

Compassion Heroes w/ Drs. Janina Scarlet & Sara Schairer

Sara Schairer: [00:00:00] some passionate isn't letting people off the hook. Compassion does not allow someone to hurt someone else. That's not compassion. Right? So what you have to do is separate the person from the behavior and the action.

Janina Scarlet: [00:00:15] If we're able to see that, just like me, the person in front of me just wants to be treated with respect and dignity. Just like me. This person might like. Sports or Harry Potter, or maybe they have a dog just like me, or maybe just like me, they like pizza or coffee or sandwiches. It can drastically change that response from seeing the individual as other, to seeing the individual as the same as just like me. And that's I think the least. Amount of steps that we can take toward compassion is creating that sense of common humanity.

Jill Stoddard: [00:00:50]

you're listening to. Dr. Janina, Scarlet and Sarah Schairer on psychologists off the clock.

Diana Hill: [00:01:05] We are four clinical psychologists here to bring you cutting edge and science-based ideas from psychology to help you flourish in your relationships work and health.

Debbie Sorensen: [00:01:13] I'm Dr. Debbie Sorensen, practicing in Mile

Diana Hill: [00:01:15] Okay. I'm Dr. Diana Hill practicing in seaside, Santa Barbara, California.

Yael Schonbrun: [00:01:21] From coast to coast. I'm Dr. Yael Schonbrun, a Boston-based clinical psychologist and assistant professor at Brown University.

Jill Stoddard: [00:01:26] And from sunny San Diego, I'm Dr. Jill Stoddard author of Be Mighty and The Big Book Of Act Metaphors.

Debbie Sorensen: [00:01:32] We hope you take what you learn here to build a rich and meaningful life.

Diana Hill: [00:01:36] Thank you for listening to Psychologists Off the Clock.

Debbie Sorensen: [00:01:39] We've talked a lot about sleep on the podcast and as mental health professionals, we know that having quality sleep is really important to mood and mental health. And that's why we are excited to pair up with Manta Sleep. They offer innovative sleep masks and other accessories to help you sleep better.

Diana Hill: [00:01:58] I am a dedicated sleep mask wearer, my sleep mask is a lifesaver. When my husband's up late reading or on these bright summer mornings, when I want to sleep in and not only does a sleep mask, provide me with the dark environment I need for a deeper sleep. I have become classically conditioned to it.

Getting out. My sleep mask is a cue for bedtime and like Pavlov's dogs. As soon as I put that thing on my body remembers that it's time for bed.

Debbie Sorensen: [00:02:21] Well, I'm newer to sleep masks and I've never used one before until I tried this one. So I was really excited to try it out and see what the hype was all about.

And the Monta mask is really light and comfortable. And before I tried it, I don't

think I realized how much the light in my bedroom was waking me up in the morning. So now I feel a lot more refreshed when I wake up.

Diana Hill: [00:02:40] So here's what you can expect with Monta sleep masks. There are six different versions to choose from.

They all offer a hundred percent blackout for a deeper sleep are infinitely adjustable for custom fit. They're soft breathable. Have zero pressure on your eyelids or eyelashes and are made with durable snack green materials. You can choose from the original sleep mask or a slim sleep mask with barely.

There feel you can also go deluxe with a cool mask to see their eyes and sinuses a warm mask with natural steam, a lavender robot Roma mask to target your set vents or weighted mask. So check them out @montasleep.com. Join their social media at, at nap with Monta and at Monta sleep and get 10% off by entering the coupon code OFFTHECLOCK.

Debbie Sorensen: [00:03:23] be sure to check out Praxis Continuing Education for their online trainings. There's a new course act in practice with Dr. Steven Hayes coming up. Enrollment begins June 24th. You don't want to miss it. Just go to the sponsors page offtheclockpsych.com to link to Praxis. And there you'll find a discount code you can use for registration on any live training So check it out.

Diana Hill: [00:03:48] we're also affiliates with Dr. Rick Hanson's online Neurodharma program and his Foundations of Wellbeing programs, you can find out more about them at our website offtheclockpsych.com where you'll get a \$40 discount

Jill Stoddard: [00:04:01] Hi, everyone. It's Jill here. And I'm here with Debbie to talk about the episode we have today. That's another episode on compassion. , and you know, I know we talk a lot about compassion on.

The podcast and I think it's just something you can never quite get enough of. And we really had a very different take on it, I think today in this episode. So I'm curious, Debbie, what are your thoughts?

Debbie Sorensen: [00:04:26] Well, you know, I love this episode. These stories are so inspiring and it's just really cool to hear about these interesting things that people are doing to promote compassion in the world and to reach people. And I think in mental health, we often focus on the level of what's happening inside of us. You know, our own thoughts, our own emotion, our own pain and suffering, but truly looking outside of yourself and having this perspective shift toward. Getting outside of your own problems toward what can I do in the world? can I think from the perspective of others, can I do something good in the world and help others? And think outside of myself, to me is a really important shift that actually really leads to a lot of meaning and fulfillment.

Jill Stoddard: [00:05:11] And I think these are two

Debbie Sorensen: [00:05:12] really good examples of people who are. Bringing something really important out into the world.

Jill Stoddard: [00:05:18] Yeah. I couldn't agree more. And you know, there's a lot of research out there that shows the benefits of compassion, not just for the self, but for others,

and I've been thinking about this a lot and that it feels to me that something has shifted over, I don't know, the past decade or so. And I've noticed this truly in

myself where. There's something happening where we tend to be more self focused than we used to be. And my suspicion is that that may be related to social media that, you know, we currently live in a culture where we're constantly thinking about what am I going to post about what's going on with my life and my kids and my vacation, or if I'm going to share this article, that's meant to help other people.

What's my take on it. , you know, so it's not that I think people are inherently selfish it's that I think we're living in times that are sort of causing us to move in this more self focused direction. And compassion is something that teaches us how to break out of that perspective and really think more about others.

