaching what we need to learn. We're all drawn to work that relates to the questions that are still alive in our own hearts. And so, for me, I was seeing it in these women but I was also recognizing the same thing in myself. Why am I feeling so tentative in my work? Why do I have such a harsh narrative about myself going on in my head? I have a lot of reasons to feel more confident. Why don't I? So, I completely include myself as someone who struggles with that inner critical voice.

So, for the past ten years, I have worked in lots of different ways with a very wide diversity of women around how we work with that voice of self-doubt and what really makes a difference in allowing us to quiet it.

And of course, all the time in workshops, in classes, women say, "Well, what about our daughters and our girls? How do we get this earlier?" I usually refuse to answer the question because it can be one more place where women say, "I don't want to talk about me and focus on me. Let's just fix this for our kids." And so I am very quick, often, to say, "This is really about you today and how you change your relationship with your inner critic will, of course, affect what your daughter, or your niece, or your students see and absorb."

However, over the years, the question keeps coming. I've also done more work with girls around the inner critic. Not a ton. It's not the focus of my work, but whether going into schools, or talking with teachers who have adapted this work and taken it into schools, or doing dedicated workshops for girls, bringing these same ideas to them. And so, I have some things I want to report back from those experiences and some things I want to talk about and for us to all be able to take forward.

In framing all of that, one important piece I want to throw in is my very strong conviction—and I believe it's backed up by a lot of evidence—that tweens and teens and young adults are more than ready to do personal growth work. I happened to grow up in a home where, in many ways, that was the culture. The culture was you analyze your dreams at the breakfast table from elementary school on. The culture was everyone goes to therapy all the time at all ages, not out of a pathology but just because we all have a lot that's unconscious that's good to make conscious. The culture was you kind of look at the world and live your life through a psychological lens.

And for me personally, that was invaluable. I can really remember as early as high school starting to use personal growth tools and skills that I was learning to navigate the jungle that is a high school, to navigate friendships, and popularity hierarchies, and questions of fitting in, and have huge positive impact from that.

And in some ways, I think, as a culture, on a lot of that learning about self and personal growth stuff, we think it comes in adulthood, not earlier. But in so many ways I think, actually, teens are better suited than adults to do that work. They're more open. Things are more pliable. There are often—not always—less stressors, and burdens, and responsibilities of adulthood that come in to calcify things in us later. So, it's actually not just an applicable age group but it's a special window, I think, of opportunity for that kind of growth and learning.

And today I'm going to be referencing a lot a couple of recent workshops I did with girls. One was junior high girls, roughly, and one was high school and college-age girls. And you'll see from their comments that the comments are exactly as sophisticated and as clear in understanding of what we're talking about with the inner critic as they are in an adult workshop. There is just no difference in the level of getting it.

So, that's the first thing I want to say because I know most of us didn't grow up in a culture of analyzing our dreams at the breakfast table every morning, but just to kind of open the question for you to carry in your life if you are not already, of, "What could I bring from my interests in psychology, and personal growth, and inner work, and mindfulness? What could I bring? Am I carrying some assumptions that my 13-year-old, or my 14-year-old, or my 18-year-old, just isn't at the life stage for that?" And maybe those assumptions need some questioning. Feel free to pop any comments on that in the chat.

People are saying, "I couldn't agree more that children are ready and it's a unique time but there are no programs." Yeah. There are some starting to crop up. Fleda says, "Oh yes, sometimes I think my girls get it more than I do." Yeah. "It requires vulnerability on my end to talk about it with my girl." "This really resonates but often my teen is resistant. She thinks it's weird." Yeah. And we all deserve to find our section in the new age bookstore. That is a basic human right.

So, her section might be different than yours and, unfortunately, the new age bookstore doesn't exist in as many towns as it used to. The town I grew up in, there were two within walking distance. Can you believe it? Now, one of them is a high-end math tutoring place and, every time I drive by, I just feel so, "Oh, that says a lot." So, what you're drawn to, the teachers you're drawn to or the methodologies you're drawn to, might be different from your teen. And then also don't forget it's always different when a parent is introducing it versus if it can come in through another avenue.

So, the first thing I wanted to ask is, if you're here with a group of girls or a young girl in mind, or an older girl in mind, to just notice and we can share in the chat, when she's having a super-self-critical moment and you hear it—or you might not even hear it but you're observing it or deducing it—what happens in you?

