

Brene brown – the power of vulnerability

[People](#)



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BUSTER**

1. Summarize the “ Ted” talk: Brene Brown, Ph. D. , LMSW, a self-purported “ shame-and-vulnerability expert”, is a research professor at the University of Houston, Graduate College of Social Work. Focusing the last ten years of her studies on the topics of vulnerability, courage, authenticity, and shame, Brene Brown’s work has been featured on PBS, CNN, NPR, and most notably TED.

In her TED talk, she shares the findings of her lengthy qualitative research, a massive collection of interviews including a colorful rendition of her own personal struggles, on the idea of human connection which she states “ fundamentally expanded her perception” and has “ changed the way she lives, loves, works and parents”. Her touching account of her personal struggles with this research centers around her views of vulnerability, which Brown summarizes as our “ ability to empathize, belong, and love”.

Brown digs even deeper into her exploration of shame and vulnerability, and how they act as obstacles in one's pursuit of true happiness. Brown draws together her ideas in a concept she labels “ Wholeheartedness”, and illustrates her theory on how to engage in our lives from a place of authenticity and worthiness. 2. Identify the assumptions made by the speaker: To summarize her concept of “ Wholeheartedness”, Brown begins her talk on the topic of ‘ Connection’. We are hardwired to connect with others, it’s what gives purpose and meaning to our lives” explains Brown, that in order to allow connection to happen, “ we have to allow ourselves to be seen as we are, not presenting only the parts we think others will like”. During Brown’s research on connection, she elaborated on the idea that we often fear being disconnected from others, which she describes as the

meaning of 'shame'. We often feel shame and fear when we feel that we may become disconnected from others.

Brown decided to take a one-year detour from her research to explore "shame" in depth, unexpectedly resulting in six long years of what she quotes as "the most important things she has ever learned in the decade of her research". Brown discovered thru her interviews that there were two distinct groups of individuals with only one variable separating the two groups: a sense of 'Worthiness', which she defines as "a strong sense of love and belonging". Brown explains that the one thing that keeps us from connection is the fear that we are not worthy of connection.

While digging deeper into the minds of those individuals whom had a strong sense of worthiness, what she found in common was their sense of 'Courage'. Brown reveals her participants "had the courage to be imperfect, the compassion to be kind to themselves first and then to others," further stating "they had a connection as result of authenticity, they were willing to let go of who they thought they should be in order to be who they were," which she theorizes you absolutely have to do in order for connection to happen.

Moving on to the group of participants who struggled with worthiness, Brown stumbles on the concept of 'vulnerability', which she describes as the core of shame and fear, and why we struggle with vulnerability. Having to see her own therapist to sort out her ideas on vulnerability, she explains that to be seen lets us build that connection with others which often means that we may find ourselves "excruciatingly vulnerable". "We live in a vulnerable

world” states Brown, and in order to cope with these emotions, we numb ourselves”.

Brown theorizes that by numbing everything, we feel miserable and look for purpose and meaning, we feel vulnerable and then reach for something to ease our discomfort, a quick-fix, such as alcohol, drugs, or even food. Brown’s assumptions are summarized in her overall theory of ‘ Wholeheartedness’: We must have the courage to allow ourselves to be seen even if it means we are vulnerable. To do so allows us to have compassion to connect with ourselves and others. 3. Describe any evidence given to support these assumptions. Brown explains that there is evidence of her theory of vulnerability. We are the most in-debt, obese, addicted and medicated adult cohort in US history” states Brown. She summarizes this evidence with the statements that “ we make the uncertain - certain”. “ There is no discourse explains Brown, no discussion, just a right or wrong answer”, which she compares to what we see in current day religion and politics. She goes on to further explain that we not only “ perfect and blame”, but that we also “ pretend” that what we do does not have an affect or impact on others, both in our personal lives and even the corporate world.

This is evident by such dealings as the BP Oil Spill, the recent bail-outs, recalls on retail products, etc. She draws the association of how common shame is using her own experiences, and how it contributes to our anxiety and unhappiness which all to many of us attempt to suppress with the use of medication , food, drugs or alcohol to suppress these unwanted feelings. 4. Are there points of view not considered by the speaker? Explain. Although Brown’s assumptions of human’s need for connection, our fears of

shame and vulnerability are legitimate, these assumptions are based on “surfacey” feelings.

Brown does not consider variables outside of our control, variables such as life experience stemming perhaps from early childhood or adolescence, witnessing or partaking in traumatic events, or any other life experience that effectively molds these feelings of unworthiness. Brown herself instructs her own therapist not to dig into her own family life, no “childhood sh*t”, she just wanted to touch on the subject of vulnerability so that she could “personally and professionally understand” what makes us “worthy” of connection without digging below the surface.

Opening up Pandora's box would most certainly result in much grittier results. 5. State your position or perspective on the topic. I genuinely agreed with Brown's talking points in her TED discussion, and I related to her own descriptions of her fallbacks of self-control, ie: the need to always be right or better, and her fear of shame. The manner in which Brown unfolded her findings of her dedicated research clearly illustrated her theories. Drawing together her conclusions in her concept of “wholeheartedness” was clever and purposeful.

However, the subject matter was very generalized and did not reflect real-life experience as a cause of such feelings of unworthiness or vulnerability, although it was helpful in nature. I personally view the discussion more as “self-help” collection of ideas that you might find quoted in a calendar or collection of daily passages to motivate yourself that you are worthy of connection, to allow yourself to be vulnerable, to open up yourself without

the hesitation of risk. 6. What are the implications or consequences of the speaker's conclusions?

Brown's ideas are similar to what addicts are taught in rehabilitation-type settings. Addicts generally numb their feelings of unworthiness with substances such as drugs, alcohol, or food, or by actions or disruptive behaviors that allow them to release these feelings such as sex or pornography addicts and arsonists. However, once a traumatic event unfolds or an addict or even a non-addict experiences a trigger, or something that reminds them of their original feelings of unworthiness, individuals tend to fall back on their addictions or behaviors, relying even more on their numbing effects.

I believe one can only tell themselves so much what they want to believe before they face what they feel to be the truth of themselves or how they view themselves. A consequence of Brown's ideas to tell ourselves to love with our whole hearts, to allow ourselves to be seen, and to believe we are enough, could potentially lead one to a false sense of self, an inflated idea of who they are. Generally, individuals feel unworthy for a reason, due to their upbringing or life experience. In a perfect world, Brown's ideas would be enough to self-medicate our ill wills.