And I think this episode did that well, and I think these women, , do that well and are teaching it and incredible ways.

Debbie Sorensen: [00:06:28] I agree. Yeah. It's like bringing us back to the social creatures that we truly are. And I think , it's really important that we do that and we keep that

Jill Stoddard: [00:06:35] perspective.

Exactly. And I think what I love the most about this episode and about dr. Janina, Scarlet and Sarah Shairer. Is that they're doing this in ways that are so practical and applicable. Like , this is not just for therapists who teach clients. You know, for example, Janine his most recent book is called dark agents and it's actually a graphic novel.

I believe it's the first of its kind. And, it's a graphic novel about characters in a special school. And one of them has PTSD and my seven year old daughter read it and loved it and I read it and loved it. So, you know, she's finding ways to reach people across all different ages and stages.

And, you know, Sarah has this really cool company that we'll talk about in the episode that is reaching people. literally all over the planet to, to promote a social movement for greater

Debbie Sorensen: [00:07:31] compassion.

You know, they talk in the episode about finding your hero. And I think these two are our heroes. I mean, just the work that they're doing is amazing.

Jill Stoddard: [00:07:40] I completely agree with you. All right. Everyone will enjoy this episode with dr. Janina, Scarlet and Sarah Schairer

hey everyone. I want to start off by saying we are recording this episode in June, 2020 in the midst of both the global pandemic going on month. Three of stay at home orders in many places around the world and amidst worldwide protests against systemic racism and police brutality.

Following another senseless murder of an innocent black man George Floyd. And I'm. So looking forward to my conversation with today's guests. Because they are both compassion warriors. And goodness knows the U S police and many politicians worldwide, and those struggling to care about the health and wellbeing of their fellow humans could use a giant dose of compassion right now. And I think we all can use a giant dose of compassion right now, um, for our fellow humans, as well as for ourselves. So I'm doing things a little bit differently today and that this is the first time I'm actually having two guests on and the same episode. So I'm going to kick things off with author and psychologist, dr.

Janina, Scarlet, whose books weave together, evidence-based concepts and skills from psychology with elements of pop culture. and as I mentioned, they all include a heavy compassion or self-compassion element. And then we'll transition to Sarah Schairer who founded a nonprofit organization called compassion it to create a worldwide social movement for teaching and spreading compassion.

And then at the end, the three of us will come together to dig into how these concepts can help us during this really difficult time. So dr. Janina Scarlet is a licensed clinical psychologist, a scientist, and a full time geek that Ukrainian born refugee. She survived Chernobyl radiation and persecution.

She immigrated to the United States at the age of 12 with her family, and later inspired by the X-Men developed superhero therapy to help patients with anxiety, depression, and PTSD. Dr. Scarlet was awarded the Eleanor Roosevelt human rights award from the United nations association for superhero therapy.

She is the author of superhero therapy, therapy, quest Harry Potter therapy, dark agents, super women and supernatural therapy. Sarah Schairer is the founder and executive director of compassionate, a nonprofit organization and global social movement, whose mission is to inspire daily, compassionate actions and attitudes.

A facilitator of the compassion cultivation training course developed at Stanford university. Sarah has led trainings for audiences of all walks of life from corporate executives to inmates at a maximum security prison. She also led compassion trainings in Africa, sponsored by the Botswana ministries of health and education and spent a week at a Rwandan refugee camp working on unleashing compassion within its healthcare system.

Sarah is a contributing author to the book, the neuroscience of learning and development, enhancing creativity, compassion, critical thinking, and peace and education and writes for Deepak Chopra's center for wellbeing website, Sarah gives talks and leads, experiential workshops on burnout prevention, implicit bias, mindfulness, and compassion.

She also created the one of a kind reversible compassionate wristband that prompts compassionate actions on six continents and over 50 countries and all 50 States. Welcome Sarah and Janina. I am so pleased to have you here.

Janina Scarlet: [00:11:26] Thank you so much for having us. It's such an honor.

Sara Schairer: [00:11:30] Agreed.

Jill Stoddard: [00:11:31] So Janina, let's start with you. So as I just read in your bio, you've written six

Janina Scarlet: [00:11:36] books

Jill Stoddard: [00:11:37] and, all of your books are self-help psychology books that are unique in that they use. Pop culture at the center of their messaging. So talk to us a little bit about why pop culture and how this may have an added benefit for readers.

Janina Scarlet: [00:11:53] Well, thank you so much for asking that. I find that a lot of folks have a really hard time talking about their emotions. A lot of individuals weren't raised to understand their emotional experiences and certainly how to understand them. And I find that pop culture, especially in terms of fiction, can

help us to have a mirror to her own experience.

And for many individuals can allow them to understand what they're going through to name their experience, and also to find some hope for healing. This work is also very personal for me as a pop culture is something that helped me with my own PTSD, both after surviving Chernobyl, and after going through some of the horrific persecution that my family and I experienced in Ukraine. And it was the X-Men that turned my life around and showed me the power of being able to understand our own trauma story through the lens of fiction and being able to understand that we're not victims where survivors of our experience and therefore being able to find some posttraumatic growth in, in my own story and which I now use to help other folks, with a history of trauma as

Jill Stoddard: [00:13:04] well.

Yeah, and it's a fascinating story. So Janina and Sarah, and I all know each other because we're all local here to San Diego, and Janina was a student of mine way back when, and so I've, I've seen you talk Janina, a few different times and the very first time I saw you, you know, stand up and give a training on this and talk about your origin story.

I was sobbing in tears, both because the story is so moving, but also because I was so incredibly proud of this work you're doing and, and. How it's making this work. I think so much more accessible for so many more people and how many people you're reaching because of it. So, would you mind sharing that story a little bit, you know, in, in your books you have readers discover their origin stories, you know, what were the things that occurred early on that have kind of set them on a path, that may start out being not entirely.