“Feel crushed,” “I feel sadness.” “It triggers my inner critic,” says Amy. Yeah. “A desire to fix it.” “Tense.” “I want to fix it and make her feel better.” “It breaks my heart because I see how wonderful she is.” “I feel so sad.” So sad, yeah. “Broken-hearted.” “It makes me anxious.” “I feel frozen in panic.” “I want to prevent her from feeling hurt.”

“I want her to see herself as I see her.” “I ask a question, what could I role-model for her?” “I want to prevent her from making the mistakes I made.” “I want to jump in and talk about it.” “I want to soothe her.” “I wish I could transmit what I see so she could see beyond her pain.” Yeah. I lot of this, “I want her to see what I see in her.” Yes.

And now just notice, with whatever reaction you put there, how would you say it hinders or helps you in being of service in that moment? So, it might help you. It might hinder you from being of service in that moment. To just notice.

Interesting. A lot of people saying that the trying to fix hinders and prevents listening. A lot of people mentioning that, yep. It hinders, yeah. A lot of people noticing what gets in the way of their listening—interesting—and their acceptance. Yeah.

And what tends to happen if you try and fix? What happens next after that? Tiffany says, “You don’t get it.” Oh, yeah. “She shuts down.” I love seeing the themes, the parallels. “She shuts down.” “She hardens her position.” “Disconnection.” “Trying to fix doesn’t go well.” “She isn’t ready.” “She just needs to be in her feelings.” “She shuts down or it gets worse.”

“Resistance.” “Feeling them pull back from the conversation.” “I might alienate her.” “They quiet down and then I realize I’m not listening.” Great.

So, this seems fairly conclusive. Lots of themes here.

So, one thing for us, maybe, all to think about there is to notice that instinct to fix is coming out of our, of course, care for that other person. It’s also coming out of, “This is painful for me and I need to make that pain go away.” That’s a very normal instinct.

It says to me, if we’re so often trying to fix, we need a no really good place to bring that pain so that, if I start to know, oh, yeah, I have a buddy who is another mom, and, once a week, we get on the phone and talk about what happened that was hard or painful in our parenting, or in our teaching, or whatever the relationship is. Or, I know I have a journaling practice where I write these things and kind of turn them over. We want to make sure we have another place to take the pain and to take the working through it since we’re noticing it might not be so effective to act out of in the relationship.

And then just noticing all of this writing you all just did is a really great way to have heightened noticing of, “Okay, that’s what’s happening for me when she’s bringing this and it can easily cause me to act out of a way that doesn’t build connection.” The interesting thing here is, for us adult women, too, what I’ve learned—I mean, really, it became apparent very quickly—is that, when we’re in self-doubt, for someone else to say, “No, no, you’re going to be great at that,” or, “just believe in yourself,” does that work for you, when someone says it to you? No, it doesn’t really impact it. And with our girls, I want to be very cautious about I’m not saying we should stop saying you’re amazing, and I see you, and I treasure you, and you’re precious to me. I’m not saying that. I’m just saying let’s notice, at least on the self-doubt front, it’s not like that’s going to change their mind.

I don’t know if everyone knows that the original research on imposter syndrome was done with very high-achieving women. The whole phenomenon was originally noticed in high-achieving, professional women, meaning these were women who had lots of evidence that they were awesome. We also know from Carol Dweck’s work that she studies the damning effects of praise on children’s motivation and their appetite for challenge.

Guess who of all types of children is the most damaged by praise? Girls who are achieving in school. And why? There are a lot of dynamics inherent in that. Part of it is what Carol Dweck’s research has shown, that when you say to a child, “You’re so good at math,” or, “You’re awesome at spelling,” or whatever it is, it doesn’t leave that child feeling confident. It leaves them feeling afraid that the next thing they do will disprove the praise. And I think a lot of us can relate to this as adults, right?

So, you give a child a test. In Carol Dweck’s research, you give them a test. They do really well on the test and you say, “That was so great. You’re so good at math. Do you want to go do the next test yet?” And they’re like, “What do I have to gain from the next test? I just got through. I did well. This authority figure thinks I’m good at this thing. I, for a temporary moment, can rest in the idea that I did this thing. Why would I want to go do the next challenge?”

