

The Gift of Being Ordinary

Ron Siegel: [00:00:00] We're like fish in water. We don't get it that, oh, maybe the whole realm of social comparison while deeply, deeply embedded in our genes is not something that we have to put our energies into. And, and that we don't have to be addicted to getting the next good feeling about ourselves, but we could find other more sustainable pals to wellbeing.

That was Ron Siegel on psychologists off the clock

Yael Schonbrun: We are three 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: I'm Dr. Debbie Sorensen, practicing in mile high, Denver, Colorado, and coauthor of ACT Daily Journal.

Yael Schonbrun: I'm Dr. Yael Schonbrun, a Boston based clinical psychologist, assistant professor at Brown University, and author of the upcoming book Work, [00:01:00] Parent, Thrive.

Jill Stoddard: And from sunny San Diego, I'm Dr. Jill Stoddard author of be mighty and the big book of act metaphors.

Debbie Sorensen: We hope you take what you learn here to build a rich and meaningful life.

Jill Stoddard: you for listening to Psychologists Off the Clock.

Yael Schonbrun: Psychologists off the clock is proud to be partnered with Praxis Continuing Education Praxis is the premier provider of evidence-based training for mental health professionals.

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, and every course I have ever taken from Praxis has really been of such value to me.

Debbie Sorensen: I get [00:02:00] questions a lot from clinicians who are looking for act training or other types of trainings, and Praxis my go-to place that I send people no matter what level they are, because they have really good beginner trainings for people who have no experience.

And they also have terrific advanced trainings on different topics and just people who want to keep building their skills.

Yael Schonbrun: You can go to our website and get a coupon for the live trainings, by going to our offers page at off the clock, psych.com/sponsors. And we'll hope to see you.

Debbie and I are here today to talk about the extraordinary gift of being ordinary. This was a conversation that I had with Dr. Ron Siegel. Who's a wonderful clinical psychologist, meditation teacher.. And you too can join him for a conversation. He's gonna be joining us for our book club on August 11th at noon, Eastern standard time in the us. Jot down notes, insights, comments, so that you can bring them to a [00:03:00] live conversation with Ron Siegel in August.

And in addition, The publisher of the extraordinary gift of being ordinary offering are listeners a discount. So check out our webpage, our social media channels or our newsletter. And you can find that discount so that you can pick up the book and give it Gander before our August book club, where Ron will be joining us.

So, Debbie, I know that as soon as I told you that I was reading this book and so excited about the content that you ran and picked it up and that you had a lot of thoughts about. Topic, which is such a universal topic of this anxiety that we have about being ordinary about not being special

um, so what were your thoughts?

Debbie Sorensen: Um, well, first of all, yes, I said, I really wanna do the co-host intro with you on this one. Yael because I because I was excited about this topic. And I think when I listen to the interview, I think every listener is gonna find something in this episode that is like [00:04:00] profound. It's so interesting to think in this way. And for me personally, this was really interesting timing because at the point where we're recording.

This cohost intro. I just came out of a conference, the ACBS conference, which is the, the conference for ACT therapists and researchers. And I gave a talk with Meg McKelvie. Who's my close colleague and our former guest, um, at the conference about self narratives and belonging, and how we often get trapped in this pursuit of high self-esteem.

We want to feel good about ourselves. But it can make us sort of preoccupied with attaining that and seeking it in ways that can be problematic. And there's this really interesting paradox where it's really at the root of it is this desire to belong. And he talks about this, right?

This is like evolutionary. We wanna belong. We wanna feel loved and included and accepted for who we are, but when we're. [00:05:00] Obsessed with self focus. And when we're really getting in that place of trying to prove our worthiness, it actually makes it much harder to connect because we're so, you know, we're so in ourselves we can't get outside of ourselves.

And so this conversation, I think just really lit me up because there's so many different ways that that plays out. I mean, who doesn't get into that trap sometimes.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. And there's something so paradoxical In the effort to belong, we can sometimes really damage connections that we have to other people. And I think that is kind of the point is that there's no inherent problem to wanting to be special or wanting to belong. The problem is that in some of the ways that we pursue it, we're kind of getting in our own way of attaining that end of, of like being in close community and building deep connections.

And so that's where we need to sort of pause and make sure that we're. Deliberate about how we go [00:06:00] about, you know, meeting these social needs, that that are just kind of inherent to being human.

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah. And when we get into that trap, right. When we really get, when we really cling to that desire to be extraordinary or special, you know, that's a really important thing to notice about ourselves. And then, like you said, what are you doing to attain that? Because sometimes there are some. Serious downsides to those things.

We can just constantly feel like we're pursuing it and never it's we're never gonna get there. Right. It just leads to misery and all kinds of problems

Yael Schonbrun: you know, we've talked a lot about this on the podcast and, and you know, me, you and Jill talk a lot about it behind the scenes, how this is something that comes up a lot in the parenting sphere.