Smooth right at the beginning of the hero's journey and then using the superhero therapy to, like you said, kind of overcome trauma. So will you tell us a little bit about your own origin story?

Janina Scarlet: [00:14:05] Of course. So I was, you know, I was just a few months shy of my third birthday when the Chernobyl nuclear disaster happened and.

Every single person in Ukraine where I was born and raised was affected, did, and for me, that was spending most of my childhood in and out of the hospital with my immune system, completely shattered, even a simple cold would land me in the hospital and having multiple nosebleeds that wouldn't clot. And the side effect that still exists to this day is that whenever the weather changes, I would get severe migraines that sometimes lead to seizures.

After Soviet union fell, uh, economy fell really rapidly, in Ukraine and on all the former Soviet union. And unfortunately Jewish individuals were targeted and my family and I were targeted in a number of different ways. And. Unfortunately, the situation was so dangerous that we had to seek refugee status in secret.

So we spent a year waiting for American embassy to approve our status, uh, all the while hiding this information from the public, because if anyone found out what was happening, then we could be killed for treason. We moved to United States when I was 12. And I don't know if any of you remember being 12 and being in seventh grade and middle school?

Um, yeah, I feel like we should do a separate podcast just for seventh grade survivors. You know? Good idea. Um, my son, thankfully just graduated eighth

grade, so he's, he's passed. Middle school now, which is great. Um, but you know, starting seventh grade and being that weird girl that didn't speak English that came from a radioactive country.

I made a very easy target. And I was bullied regularly. People would ask me if I'm contagious, if I'm radioactive, if I glow in the dark and as painful as the bullying was the most painful part of it was feeling incredibly alone. And I didn't know that other kids were also experiencing bullying. I didn't know that other kids were also going through depression.

I didn't know that other people will also struggling with mental health. All I knew. All I knew was that I felt so alone that I wanted to die. And it wasn't until I saw the X-Men movie a few years later that my life shifted. I saw a story about these individuals who were persecuted against for being different.

And I felt like I was watching myself on the screen. But I also looked around in a very packed, sold out theater, where everybody else was watching and everybody else was crying. And in that moment, I realized that everybody else was feeling alone. I'm getting choked up, just talking about it, where even if people didn't have the same persecution experiences I did, they knew what it was like to feel alone, to feel different and to just want to belong.

And it was in that moment that I realized that I wasn't a victim. I was a survivor. And I realized that the X-Men had something very special where they use their pain to become these amazing superheros who stood for good, who helped other people. And so it was after seeing that movie that I immediately signed up for psychology class in high school and fell in love with psychology and realized that we can use stories to help facilitate change through the lens of fiction by helping people understand that they're not alone, which I think is fundamental in healing. Yeah,

Jill Stoddard: [00:17:36] absolutely. I mean, what an incredibly powerful story and just, I so inspiring, that's such a story of, growth and survival. And so I'm curious, , several of your books, like you have superhero therapy and now super women, which is like the women's version of superhero therapy, which I just finished reading.

It was wonderful. Um, but one of the things that strikes me is that you, you call it superhero therapy, but it's really not just about superheroes and comic book characters. And one of the things I loved about your superwoman book is as I've shared with you, I think any woman reading this will see herself or themselves in it, um, But, you know, Harry Potter therapy, Harry Potter is not a superhero per se.

So tell us a little bit about how, like, if, if someone were to walk in your office and maybe they hate star Wars or comic books, or how do you sort of individually tailor this to the person in front of you to sort of get out of them? Like, what are the pop culture influences in their life that. That you think you can help them really connect with to be able to move forward in this

Janina Scarlet: [00:18:44] way.

That's such a great question. And I get asked this question a lot because it's true. Not everyone relates to pop culture, but I think everyone has a hero and this hero could be a real life person, like maybe a parent or a grandparent, even if that person is no longer alive. It could be a teacher that we've had such as, you know,

you being one of my heroes and, uh, you know, or it could be an athlete. It could be a celebrity and influencer, or it could be a fictional character. So to me, a hero is someone that we look up to a hero is someone that inspires change and in therapy, my focus. Then as a superhero therapy provider is to encourage my client to identify their hero. And it could be multiple heroes too, and then use their hero as a role model to become their own version of a superhero in real life, such as by being an advocate, for example, against racism or misogyny or violence, uh, such as, uh, by speaking out about mental health or helping other people or facing their biggest fears or.

Or talking about their trauma, whatever that vision is, it's them becoming their own version of a hero in real life through this kind of mentorship.

Jill Stoddard: [00:20:00] I love it. And you have a number of powerful examples. and I'm wondering if you could share, you know, to come to mind for me, one is kind of the first example when you were working with, , military.

you also have, , the, the Veronica Mars example. And I think both of those. Are incredible, you know, they really illustrate what this looks like in practice. Do you want to give us a snapshot of both of those?

Janina Scarlet: [00:20:23] Sure.

Yeah. Thank you for asking. So in my postdoctoral training, I was working at camp Pendleton, working with active duty Marines. Who had just returned from the war from Afghanistan, from Iraq. And unfortunately, a lot of these individuals believe themselves to be a failure for having developed PTSD. These individuals were groomed for combat.

They were incredibly resilient. And given the atrocities that they faced, it was not surprising that they developed PTSD. And so time after time after time, I would hear these incredible individuals tell me I wanted to be Superman. I failed. And this line would just break my heart because they, they shame themselves for developing a mental health disorder.

And so I started using Socratic questioning based on pop culture. So I would ask, well, is Superman truly invincible or does he have any kind of vulnerability? And they would say, well, yeah. Okay. He's vulnerable to kryptonite, which for those of you who don't know kryptonite is this green substance from Superman's home planet that we can powers and in large enough quantities, it can actually kill him. So then I would ask, well, the Superman being vulnerable to kryptonite, make him any less of a superhero. And of course, all my clients were quick to defend him and him say, no, of course not. He's still a superhero. And then there'd be a pause and then a light bulb moment and then a big smile. And then they would say, okay, I see what you did there because the truth is.