So, in her formulation, instead, the alternative that is being looked at is to say to that child, “You worked so hard. I saw how you struggled with that. That was awesome, how you just stuck with it even when it was tough.” So they’re learning, “It’s not my perfect performance but it’s that hard work and perseverance.” So, that’s part of it, how praise can leave us feeling afraid. It can feel like we fooled them and now, next time, my imposter thing is I’m going to be revealed as an imposter.

Another piece, though, is that the more we are praising our kids—praising them for what they do or praising them that “You’re talented in this way and that”—the more we’re really emphasizing having a story about themselves and a package of themselves. So, I like these

terms from Antonio Damasio, a neuropsychologist-type-person/researcher. He talks about there are two selves. He calls them the autobiographical self and the core self.

The autobiographical self is the story we tell about ourselves. So, for us as adults, it might sound like I'm a good friend. I'm a loyal person. I'm really disorganized. I'm a professional accountant. I'm attractive. I'm not attractive. It's whatever our narrative is. So, this is like the ego-self is very interested in, who am I in that way? What's my bio? What's my story? Let me travel outside myself and look at myself like a package. What would I say? That's the autobiographical self. It depends on language and depends on story-making.

The core self is experiencing self. So, it's not really like, who am I? What's my bio? It's like, what am I feeling in this moment? What's my creative inspiration? What's my body intuition in this moment? Is the situation a yes or a no, stay away? What do I long to do?

And we know that the more we live in the autobiographical self, essentially, the more we cause ourselves a lot of suffering. And the more we can move into the core self, interesting things start to happen. So the core self is the one that's like, "Hm, I kind of want to write a book." The autobiographical self is like, "Who are you to write a book? Are you qualified to write a book? How do you measure against all these other people?" Core self: "I'm just tired. I'm not up for taking a run today." Autobiographical self: "Well, aren't you a person who runs three times a week? How do you compare on the lady on Instagram?"

So just think about the culture of school: is it supporting the development of the core self or the autobiographical self? So, every time we're saying to a kid—or the teacher is, or the system is—"You're good at science but not at this," "You're the type of kid who __," "You are in the group of kids who __," or, "You've been labeled this way by that other __," there is a lot of autobiographical stuff happening.

And so, in a way, can you see how praising kids can end up really feeding into the autobiographical self because we're sort of adding to the narration about them instead of really meeting that core self?

Thank you, guys, because, when I was writing my notes for this morning, I kind of got this more succinctly than I ever have. It's just to say I think the work here, whether it's us as adult women or with our kids, is not to think better of ourselves; the work is to think bigger than ourselves. So, we're not trying to have a better opinion about ourselves because we're actually trying to live less in the story about ourselves. We're trying to act out of our desires to serve, our values, our creative impulses. It's not about ourselves at all. In one of our girls' workshops recently, we had a great moment where this girl was asking—she was maybe around eighth grade—"I'm trying to decide whether to go out for the varsity team. Isn't my inner critic helping me assess if I am really ready to do it?" She was starting to think about, "Well, what if I just let that go?"

And we really got this great conversation of, why do we even need to self-assess? Maybe the question is, do you want to go out for the team?

So, I want to read you some things from the girls, here. So this was, I think, in the older age, 16-24-year-olds, when I asked them, "What does your inner critic say?" And this is going to be sad, I'll just warn you. So, this is them recording, "What does your inner critic most frequently say to you?"

That I'm talking too much. You're fat. You're lazy. Work harder. No one cares what you have to say. Keep it to yourself. Who do you think you are? You're not good enough and you'll fail. That's too hard for you. You are so weird. You're not enough. You talk too much. You're talking too much. You're being too loud. Why can't you get it right? You're going to say the wrong thing. You're lazy. You won't live up to expectations so why bother?

You can't make new friends. You sound like a nerd with that lisp. No one cares. You're too loud and no one cares what you say. You're going to say the wrong thing. You're not good enough for this. You don't deserve this. They're not really your friends. You never do anything right. You have an amazing twin brother, why aren't you anything like him? Someone else will be able to do it better. You always say the wrong thing. You're stupid and nothing you say makes sense. You're never going to be good enough at that.

