



Q and A with Author Amy Ahlers

Your book is called “*Big Fat Lies Women Tell Themselves: Ditch your Inner Critic and Wake-Up your Inner Superstar*”, what do you mean by big fat lies?

The National Science Foundation has discovered that the average person thinks as many as sixty thousand thoughts a day and that the vast majority of them are negative and critical. In other words, we’re constantly telling ourselves Big Fat Lies. This internal battle eats away at self-love, self-worth, and self-esteem, leading to depression, dissatisfaction, decreased productivity, and heart-stopping stress.

We’re paying a high price for letting these Lies go unquestioned. Here are some facts for those of you who are statistic junkies:

- We’re stressed out, and the National Institute of Health reports that 70 percent of all disease is stress related.
- We’re worried. *Time* magazine has proclaimed that women are more powerful, but less happy, than they’ve ever been.
- Even when we’re doing well, we don’t *feel* as if we’re doing well. According to *The Paradox of Declining Female Happiness* by Betsey Stevenson and Justin Wolfers, “The lives of women in the United States have improved over the past thirty-five years by many objective measures, yet we show that measures of subjective well-being indicate that women’s happiness has declined both absolutely and relative to men.”
- And all this self-loathing is seriously affecting our mental health: the National Institutes of Mental Health reports that nearly *twice as many American women* as men are affected by depression and that between five and ten million women and girls suffer from eating disorders.

How depressing is *that*? I mean, it wasn’t so long ago that women were banding together to win the right to vote, and now here we are powerful and free . . . and totally miserable. It’s time for us to fling open our windows and yell, “I’m mad as hell and I’m not going to take it anymore!” (Thank you, Paddy Chayefsky.) I know it and you know it; we are ready to get our happiness on — and not just by popping a pill. It is high time we went easy on ourselves, just for the sheer joy of it.

You talk a lot about The Inner Critic and Inner Mean Girl- what do you mean by that?

The Inner Critic, or Inner Mean Girl, a term coined by my colleague, Christine Arylo, and me is that internal voice that berates you. She’s negative. She’s catty. She’s judgmental.

She compares your worst to everyone else’s best. In her eyes, you lose every time.

She spews cruel words at you and makes you feel like you’re in seventh grade again — and *not* in the popular group. Your Inner Mean Girl’s favorite thing to do is to make you feel small, inadequate, and unworthy. She’s always finding evidence to prove her theory: *you are not enough*.

And I've got news for you: Your Inner Critic is a liar! She tells you Big Fat Lies to try to maintain the status quo and keep you in your comfort zones. Even if your comfort zones aren't all that comfortable. She will tell you over and over that "you're not enough," "it's too late," and "you're a failure."

Who is the Inner Wisdom and Inner Superstar?

As loud and nasty as the voice of your Inner Critic can be, there is another voice inside you that is even more powerful. Take a moment right now and tune in to your Inner Wisdom. Close your eyes, take a deep breath, and invite her in. Feel her deep inside you, beckoning you to wake up to your magnificence.

As you connect more and more to your Inner Wisdom, you'll begin to feel your light shining brighter. When you fully wake up your Inner Superstar, you make heads turn as you walk into a room because you are so deeply and fully being *you*. You are in the flow. You become a magnet for everything your heart desires because you are like a beacon for happiness, love, and success.

How do you know when you're being hard on yourself?

- Feeling punished
- Shame (wanting to hide/conceal)
- Guilt (wishing you'd done something different – blaming yourself)
- Torment (running the same old movie over and over)
- Anxiety (racing thoughts)
- Overwhelmed (right back into bed)

And how do we know what we're being too hard on ourselves about?

When I ask, every woman immediately knows, and she tears up. So listeners – right now, get quiet in your heart for a moment and answer the question, "What are you being too hard on yourself about?"

The most important relationship in your life is your relationship with you. And, woman to woman, most of us are not doing so hot. We are incredibly, intensely, hard on ourselves. And that stinks. We think if we were just accomplished enough, thin enough, beautiful enough, rich enough, that we could then magically shift our internal dialogue into an empowering, nurturing, loving one. But after more than eleven years of coaching women from every conceivable walk of life, I finally got it: women are really hard on themselves, *despite* their external circumstances. We all engage in beating ourselves up both for the big things and for the tiniest imperfections. And it isn't helping us become more successful or to feel more fulfilled or even to get more done.

What is your 3-Step Process for taking your power back?

The Wake-Up Call Three-Step Process

- *Step One:* Ask yourself, "What is my Inner Mean Girl/Inner Critic saying?" Give voice to the Big Fat Lies you are swallowing. Bring them out of the darkness and into the light so they can be healed. Don't hold back here . . . rant! Let it out!
- *Step Two:* Close your eyes, take a deep breath, and ask yourself, "What does my Inner Wisdom know?" Sink into the land of your Inner Wisdom's Truth. This is the place that feels grounded. It feels like *home*. Really let the Truth wash all over you and disintegrate the Big Fat Lies. Ahhh . . . that feels better! (Remember that even if your Inner Wisdom is delivering a hard, tough-love Truth it will feel so much better than when your Inner Critic berates you with it. Your Inner Wisdom comes from a compassionate, loving place, whereas your Inner Mean Girl shames and beats you with its Lies.)
- *Step Three:* Lock in your Inner Wisdom's Truth by repeating it back (aloud if possible) with a physical gesture to tap it in. My Inner Wisdom has me lightly touch my heart; I have a client who waves her

hand, and another who touches her belly. This will become your touchstone for stepping into Truth and feeling better. It will allow you to lay down a new neural pathway in your brain that serves as a shortcut to your Truth. My clients and I can now simply do that physical gesture anytime we feel the Lies coming on and immediately feel relief and connection to our Inner Wisdom's Truth.