All our heroes have vulnerabilities and it's not despite of them. It's because of them that we care. We want to see the kind of hero that overcomes obstacles, because it reminds us that we can do the same. It's not about the fact that dragons exist. It's about the fact that dragons can be beaten. That's the metaphor here.

And so with using Superman, I was able to see incredible changes in my client's perspective on therapy and have their own experience because rather than shaming themselves, they were now aligned with Superman. And so that's the military experience. And I was, um, I also now primarily work with civilians, which.

Also includes veterans. Uh, but, uh, the Veronica Mars story has to do with a 15 year old girl that I was working with, uh, who came in for severe depression. She also had been engaging in self harm and she had been bullied in her school. And she struggled talking about her experiences so much that she would often look to her father to speak for her.

She would refuse to let them leave the room and just absolutely terrified to talking about her experiences, but she was willing to talk about her favorite show, Veronica Mars, which I knew absolutely nothing about. Uh, in fact, I thought it was a scifi show and because she was so excited and she kept saying how much he relates to the league leading protagonist.

I decided to check it out. So I went home fully intending to watch the first episode. And I accidentally watched the entire season in one evening because the show's amazing. It's on Hulu now in the United States, I highly recommend it. And the reason why is because it depicts just about every single thing that a teenager can go through.

So before the show even opens we're on a Camaras have been drugged and sexually assaulted. Her parents are getting a divorce. Her mom has an addiction problem. Veronica's boyfriend broke up with her. All her friends hate her. Now her best friend was murdered and Veronica is being bullied pretty much by the entire school and is completely alone.

And. All her grief and trauma. And that's the part that my client was relating to, which she didn't see, or maybe didn't quite understand was Veronica is incredible development because throughout the series, Veronica becomes essentially a teenage Sherlock Holmes. She uses her detective skills to solve crimes and help people over time.

Not only healing from her trauma, but also gaining friends and becoming this incredible hero. So when I went back the following week, I told my client, I said, Hey, I understand why you like the show because I see how you can relate to Veronica's experiences. But she also uses her skills, her, her abilities to help other people.

So maybe we can do the same for you. So I said, what do you have. And I'll never forget this moment because she looked at me with these big eyes full of tears. And she said, I have depression. And to this day, I remember that heartbreak. And then also this moment of wait a minute, we can use this. And I said, well, does anyone else in your school have depression?

And she said, I don't know, maybe one or two people. So I said, what would Veronica do? And she paused. And she didn't look to her dad. She looked at me and she said, Veronica wouldn't keep silent. She would do something. She'd make a speech. And I kind of was speechless for awhile, but by the time I answered, I said, is this what you want to do?

And she said, yes. So we spent two weeks preparing and rehearsing and practicing, and then she actually did it. She stood up in front of her class and gave a five minute speech talking about her mental health. And she even shared some of the things that she never shared with me or her parents such as that. Sometimes she has suicidal thoughts. And she shared that with her class to let them know that if they're having these kinds of feelings and ideations, that they're not alone, she encouraged them to ask her questions about mental health or to

talk to her if they need help, or if they need help finding a therapist. And that was it. It was just the five minute talk. But the result of that was incredible because. At the end of it, everyone rushed over to her. Everyone was hugging her and crying. And at the end of the week, the whole school knew, and everyone was stopping her in the hallway and messaging her and thanking her because everyone needed someone to share their story.

And maybe not everyone had the same details of their experience, but everyone needed someone to talk to. So a few months later she started her school zone, mental health support group, and she still struggles. But now she doesn't have to go through it alone. And that's what superhero therapy's about.

Jill Stoddard: [00:26:53] I just, I could listen to that story a hundred more times and you know, I get goosebumps every single time.

It just, I love it so much and good for her. I think that is, she is a true superhero. That's incredible. And to think about, you know, how many lives she's been able to. To touch, not because there was an absence of kryptonite, you know, not because there was an absence of vulnerability or challenge, but because there were those things, which is just so amazing.

So tell us a little bit about how compassion. And self-compassion play a role in superhero therapy.

Janina Scarlet: [00:27:33] Yeah. . So, uh, I've used self-compassion as like a magic potion as a magic charm that we can all imply apply to kind of boost ourselves to give ourselves, uh, that, that energy that we need in order to become the kind of hero that we want to be.

And compassion then becomes an action. Not only a feeling, but also an action where a person can. Yeah. Be present with their feelings of compassion towards somebody else, and then not only intent, but also participate in being compassionate toward that individual, whether it's through a meditation or through reaching out.

And so we look at it as a part of a hero's journey where self-compassion is a power up and compassion is the quest. And so, uh, that's, that's one of the actual goals of treatment.

Jill Stoddard: [00:28:28] I love it. That's so great.

Well, why don't we, especially, because this is such a nice natural segue because you're talking about compassion essentially as a verb or something. We do an action we take. so I want to turn it over to Sarah now. And you know, I use compassion and self compassion practices in the therapy room as well. And one of the things I find is that, you know, people really connect with these practices. They're incredibly powerful. And then I find that sometimes they sort of. Struggle to apply them outside of the therapy room. So even when we're engaging in applied experiential practices in the therapy room that they can take with them, there's like, it becomes harder when they're like on their own, out in the world. And so I think this is a perfect place to bring Sarah into the conversation, especially because Janina, you were just talking about compassion as an action.

Um, Because I think Sarah is nonprofit organization, compassionate. Um, you know, this is what they're doing. They're working hard to find solutions to this very

problem of like action and application. So Sarah, can you tell us a little bit about what compassionate is? Um, and you know, how we might use some of the things that you're doing to be more active in our practice and application of compassion?

Sara Schairer: [00:29:53] Yes.