Don't even try. You're not smart enough. You're going too deep. Don't do or say that. They're going to think you're not as smart as you used to be. You're too quiet. They don't actually like you. Why would you even think of doing that? You're going to look like a fool. You don't like anything, what's wrong with you? You're weak, stop crying. You don't deserve what you have. You're overthinking it. They don't care that much. You used to be a good test-taker, what happened? You need to be perfect, and interesting, and fun, and witty for people to like you. You can't be anything but bad. Everyone is looking at you and analyzing your every action. So, it is heart-breaking. So, this was age 16-24, and I want to say that's not 100 girls, that's ten girls. That's everybody in the room. We have to think of that that's the girls whose moms, or aunties, or teachers were clued-in enough to sign them up for an inner critic workshop. And also, that came out in a rush 15 minutes into the workshop. This was not hard for these girls to get what the inner critic was, recognize it, and want to say it.

Then, just, again, to really underscore my point about how clued-in they are, before we even talked anything about what the inner critic is, before there was any teaching, I just asked them, when you think about the "why" of your self-doubt, what do you think the reason for it is; the why? And here's what they said.

Family expectations. Fear of failure. I don't want to make a fool of myself in public. It's trying to protect me. Fear of failure. Fear of rejection. Fear of not being liked. Fear of being judged.

Fear of success. Fear of embarrassment. Protecting myself. A fear of not succeeding. A fear of making mistakes. A fear of being seen as lesser. A fear of letting myself or others down. Lots of fear of embarrassment and humiliation. People-pleasing. It's a way to be careful or responsible. So, it's just to say they totally get it, even more often than adults do. They understand the protective intent of the inner critic.

So, let's talk about what we can do about it. And again, I kind of want to qualify all this by saying, unlike my work with adult women where I can really feel like I've done this 7,000 times and seen the results, that's not true in my work with girls. So, this is sort of, let's hold this as, if we bring those same Playing Big approaches that we used with the adults to the girls, let's see what happens, and you all can try it on. Because we know what we are doing—"Honey, you're so wonderful"—is just not doing enough.

So, let me pull up a slide for a minute here if I can. So, three big concepts. One is, in the Playing Big model, we talk about the inner critic as a voice within us. So, we're not saying, "Urgh, I'm just not a confident person," or, "urgh, I'm so nervous." Those are ways of making this about fundamental attributes of ourselves: I'm either confident or I'm not, I'm nervous. Instead, we're starting to recognize the inner critic as a voice within us: "Oh, I'm really hearing from my inner critic right now around this situation. I'm hearing from it strongly." And by doing that, we really help shrink that voice of self-doubt back into its proper place. We're teaching ourselves and reminding ourselves that there is another voice in us, or many other voices in us. That's just one. And that, even in a situation where it's speaking up—"Oh, my inner critic is really loud"—that we could also then ask ourselves, "Yeah, but what other voices are present? What about my ambition, or my playfulness?" Or you have inner mentor in your toolkit: "What about my inner mentor's voice?"

So, with the young people in our life, too, we can start to say, "Hey, you know how I think of that when I get that kind of chatter in my head? I think of it as a voice within me. I think of it as my inner critic. I know it's just one voice and I kind of try and look at it like that, like, oh, that's one voice in my head. What other voices are there, or what other feelings are there? And I also know that voice is often not the voice of truth."

And you can give some examples from your own life like, "Oh, one time, I was applying for a job and I heard this voice that said, 'They're going to laugh at you,' and it was totally off-base. Here's what really happened." I bet you can also think of times in your life when you've had that voice and it has been totally off-base.

So, we can talk about it as a voice and we can share how that voice shows up for us. A lot of this, I think, when we're trying to work with the young people in our lives in a new way, is just about saying, "Hey, here's what I do in my life that works well for me. You take it or leave it," rather than coming in with a, "You might do this," or, "you should this."

Then also we start to have this practice of recognizing the voice of self-doubt where we just are looking for when it's showing up because, for most of us, the inner critic voice has become the background music that we live with. It's the water that we're swimming in. It often feels like the voice of truth so we don't even notice it anymore.

And so, we want to talk to our girls about, what if, just for a day, we try and notice? I'll try and notice all the times mine comes up, you'll try and notice all the times yours comes up. We can laugh about it together. Or to just invite them to notice it in their own lives.

A third piece that's really powerful is—and it's powerful for adults when I work with adult women and for girls, too—is really getting that this voice is universal. So, all those things I was just reading you, that was from the workshop that happened on Zoom, and everyone was sharing those in the chat. There is always shock at seeing, “Oh, my gosh. Everyone else is carrying this around.”

