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*Happiness and Meaning Seminar Prep 2/16*

*Part 1:*

**What is the purpose of our existence?**

Alain de Botton’s TED Talk on his idea of success is what best defines the purpose of our existence. Botton understands that in America, our atmosphere of equality and desire for success creates anxiety. Though our identities are entirely bound up in our work, we all have the desire to be evaluated as complex beings. I believe that his stance on success is the best illustration of purpose because he is very focused on the individual and how the roots of success are tied to individual choice. Botton states, “We need to treat *ourselves* with compassion. … We fear the judgment and ridicule of others. … All success involves choices.” Botton believes that it is the individual’s responsibility to choose where they want to devote their own time. Our purpose cannot be definitively defined by any one idea because we are all different people with different goals and definitions of meaning. Botton said it best when he said, “We are the authors of our own ambitions.”

**What is happiness and what makes one happy?**

In the movie “Happy,” as the title implies, happiness is explored in detail. According to a scientific study cited in the movie, “50% of happiness is determined by genetics; 10% is jobs and careers; and 40% is varying what you do and individual choice. It’s the ‘spice of life.’” If we take these statistics to be true, then our happiness is mostly determined by our inherited genes, but we can make ourselves happier by varying our routines and trying new things. In another part of the movie, they explored the difference between intrinsic and extrinsic happiness. Extrinsic happiness is based on money, status, and image, whereas intrinsic happiness is based on things like personal growth and community feeling. When the two types of happiness were compared, it was found that “those who more oriented on extrinsic and superficial things were less happy.” Based on the movie, it can be sad that happiness and obtaining happiness is a multi-dimensional undertaking. In one regard, it is important to focus on oneself and being emotionally satisfied as an individual. In another regard, it has been found that focusing on others can actually enhance emotional satisfaction. Being happy is a balance between giving to others and making choices for the individual.

**What does it mean to live a meaningful life?**

Jennifer Aaker believes that happiness and meaning are not the same thing. According to Aaker, “Happiness was linked to being a taker rather than a giver, whereas meaningfulness went with being a giver rather than a taker.” One cannot live a meaningful life if they are focused on themselves and satisfying individual desires. In reality, a life of meaning is one that “[links] the past, present and future,” and encounters “lots of negative events and issues, which can result in unhappiness.” The way that Aaker presents it, it is much more difficult to be happy when one pursues a life of meaning, but pursuing happiness is a more selfish goal. One should focus on the well-being of others rather than the well-being of the individual, and should accept that stress and unhappiness are realistic challenges of pursuing a meaningful life.

*Part 2:*

**“The Power of Vulnerability” by Brené Brown**

* “If you can’t measure it, it doesn’t exist.”
  + “Lean into the discomfort of the work” vs “Knock discomfort upside the head and move it out of the way”
* Connection is why we’re here; it’s what gives purpose and meaning to our lives
* “When you ask people about love, they’ll tell you about heartbreak. When you ask people about belonging, they’ll tell you about being excluded. And when you ask people about connection, they tell you about being disconnected.”
* Shame and Fear
  + - “I’m not \_\_\_ enough”
      * excruciating vulnerability
      * the idea that, in order for connection to happen, we have to allow ourselves to be really seen
* Worthiness
  + sense of love and belonging
  + only one variable that separated people who have love and belonging and people who don’t: the belief that they were worthy of it
  + The people who believed they were worthy lived **wholeheartedly**; the had the courage to be imperfect
  + They had the compassion to be kind to themselves first
  + They had connection as a result of authenticity; they were willing to go of what they thought they should be in exchange for who they are
  + they fully embraced vulnerability; they believed that what made them vulnerable made them beautiful; vulnerability is necessary (willingness to say “I love you” first, willing to invest in things that you don’t know the outcome of)
  + Vulnerability is the birthplace of creativity, joy, belonging, etc
* **Why do we struggle with vulnerability so much?**
  + we numb vulnerability
    - we are the most in debt, obese, addicted adults in history
  + You can’t selectively numb emotion
    - When you don’t feel the negative, you don’t feel the positive
    - When we selectively numb, we feel miserable, and then vulnerable
  + We make the uncertain certain
    - RELIGION
  + blame is a way to discharge pain and discomfort
  + we PERFECT
  + Kids are wired for struggle
    - Our job is not to perfect them
    - Our job is to say “yes you are wired for struggle and you are imperfect, but you are worthy of love and belonging”
  + we pretend that what we do doesn’t have an effect on other people
* To let ourselves be seen, to love with our whole hearts even when there’s no guarantee, to practice gratitude and joy in insecure moments, **to believe that we are enough**
  + When we believe we are enough, we stop screaming and start listening
  + We are kinder to ourselves and those around us

Brené Brown’s TED Talk was inspirational in a number of ways. In our society, there is an ever-present pressure to be better. We are bombarded with imagery of perfection and things that we don’t have, and it creates a tremendous feeling of unworthiness. Particularly as a teenage girl, I am surrounded by diet fads and makeup trends and those who have become one of the many victims of the selfie epidemic. It’s hard to believe that you are worthy when everything around you is constantly saying that you aren’t good enough. What I loved about Brené’s talk is that she herself exemplified what she was talking about. She explained her flaws and where she had been wrong, readily admitting that she had been to therapy, and she was unafraid to be herself. Her talk forced me to reexamine my own life, and I realized that I was very much like Brené before she opened herself up to the unknown. I pushed away the bad, and, as a result, often diluted the good. I made an effort to perfect so that I didn’t have to feel like I wasn't good enough, and so that I had a way to be in control. I lived in a selfish universe where I was the only person who made the decisions and those decisions only affected me. What Brené talked about was a spiritual awakening that I believe everyone should go through. It’s hard to embrace pain and vulnerability, but it makes it easier to embrace yourself as well. What I loved about this TED Talk was that it was so honest. Not feeling good enough has become a sickness with a cure that people aren’t willing to accept. Stars like Demi Lovato and others have started empowering programs like “Love is Louder than the Pressure to Be Perfect,” and it was this slogan that I kept thinking about. It’s important to take a step back and understand that our flaws and our vulnerability make us beautiful.

**Can we be happy if we aren’t happy with ourselves?**