Janina Scarlet: [00:29:54] thank

Sara Schairer: [00:29:54] you. Compassion. It is two words. Sounds like compassionate, but it's two words making compassion, a verb, as you previously mentioned, and it's a nonprofit, as you also mentioned before. And our mission is to inspire compassionate actions and attitudes, and our goal is to make compassionate accessible.

So compassion. People maybe have heard of the word, but . People have various definitions of the word, and we want to say, okay, this is what compassion is. And these are ways you can compassion it and we want it to be simple and accessible. So the definition of compassion that we use is that it's a response to suffering, right?

It's this awareness of suffering and the willingness, the desire, and the willingness to relieve that suffering. So we offer. Simple ways that a person can compassion it. And we have a simple tool that helps people remember to compassion it. So that tool, is it reversible wristband that says compassion it. On it.

And every time you do an act of compassion, you flip it from one side. To the other. And we also have a self-compassionate version as well. And it's impossible to ignore this thing. That's on your wrist because it's really hard to act like a jerk when you have something that says compassionate, right.

Staring at you in your face. And it's also a nice, uh, it's a reward, right? You get a little hit every time you get to flip your wristband, which I think. Also reinforces this positive feeling you get from practicing compassion. So my team and I are constantly trying to figure out ways to make compassionate, accessible, and scalable.

Jill Stoddard: [00:31:37] Yeah. And you know, you also liked Janina, have some incredible kind of success stories. I love that people get in touch with you to let you know that they've seen, you know, when they've spotted bracelets out in the wild, I know, , Zach Braff was spotted wearing one at one point, and you've heard, um, I mean, almost every continent now, right there has been represented by compassionate.

Will you tell us, you know, one of your success stories. Um, I'm thinking about the town that experienced a couple of deaths that were close to each other.

Sara Schairer: [00:32:11] Yeah, yeah, yeah. And that it actually helped launch compassion it .

So this was back in 2012 and this town of Northbrook, Illinois. In the summer experienced tremendous loss. They had three teenagers die within three weeks to the suicide and won in a car accident. And it's a very close knit community. And. And people were suffering. It was, it was too much to bear and a couple, a couple of volunteers for compassion it reached out and said, we need compassionate here in our town.

We really think it can help. So at that time we had just ordered wristbands. I think

we had a thousand of them and um, I said, well, I'll ship you all the wristbands we have. And. You can sell them as a fundraiser in honor of these boys, we don't need to make money off of this. So they, they sold them. And then there were about a thousand people in the community, compassion-ing it and honor of those three boys.

And then the stories began pouring in to the Facebook page. Just people talking about how doing these acts of compassion in honor, of those boys with helping them heal and grieve, and it was bringing this Mmm. Positive energy and healing energy to this community that so desperately needed it. And so we could see that with just the power of a wristband, helping to bring, bring healing to a community through compassion.

And we knew because that was really the first time the wristbands had been used. In any way. That's when we knew, wow, this is something so simple. That can be tremendously powerful for people.

Jill Stoddard: [00:33:49] Yeah, absolutely. I love that. You know, it can be these like simple, small steps that make an enormous, enormous difference.

Um, and you also have a pretty cool origin story. For how, how you even came up with this idea in the first place, would you be willing to share that with our

Sara Schairer: [00:34:07] listeners? Sure. So back in 2008, I was going through a very tough time. I was facing an unwanted divorce. My daughter was just a little bit over a year old and I had quit my job to stay home with her.

And I was. Stay at home mom. And it was the economic fallout of 2008. So I tried to get a job and I couldn't. So I spent a lot of time crying and sitting on the couch, watching daytime television while she napped. And I happened to catch an L an episode where she was interviewing Wayne Dyer is a speaker and author since passed away, but he was talking about compassion and he said, it's the most important lesson to teach our kids.

We need to teach our children to put themselves in another shoes. And if we do that, we could solve every social problem on the planet. No more war, no more hunger. You name it. Compassion is the answer. And I had been raised to be compassionate, but I had never. Thought about the power of compassion until I heard him say that and I could not get it out of my head.

And that very evening, the word compassionate turned into this two word phrase, and I saw it as a, a bumper sticker, black and white, very simple, compassionate. And I thought, Oh my gosh, this makes so much sense. And I got the trademark actually, thanks to your help with that gel. I got the trademark for stickers and then kept postponing it for years.

And began living my life that way and recognizing when I compassionate things just go better. Things are a lot more smooth when I put myself in another shoes and try to see their perspective and

Jill Stoddard: [00:35:58] try to help

Sara Schairer: [00:35:59] whether it's, uh, whether I'm going through a divorce and struggling with, you know, my daughter's father or whether it's a challenging. Colleague, whatever the situation may be. When I remembered to bring compassion into this situation, I was able to handle it with much more skill. So, and I felt better, frankly. So, um, I knew that this phrase was powerful. And so in a couple of years later, I made. Stickers and gave them away and started getting

great feedback about them that turned into t-shirts that turned into these wristbands.

And then because of my obsession with compassion, I went through a training at Stanford university to get certified, to teach an eight week course on compassion. And so now compassion it started as this brand, that sold products. And now we. Or an education platform. So I teach compassion.

Jill Stoddard: [00:36:56] it's so cool.

And I will never forget the day I was, I was over your house and, you know, you said something like, can I show you something can tell me if this makes sense to you and you just hand wrote compassion space. It period on a scrap piece of paper. And I was like, Oh right. I mean, just

Sara Schairer: [00:37:16] like chills

Jill Stoddard: [00:37:17] and goosebumps.

And you're like, is this stupid? Like, do I have a thing here? I was like, Oh my gosh, this is brilliant. And I just think it's so cool. And it's such a, it's such a cool story. Good thing. I wasn't like now I don't get it

Sara Schairer: [00:37:32] seriously. There are a couple of people that I sort of flirted it by. And if anybody had had that reaction, there's a very good chance I would have been like, okay, nevermind.