As you practice this process, you will feel your Inner Superstar radiating her strength and power more often, until you at last feel that she is present almost all the time.

You have 59 Big Fat Lies in your book, what is one of the most common Lies and how do you address each lie in the book?

Each lie has a corresponding truth, challenge, affirmation and inspiring quote to help the reader take her power back from her Inner Critic and lock in on her Truth.

One of the most common is: I am not enough. An online survey conducted by Oprah.com asks readers, "What is missing in your life?" The number one answer by far was self-love. This Lie, the one that says you are not good enough, that you are not worthy, is pandemic, but don't believe it: you *are* good enough. You *do* add up. You *are* worthy. Declaring that you are enough is a decision. It's high time you decided that you are enough. It's a big decision to make, so don't worry if it takes practice. You will need to decide over and over *until it becomes your core belief*.

What about the Big Fat Lie #3 "I'm unlovable"?

We are *all* lovable. We are all worthy of being loved. *You* are lovable. No matter what you've done. No matter what mistakes you've made, there is a place of love just waiting for you. The first step in embracing this lovability is taking the stand to love yourself.

Cooper was a witty writer and a wonderful vegetarian cook, and she had an Inner Critic that was just brutal with this unlovable Lie. We named her Inner Mean Girl "Loveless Lulu." Loveless Lulu carried a martini in one hand and a cigarette in the other. She was always in the background, saying, "You are unlovable. Who will ever love you? You'll *never* be loved, kid."

After we named and drew Loveless Lulu, Cooper had a lightbulb moment. She realized that this Lie was her Inner Mean Girl's way of keeping her safe so that she would never be hurt or vulnerable. In other words, thinking she was safe from being wounded was the big payoff of believing she was unlovable. But the cost was way too great. With Loveless Lulu in charge, Cooper kept attracting men that treated her poorly, proving her "I'm unlovable" theory. Yet, Cooper wanted to love, she wanted to receive true love, and she desperately wanted to stop the loveless self-talk. She began by starting a loving relationship with herself, and her life completely transformed. Not only did she become much happier in her own skin, but within one year she also ended up attracting her soulmate (they met at the farmers' market over some new spring radishes — I think it's so romantic that you never know when love will find you, don't you?) and is now happily married.

Or the Lie #22 "I'm a failure"?

Human beings fail. In fact, we fail all the time. Winston Churchill put it brilliantly when he said, "Success is leaping from failure to failure without loss of enthusiasm."

The problem is that when we fail, we tend to believe that we've become *failures*. In reality, we just *experienced* failure — that's it. Failures are opportunities for reflection, growth, maturity, and wisdom. After all, failure is a part of life — no matter how successful you are. Check out these stats:

- Babe Ruth had 1,330 career strikeouts.
- At one point, Donald Trump had \$900 million in personal debt and four years of repeated failure and financial ruin.

- Oprah Winfrey’s movie *Beloved* was a box office bust, losing approximately \$30 million.
- The truth is that the road to success is paved with failures. It isn’t in avoiding failures that we achieve success, but in *processing* our failures effectively. Write down a list of all your failures over the past year. Next to each failure, write down how it helped you grow.

Tell us about the Big Fat Lie #5 “I don’t measure up”?

Ah yes, the Comparison Queen, as we call her in Inner Mean Girl Reform School. She is always comparing you and telling you how you don’t measure up OR how you’re so much better than everyone else. Look instead to inspiration and connection.

Women seem to be obsessed with body image, in your book Big Fat Lie #14 says “I’m too (fat, thin, tall, short, ugly)”. How do we overcome these lies?

I don’t know a single woman who doesn’t want to change her looks in some way. How could we *not* feel this way, when practically since birth our subconscious minds have been bombarded by images of flawless women like creatures? According to media expert Jean Kilbourne, the average American is exposed to three thousand ads every day! And almost every one of those ads is telling us that we are not enough and is meant to sell us something to make us look better, younger, thinner. Really allow that to sink in for a minute.

So when you look in the mirror and find your Inner Critic flagellating you with words such as *fat, ugly, or old*, take a moment to ask yourself to whom are you comparing yourself. Too fat compared to whom? Too old compared to what image? Too ugly compared to what supermodel (who’s been airbrushed and Photoshopped to death)?

Notice what this belief is holding you back from. Are you really saying that you think you’re too fat to be loved? To attract a great business partner? Or that you’re too old to go for your dream job? Or learn how to sculpt? Find the love of your life? Then collect evidence of people who are doing it anyways!

If we stop being hard on ourselves, won’t we end up being lazy or will our ambition dry up?

Finding a way to nourish yourself with unconditional self-love and self-compassion is not only the most feel-good, wonderful gift you can give yourself, but it is also the most effective way for you to create more of what you want in your life. Think of it like parenting. When a child is learning to walk, we don’t belittle, criticize, or berate him every time he falls down. Instead, we encourage, cheerlead, and normalize the process of failing as part of the human experience. Study after study has shown that this kind of parenting is far more effective than spanking, fear mongering, or belittling.

The same is true in our relationship with ourselves. The more we practice inward loving-kindness, the more happiness and joy we experience. And with that foundation of unconditional love and support in place, we experience more success. I’ve seen people fall into the trap of thinking that if they go too easy on themselves and lighten up, they will fall into self-indulgence and spiral out of control. Believe me when I tell you that after over a decade of coaching, I have not once found that to be true. Instead, I see self-love and self-compassion as the ticket to a new lease on life and more everyday bliss. After all, life is too short to miss out on even one drop of joy!

What do you most want listeners to take away from this interview/conversation?

That it is OK to stop being hard on yourself and that it is high time you start practicing unconditional self-love and compassion. This will transform your relationship with you and I promise your life will change for the better!