I happen to also just do this with that same exercise with a group of women that are MD/Ph.D. students. And we just had them all put everything in the chat. And of course, they all think each other are amazing, and to see what everyone is carrying around makes it clear really quickly that can't be the voice of truth because I know these women are amazing. And so, if everyone else in the room is hearing those really negative things about themselves and I can see that's absurd about them, it kind of forces me to look at my own inner critic narratives differently. So, you can think about, with girls, what's a good way, in your context? If you're leading a dance class or a writing group, that would be a great exercise to do with the group. If you're a parent, maybe you want to suggest it to someone else in their life. It might be hard to do that as a parent or it might not, to bring a group together. Or just encourage them to talk with their friends about it because this does tend to stay really secret and that fuels the sense that those thoughts are the truth.

Just to reiterate, the whole idea here, the goal for ourselves and our girls, is not unflinching confidence. The goal here is to have a more wise and effective relationship with our self-doubt because we know it's not going anywhere, for psychological reasons, for cultural reasons. Nobody graduates from this. You might graduate in certain areas, like, the thing your inner critic used to speak up about, it doesn't anymore, but it will move onto the next place you're on the edge of a comfort zone or where there is some sort of emotional risk.

Remember when the girls were saying, “Well, it's there to protect me, and my fear of embarrassment”? So, the inner critic is just speaking up any time our girls feel something is emotionally risky for them. It's risky to wear that. It's risky to say that. It's risky to be honest in this situation. It's risky to be the smartest one in the class. Whatever it is, it signals that it is emotionally risky in their context or that it might be. The inner critic comes up to say things that

are so scary and wounding that they'll just go right back into the comfort zone and not do the thing that carries that risk.

So, that's why it's not going away and why trying to find some unfailing confidence really tends to not work. But we can use these tools and practices to be in more wise relationship. And then, today's version of this is we're not trying to think better of ourselves, we're trying to think bigger than ourselves. So, moving from that autobiographical self to the core self. We're not really doing self-assessment at all, which is a huge challenge in systems like our traditional educational ones that are always assessing us.

So, of a few of the tools that we can use and that we can teach our girls or help someone else teach them to quiet the inner critic, that first one is just noticing and naming it when it comes up. So, tools you can use, and teach, and talk about, and model—because, of course, modeling is so important—are noticing and naming.

So, you're not noticing and naming their inner critic. Let me make that clear. You would be noticing and naming your inner critic or, in some way, bringing this conversation or education of we can notice and name our own inner critics. And noticing and naming simply means, when I'm hearing that voice of self-doubt, I go, "Oh, I'm hearing from my inner critic now." And sometimes, that's enough to just help us unhook, because that's so different from just being identified with the thought, being in the thought that this is going to be a disaster, or I have no idea what I'm doing: "Oh, I'm hearing from my inner critic now. Okay. I know. That's a regular thing, especially in scary situations. Moving on"—that kind of thing. So, there's noticing and naming.

In the *Playing Big* book and in the courses, we create a character that personifies the inner critic. I do this with girls. You can imagine—it works great with a younger audience—where they think up, who would the character be? It could be a made-up character from film or television that really represents their inner critic. And then, when they're hearing an inner critic thought, they can picture it coming from that character.

And we talk a lot about, how is that character different from you? So, I'm thinking of one girl in our recent girls' workshop. She created this character named Chloe and Chloe was the popular girl, the one who is really interested in how the other girls look: "She has very strong ideas about how bodies should look. She's a little judgmental. She's really worried about me losing friends and getting embarrassed."

And so, then we can talk about, "Okay, how are Chloe's priorities different from yours?" and really start to pull that apart. And when she's having an inner critic thought, we can see it as coming from Chloe, and that kind of shrinks it back into its place and maybe even adds some

humor with it. So, if you're interested in that tool, in the *Playing Big* in the chapter on the inner critic, there are questions and a process to walk you through that.

And then, going back to this idea that we're not trying to think better of ourselves, we're trying to think bigger of ourselves. We can also think about, "Okay, what's the critic trying to protect me from here?" compassionately seeing its motives: "Oh, it's trying to protect me from embarrassment, or failure, or rejection."

And then, choose a value of ours to lead instead. So if we say, well, if I'm in the situation of, let's say, auditioning for the school play, what's the inner critic trying to protect me from? Oh, being really disappointed if I don't get in.

And then, what's a personal value of yours that could be in charge for you in that situation instead of that fear? Oh, maybe it's adventure because it kind of feels like an adventure to try that out and I really value having adventure in my life. Or maybe it's creativity because I love to be part of creative projects. Or maybe it's trusting myself because I think I'm strong enough to go through this audition process.