Jill Stoddard: [00:37:42] Well, hopefully you would have had the wisdom to move on to someone smarter until someone, until someone said, yeah, that's amazing. So tell us what are some of the, you know, in, in relation to this kind of transition from a company that sells products to this more global social movement, you know, you, you did get nonprofit status.

And so the money that does come in from the products you sell then goes back out right toward things like bullying education. Can you tell us a little bit about some of the ways that you're, you know, other than the, the, the bracelets, like getting this education out there into the world?

Sara Schairer: [00:38:19] Yeah. So my teammate Burrell Pope, who is based out of Chicago, he and I are committed to making compassionate accessible.

So we do lead trainings. Now we focus a lot on workplaces that can help workplaces that need. To create environments of compassion, which is especially important right now. Um, and we decided on concentrating on workplaces for a couple of reasons and mainly it's because we can get paid. Um, it's, it's not so easy to run a nonprofit and we found that we can get paid by organizations that can pay us.

And then that allows us to do our training for organizations that can't so. We have we lead trainings quite often, pro bono for organism nonprofit organizations, or I go into schools and I teach my class at the women's jail here in San Diego. I've taught at the men's prison here in San Diego, and none of that is paid, but we are able to get funded by getting paid, to do our work and other

Jill Stoddard: [00:39:22] brilliant model.

What do you think about doing some compassion training with Congress?

Sara Schairer: [00:39:29] You know, I would give anything. And I don't know if you remember, but four years ago we had a campaign where people could purchase compassionate wristbands and we would send them to their senators. They could, they could write a note and we would hand write notes to their

particular States, Senate senators, and then send the wristbands. And I had one woman who, every time she got paid, she would send me \$10. And would ask me to send wristbands to Donald Trump. And so month after month. So we were, that was our one way of like, trying to get in there. Yes. every facet of society would benefit from compassion

Jill Stoddard: [00:40:10] training.

You know, this is a nice, nice transition there because it certainly does seem to me that, you know, there's a real. Lack of compassion at the center of many of the difficult things that are going on in the world right now. And, you know, and I don't mean to oversimplify, you know, clearly there are many complex layers to hundreds of years of organizational and systemic racism and sexism and homophobia and transphobia, but.

You know, I see things like, um, people ignoring recommendations for how to safely navigate the COVID-19 pandemic. So, you know, we all saw the photos over Memorial day weekend here in the U S where people were congregating very closely, not wearing masks, um, or, you know, we hear individuals making comments about all lives matter.

And I think, you know, this isn't just a lack of. Information or knowledge, right? Like that the education is out there. No doubt. Um, and that there just, there has to be a lack of compassionate that at least plays part of a role in all of this. And so I'm wondering if you guys could each talk a little bit about what you think the role of compassion or, or really the lack there of maybe playing in, in some of these.

Behaviors that we're seeing.

Janina Scarlet: [00:41:32] I think for some folks, there's the kind of the us versus them mentality, right. Where they're seeing their in-group as one group and the outgroup as another group. And as a result of this, unfortunately produces this dehumanization effect, which neuroscientific studies are actually finding that. People in an MRI who see images of individuals that they consider to be in an outgroup are not perceived as human. Just like, let that sink in for a moment, because that means that they do not see the humanity of that person. And in fact, for some individuals, when they see typically stigmatized groups, such as, for example, homeless individuals or individuals of a different maybe racial group, that they may be considered an outgroup.

Sometimes in addition to a lack of compassion, there's even anger or disgust that shows up as a, uh, as an activation in the insular area of the brain, uh, suggesting that they're perceiving these images to not be human and, and similar to, um, To something that they wouldn't care for. But what's really interesting is that if we can bring on an element of common humanity, the recognition that we're all humans, we're all in this together, but even asking a simple question such as what do you think this person in this picture likes to eat?

That just even allowing the person to put themselves in another person's shoes for one moment. About a simple topic, such as what kind of food they might like, what kind of music they might like to listen to can drastically change that response and bring on that humanizing activation within the compassion centers of the brain.

If we're able to see that, just like me, the person in front of me just wants to be treated with respect and dignity. Just like me. This person might like. Sports or Harry Potter, or maybe they have a dog just like me, or maybe just like me, they like pizza or coffee or sandwiches. It can drastically change that response from seeing the individual as other, to seeing the individual as the same as just like me.

And that's I think the least. Amount of steps that we can take toward compassion is creating that sense of common humanity. And then after that, I think it might be easier for other folks to, develop a deeper sense of compassion and understanding maybe even the willingness to listen.

But to me, that understanding of just like me is foundational.

Jill Stoddard: [00:44:11] That's so interesting and such a good point. And you're reminding me of. Something I heard. And I don't remember if, if it was a study or, um, you know, where it came from, but it was something to the effect of, you know, we used to think that in this, in the ingroup outgroup thing that, you know, we used to think that like, if you look at radical Muslim extremists, for example, that there was a lack of compassion.

Right. And that part seems obvious how that could be connected. And what they were talking about, um, is, is that studies have found there's actually almost too much compassion, but only within the in group. Yes. So that they, they connect and identify so much with each other and that the more compassion.

You have in the more bonding you have, the more oxytocin is produced and it's this very reinforcing experience to be part of that in group and have those affiliative feelings toward each other. But then it creates that much more of a disconnect between, you know, the people like you're saying who are, who are sort of other essentially.

Sara Schairer: [00:45:18] Well, I'm going to throw this out there because what I've found is. People similar to me care for others, right? And maybe people who listen to this podcast, they don't understand why those protesters would not have masks and be demanding that we, you know, it seemed to have disregard for others.

Right. We don't quite get that. So then my struggle is how do I have compassion for them, or for leaders who are perpetuating. The system, right. That's my own internal struggle. And I think that's something we have to think about too. When we say everybody deserves compassion. That means everybody. So what does compassion look like when we're talking about having compassion for.

Violent police officers.

Jill Stoddard: [00:46:06] Well, can I

Sara Schairer: [00:46:07] back up, back you up

Jill Stoddard: [00:46:08] for a second? Why do you think that's important? I, I T I hear what you're saying, and I'm totally guilty of that too. I have compassion for the people who believe the same social justice opinions that I do. Why is that important? Cause you could see that people would say no, that those, those racist police don't deserve compassion.

Why does that matter?

Sara Schairer: [00:46:29] Well, I think we need to make sure everybody

understands what compassion is first before I answer that question, because some passionate isn't letting people off the hook. Compassion does not allow someone to hurt someone else. That's not compassion. Right? So what you have to do is separate the person from the behavior and the action.

And I can say what you're doing is not okay. I will not stand

Jill Stoddard: [00:46:53] for that. You

Sara Schairer: [00:46:55] as a person, as a human being, man, I wish he could feel safe and have peace because if you did, I bet you, you wouldn't act that way. That's why it matters because if our leaders had peace and felt safe and cared, they wouldn't act in this way.

Janina Scarlet: [00:47:22] I love that.

Sara Schairer: [00:47:23] That's true. That is what that is. Like compassion applies to everyone.

Jill Stoddard: [00:47:28] Yeah. Trying to understand the pain that is driving some of these choices in the first place

Sara Schairer: [00:47:38] back, we've been curious, where, where is that coming from? Or even imagining what must it have been like for you growing up? Or what kind of childhood did you have where this is now, how you act. And that's okay. Right. So, and again, not, not condoning the behavior ever, but seeing people as seeing their humanity.

Janina Scarlet: [00:48:03] Yeah. I love that. Um, and I would also like to add that. Compassion is a practice. And as a practice, it can also be gradual.

So what that means is that when we're seeing so much devastation, so much trauma, it can be very difficult to have compassion toward individuals that we see as perpetrators. And so it might mean that we may be aren't ready yet. To have compassion toward difficult people. So we can start with having compassion towards people for whom it's easier for us to have compassion toward such as people that we can relate to and identify with maybe people who are suffering the most right now, kind of like triaging, right?

Like an EMT at the scene. So maybe going to the individual that's bleeding the most. So maybe initially practicing compassion toward individuals whose family members were killed, or individuals who were harassed or hurt by the current events. For example, um, also our own trauma and our own suffering shows up too.

And behind the anger that we might feel toward police officers toward the government is our own suffering. So we can offer compassion toward ourselves as well, because we're a part of this movement and a part of this process. And it might take time. So if today we're not in a place where we're ready to fully practice compassion toward a difficult person.

Maybe we don't have to, but maybe we can even set an intention such as maybe one day I can get there for now. I can focus on the people for whom it's easier, but I can keep doing this work where I can maybe one day expand my heart to have compassion for everyone.

Sara Schairer: [00:49:57] That's perfect. And I also want to add.

You can say to yourself, maybe I am not ready to have compassion. But what I can commit to is not harming, not adding more suffering.

Janina Scarlet: [00:50:09] Yeah. So what

Jill Stoddard: [00:50:10] about, so one of the things I'm thinking about related to this is , trying to fight sexism is something that's become incredibly important to me for a variety of reasons.

And you know, I'll write blogs about this with very concrete. Steps for things people can do right now. But it occurred to me that the majority of people who are reading these articles are just other feminists, right? It's that whole like echo chamber issue. And of course, like we need men to care about women's issues and to, to join the fight, just like we need white people to care about the rights of people of color.

And we need straight people to fight for the rights of LGBTQ individuals and so on and so forth. I guess where I'm going with this is like, how do we reach everyone? Like how this is a big question. I know, but like, how do we reach the people we most nature. And I guess based on what you were saying, Sarah, really, we need to reach everyone because even those of us who think, you know, even those of us who believe in equal rights for all humans.

Still have to work on having compassion for people who are different from ourselves. But if we think about the people we, we genuinely think are really lacking compassion around, seeing everyone is human and fundamentally deserving of equality. Um, How do we, how do we reach them? How do we, how do we get out of just this like echo chamber phenomenon and like really reach the people that need to be reached and like convince them that this matters and is helpful, not just to other people, but to them too, it heals your own wounds to become a more compassionate human.

Sara Schairer: [00:51:42] I personally think that trying to understand, and their perspective is helpful, right? So if you have individuals in your life that. Perhaps you'd like to maybe they could see things a little more skillfully or, or differently, or maybe you feel that they don't value all human lives, that you could engage them.

One-on-one and not come at a place of, I need to convert you to my view instead, come from a place of, I just want to understand. Because I care about you as a human and really engaging in a helpful dialogue around it that doesn't get heated. That doesn't shame anyone, but instead it's coming from a place of understanding.

That's, those are my that's my thought. And then I always come back to the best thing I can do is lead by example. And I don't know, who's seeing it. I, I know that I grew up in a small town in Illinois and perhaps someone is inspired by something they see, and they're curious to learn more and I don't know,

Jill Stoddard: [00:52:49] but that's my hope.

Well, I know there's one example of, you know, your daughter didn't she win an award at school for being like the most compassionate student or something like that.

Sara Schairer: [00:52:59] Yeah. Yeah. She's pretty remarkable. Right? Well, she doesn't want to talk about compassion and if I even tell her to breathe, she's annoyed with me.

So she's 13. That's

Jill Stoddard: [00:53:12] exactly it. I mean, I think, you know, what you're

pointing at really is that like, People do what we do, not what we tell them to do. You know, that's what leading by example is all about. I think that's really, that's a good thought. It's a good

Janina Scarlet: [00:53:28] think that everyone wants to be the hero of their own journey.