And then, that value becomes the cornerstone. And can you see how that is a much richer place to plant our roots and a much more stable grounding than I have to believe in myself or I have to be convinced it's going to work out great if I audition? If we're trying to do that, and if the adults around us are just saying, "But honey, you're the best singer, you can do it," or whatever, that's not so reliable because it still has us in that egoic territory of assessing the self. And also, we can't guarantee that it's going to work out great. We don't know. And we shouldn't do it simply because we believe it's going to work out great. We should be doing it for some deeper, more intrinsic, core-self reason.

So, the values are taking us back to the core self. What means something to me as a principle, as a way of being, that could be my guidepost in this situation? I'm going to choose to have that be what directs me even as the inner critic is chattering away—and it will often continue to chatter away. And there is more on that in the *Playing Big* book, chapter two.

So, those are some really nuanced but very actionable ways of working with the inner critic. And again, you can do them in your own life as an adult so the young people around you see that—"I'm really nervous about this new project I'm launching but I know, often, that self-doubting voice is just trying to keep me safe, and there's something I really want more than that sense of safety. I really want to see this project through, and here's why"—modeling that and inviting them to try that out, too.

I also wanted to share one more thing from the workshops, and then we can take some questions. We did ask the girls about, when does the inner critic come up most for them? And I

thought it was really interesting that a lot was around—I mean, probably, it's not shocking but it was just helpful to have confirmed—social stuff: friends and dating stuff, body image stuff, a lot about clothes (I mean, these poor girls are just feeling like what they wear is this high-risk matter every morning) not actually as much around academics and very little, also, around extra-curricular activities. So, it was more of this kind of social domain, body domain.

But I also found it really interesting there was a point where I asked a group of girls, what would you be doing if you weren't listening to your inner critic or if your inner critic wasn't present? And there were a couple that said, "I'd go out for the lacrosse team and I would make more friends," but the biggest theme was some form of, "I'd share my art more," which I just thought was so touching. There was a whole slew of: I'd sing more; I'd sing in front of people; I'd show people my drawings; I'd write more songs; I'd be painting.

And for a lot of these girls—with some of them, I know their families a little bit or just learned from other parts of the conversation—the arts are not like the main thing that they're pursuing. They may be athletes or they may be up to something else. But I just felt that was very important in terms of, first of all, just how we've lost that place for the creative spirit in a way where it's safe to share your creative offerings, and it's not hierarchical, and it's not being evaluated. And just for girls, it's acknowledging that it's very vulnerable to share your creative work. It's actually kind of different than going out for the lacrosse team. There was an inner critic voice that was quite present for a lot of them shutting that down. So, that's just a really interesting other piece that emerged there.

What questions are you sitting with? Let's put some questions in the chat.

"What role do we think social media plays in this?" Definitely. It's playing a role, for sure. And a lot of the research on the negative psychological impacts of social media shows that it's kind of like it impacts everyone negatively but it's always worse for women and girls. And girls can use social media more than boys, in addition.

There was a lot about body image stuff as it relates to social media, for sure. In one of our groups, we had a whole, interesting conversation about why ... We were all kind of talking about how the "body positivity" posts really bother them and really hurt them. There was sort of this sense of, "That's fake," or almost an anger of, "That's not my reality so I'm mad at you for trying to give me permission to have any body, because that's not the world I'm going into at school," so that was really interesting. So yeah, I think we're up against something tough and new.

I also think, however, that there are so many ways that the typical educational environment creates a profound lack of a sense of safety for the kids in it. It's not safe to be who you are

from very early on, and I think that social media is a place where that lack of safety and its consequences get played out.

So in the sense, I don't think that social media is the cause of the problem; it's like the canvas on which the problem paints. And I do believe that if we were structuring our school communities really differently, and there was room for authenticity, and there was a focus on safety, and connection, and on the core self, and not on the autobiographical self, social media could probably be a lovely place for expression and sharing.

But I know, in my school, there were kind of the dangerous corridors where kids would tease other kids, or where, maybe, you could get bullied because they were kind of off the main quad and no adults were around. And so, the corridors weren't the problem. There was something that was coming up in kids that needed to get expressed and needed a place. Personally, I sort of see social media the same way.