And so whether it's people that think one way or people that think another way, I think that a lot of folks on all sides of the issues that we're talking about, believe that they're right, because they believe that's the right thing to do. And I think that. Maybe one of the ways that we can maybe get at potential changes is by allowing the individual to be the hero of their journey by helping somehow so that they're able to take maybe one action in the right direction where they, can feel maybe over time empowered and inspired. And so it can start with just a small action and over time can allow that person to see a different side of events.

Jill Stoddard: [00:54:23] Yeah. The other thing that just occurred to me too, around self compassion that I think can be important, especially for people who, maybe the people who are starting to be the heroes of their own journey.

And they're starting to venture into more activism. If they've otherwise been quiet is to really practice self compassion around mistakes, because we're going to get it wrong. And, you know, I've heard a lot of people talking about one of the challenges of, you know, fighting for social justice right now is feeling a lot of confusion.

So on the one hand, I'll give you an example. Like on the one hand I'm hearing people say, um, um, you know, Don't don't ask your black friends and colleagues to tell you what you need to do. Like they're tired. Figure it out, do the work yourself. And I'm like, yes. Right. That makes so much sense. But then you hear similar messages saying you all need to be quiet and listen, this is a time for your black friends and colleagues to speak up and you need to learn from them.

And there are other examples of that. in congruent messages and I think two things happen. I think one, people get stuck in the confusion and it stops them from moving forward because they don't know the quote unquote right thing to do.

So I think when we can make space for those difficult feelings and that dissonance and move forward, Anyway, that's super important. And then if you move forward and you get it wrong, or even, I don't even want to say get it wrong, because I think there's a lot of right ways to do things. But even if you're doing something that's a right way, it's still might not land well, right?

Like there may be somebody who doesn't like the way you went about it. And if that results in a feeling of shame, which it often does, it's like an example of moral injury because you're trying to do the right thing, but you feel like you've done the wrong thing and that when you feel shame, you know, as humans, we work very hard to avoid shame and it can be so tempting to run right back into the safety of your comfort zone.

And I think this is a place for self-compassion can be really helpful and make it more likely that will persist even in the face of those difficult emotions.

Sara Schairer: [00:56:32] Well said, I think you're absolutely right.

Jill Stoddard: [00:56:39] So on that note, How would you guys feel about doing

an actual exercise? I think it would be really, you know, we're talking a lot about these things and we're talking about the importance of applying these things. So why don't we give people something that they can practice and apply? Um, and for anyone who doesn't want to listen to. This experiential exercise, I'll say now that if you want to find Janina and Sarah we'll put all of their information, their websites, where you can get their books, et cetera. We'll put all of that stuff in the show notes. Um, but for anybody else who wants to stick around and actually have a compassion practice, Sarah, do you want to lead us in a compassion

Sara Schairer: [00:57:24] practice? Sure.

So we'll do a brief loving kindness practice that will help us cultivate feelings of warmth and compassion for

Jill Stoddard: [00:57:34] ourselves,

Sara Schairer: [00:57:36] for our fellow community members, for our fellow national citizens and for everyone on the planet. And during this practice, if at any point in time you feel overwhelmed. Feel free to disengage from the practice and open your eyes or return to the breath, or just feel your feet on the ground.

Okay. So let's get started. I invite you to close your eyes if that's okay for you, or you can pass your gaze down and focusing your eyes. And why don't we take a few deep cleansing breaths together to start exhaling everything out.

Inhaling through the nose and filling the lungs to capacity

and then exhaling out of the mouth, almost like a style,

again, inhaling through the nose and filling the lungs

exhaling.

And once more in healing.

And exhaling

and now closing the lips and breathing in and out of the nostrils, tuning into the breadth in and the breath out,

relaxing the forehead, the eyes, the jaw. Yeah. Softening the shoulders, the belly, the hands

taking a moment to settle the mind by simply focusing on inhaling and exhaling.

We'll invite you to take a moment and recognize. Or bring your attention to the body. Notice if you're holding on to any tension or stress, any concern in the body, maybe you're tight or tense.

and perhaps giving yourself soothing touch, like a hand on the heart or holding your own hand, or even facing the hands wherever you feel that tension or tightness,

giving yourself the comfort you need through this warm, soothing touch.

And saying to yourself self, as if you're looking in a mirror,

may you feel peace?

May you be safe?

May you be healthy?

Again, repeating the phrase.

You feel peace.

May you be safe

when you be healthy?

And from this place of self compassion, I invite you to expand that compassion

out. So the people in your community,
recognizing that like you, they want to be free from suffering.
And saying in your mind to those in your community,
when you find peace,
may you be safe,
man, you be healthy.
Again, when you find peace
me, be safe,
may you be healthy
and allowing that circle of compassion to expand and include everyone in your
nation.
Offering the same compassionate wishes me. You find peace.
May you be safe,
may be healthy. And now extend, extending that compassion to everyone on our
planet. Knowing that just like you, every single person wishes to be free from
suffering and knowing we are all in this together.
And in your mind saying to everyone, may you find peace?
May you be safe?
May you be healthy
and now bringing your attention back to the body,
scanning the body from head to toe, noticing if there have been any effect, any
effects on the body. The mind, the heart
may this practice benefit the wellbeing of all.
When you're ready, you can open your eyes.

Jill Stoddard: [01:04:44] Thank you so much. That was wonderful. Well, I want
to thank both Janina and Sarah so much for being here today. It was a great
conversation and I hope our listeners will find it useful and that they'll come find
you in all the places that you can be found.

Sara Schairer: [01:05:05] Thank you. Take care.

Diana Hill: [01:05:07] Thank you for listening to psychologist off the clock. If you
enjoy our podcast, you can help us out by leaving a review or contributing on
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Jill Stoddard: [01:05:20] We'd like to thank our interns, Dr. Katherine Foley-
Saldeña and Dr Kati Lear

Debbie Sorensen: [01:05:25] This podcast is for informational and entertainment
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