Anne says, "So, the inner critic never goes away, it just changes its clothing?" So far, that's my experience, yeah. I'm hearing Diane von Fürstenberg say, "Yeah, I would say three out of seven days I wake up feeling like a complete loser," and Twyla Tharp saying, "Every time I make a new dance, I'm convinced it's going to be the one where the audience is going to walk out laughing." But as long as we're genuinely risking, there is some level of that that continues coming up for many of us.

Yeah, that really struck me, too. Pauline is asking, "Why do you think so many were concerned about talking too much?" Wasn't that interesting? I just think that's an expression. It's almost a metaphor for what's going on with women and boys in our culture: that we are just all carrying this sense of, "My voice is not wanted," and that's starting early for girls.

I think it's also a way that certain gender power dynamics get enforced, by girls feeling like they're just not supposed to express much at all, and kind of still these negative, Chatty Cathy kinds of stereotypes we see in books, and TV, and stuff. I think it's a really sad expression of that and of a certain kind of not just inner critic but a certain kind of deep lack of self-trust or even self-hatred that we internalize that then comes out in feeling like anything we want to say is talking too much.

Lisa is asking, "How to bring in other people to help support our children with this as it's different when it doesn't come from the parents? Where do we look for that?" It could be if there is a teacher, or a coach, or something who you think might be interested in this. It could be sharing with them about it. The *Playing Big* book is a good way to just help them get an orientation, and there are plenty of junior high and high school teachers that take the book and adapt it, or pieces of it, for their age cohort. I would probably look there.

“How do I bring up the idea of the inner critic to my daughter who aren’t familiar with the term to start the conversation?” I don’t think I have a great answer to that because it’s probably so context-dependent on your girls and your family. You could ask your inner mentor what she thinks about that or for ideas. But it may really arise organically, too.

They may say something that is a jumping-off point for it. Sometimes, it’s better to bring it up when there is not a jumping-off point for it, so it’s really clear you’re not criticizing their natural response to something in the moment. But I think it’s also okay to say, “Do you ever have a self-critical voice inside? I know I sometimes do and I want to talk about it.”

Someone has asked me, do I have one key bit of advice for parents of pre-teen girls? Not really. I don’t think I have a particular one thing. I have offered some online workshops for girls in the past and will in the future again, yes, so stay tuned if you’re on my list.

Well, this is a great note to end on. Paula says, “My 12-year-old told me in a rare moment of emotional outpouring and crying just two months ago that she hears voices in her head that say, ‘Who do you think you are? You’re not good enough,’ and that was a definite conversation starter.” Yeah. And it’s so true. Sometimes—I find this, certainly, with my parenting—because you came today—it’s just funny how life works—something will happen in the next three days. It will precipitate a conversation. Or you go talk to your support person about something, and then you never even dealt with the situation, but it resolves. So, sometimes things work in interesting ways like that, so you’ll see what shows up now, and what opportunities arise, and all of that.

Let’s, before we go, please share, what’s one thing that particularly resonated with you that you’re taking away? It’s just helpful for us to know, and also we always learn so much by reading each other’s.

“That kids understand this early on.” “Core self.” Great. Oh, yeah, let me put his name/reference for that: Antonio Damasio. I believe that’s right. “Thinking bigger, not better.” Great. “Just one voice.” “Looking at your core values and committing to come from there.” “Creating a wise relationship with the inner critic.” Yeah. “That young girls are open to talking about this.” “The question of what genuine risk is.” Yes, genuine versus perceived risk. “We have to look at ourselves first.” “Being mindful about how we’re using praise.” “The impact when we praise them.” Yeah.

And remember, praise is the junk-food version of nutritious love. Sometimes, I think what we’re trying to say is, “I adore you, and you’re precious to me, and I’m here for you no matter what, and you’re an amazing, sacred creation.” So, just say the nutritious version. Sometimes, I think in our culture the only way we know how to do it is the, “That was so great,” or, “Thank you for doing this thing,” or, “Wow, honey, you did it!” But we can do to whatever feels like the most

pure reflection of our cherishing of them, which may have words to it or may be expressed in some other way.

We're going to unmute so we can all say a raucous goodbye. Thank you so much for being here. We will not be together next Sunday. Our next Sunday session is going to be May 30th and we'll be talking about another topic then. But please, join us again. Lots of love to everybody. So, you should all be able to unmute now so we can say a raucous goodbye.

Participants: Bye! Thank you!

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