, that, you know, we have this myth that we need to raise up our kids' self-esteem to make them feel special, but actually that's not quite right either. Right. That, that can create problems and undue pressure for our kids.

And I know that this is something that you've been looking into as well.

Debbie Sorensen: Oh, yeah. I've been thinking about a, it a lot for myself as a [00:07:00] parent, because I think sometimes I get caught in that and who doesn't. It's coming from a place of really wanting. Our kids to have opportunities and to feel good about themselves and to have, you know, to give them the opportunity to have a good life.

Um, but there is a dark side to it. . I think, what ends up happening is that we teach us, their kid teaches our kids, that their worthiness hinges on being extraordinary on being special.

And they end up feeling all this pressure. To be extraordinary and to win everything. And that fear of not being special drives all kinds of problems. And what if instead, we could just accept our kids for the human beings that they are and not do all that. Like how would that be different and how would that feel to them?

You know, if they didn't feel like they had to prove themselves in that way, by getting all the, you know, accolades and achievements. Uh,

Yael Schonbrun: I just sort of thinking about all these past episodes where we've talked about this . Like I had a [00:08:00] conversation with Emily Oster about this. When we talked about her book, the family firm with Melinda winter Moyer. When we talked about raising kids who aren't jerks with Jess Lehe, when we talked about the gift of failure.

Debbie Sorensen: I also talked to Tracy Baxley about this in our most recent episode on social justice parenting,

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. It's such an important message for parents, but I think it's an important message for all of us, for all of us human beings who feel that pressure to kind of stand out, to prove our worth and that if we can unhook from

that, that natural human impulse to. Prove ourselves, that we can find a lot more happiness and contentedness right.

Where we are. And so I hope that you listen to this episode all the way through, because, Around gives a really good framework for understanding why we have that drive, but also offers some really practical on the ground exercises and actually walks us through some of them in the episode itself.

And we hope that. Join, our live conversation with Ron in August the [00:09:00] second Thursday in August. Um, and bring your questions and comments and insights. Okay. I'm here With Ron Siegel today to talk about his new book. The extraordinary gift of being ordinary. Ron is faculty at Harvard medical school and teaches internationally about mindfulness practices in psychotherapy and other fields.

He's written many terrific books about mindfulness. And we're going to be chatting about his latest book again, called the extraordinary gift of being ordinary. Welcome, Ron.

Ron Siegel: Thanks for that.

Yael Schonbrun: Well, I have to start with the background experience that I met you about a decade ago. I think it was a workshop that I attended that you gave, and it was actually really impactful for me.

It was one of my earlier exposures to mindfulness and sort of practicing mindfulness in the therapy room. And I actually remember pretty vividly a story that you shared, um, that related to the desire to be extra ordinary within the mindfulness community that you actually share in the book too. And the gist of it.

And you can correct me if this is wrong, [00:10:00] is that, you know, even in a community with a core mission of acceptance of all beings and all things without judgment or desire that you found that there was still this undercurrent of competition, for example, like who's the best meditator. And it just really seems like we can't escape it, can we?

Ron Siegel: No, we can't it. Well, it's even silly within that. It's like, who's less concerned with social comparison who is less concerned with self-esteem, who is transcended this, uh, their narcissism more thoroughly. And that then becomes a pursuit in which we wind up comparing ourselves to others and neither feeling good about ourselves or bad about ourselves.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah, it's it's like, even when you try to escape it, it doesn't seem like we can because, and you talk about this a bit in the book, but there's really a lot of pathways to getting hooked on that desire for specialists. And part of it is really evolutionary. And part of it has to do with our early childhood experiences and part of it has to do with our culture.[00:11:00]

And so this is kind of a big question, but I wonder if you can talk a little bit about why it's so common to have that desire, to feel special, to be sort of pinned as extra ordinary.

Ron Siegel: Yeah, You know, I, I really do think it's, it's deeply rooted in our evolutionary history. Um, You know, if you travel around Africa, I'm on a so-called safari, which means riding in a Jeep with a naturalist, um, the naturalist will point out a pattern over and over and over in various different species that there will be a dominant male surrounded by basically a harem of reproductively promising females.

And then over in the next field, there'll be a group of usually somewhat younger males doing the species specific equivalent of playing basketball at foot Paul, try, you know, trying to hone their skills to, uh, to become dominant. Again. You think. So what's up with that. And what's up with the fact that birds, or, [00:12:00] you know, organize themselves into pecking orders.

In fact, we use that phrase when we're talking about human hierarchical rate arrangements, and what's up with the fact that even crickets, a certain species of crickets, if you put them together in a box inside of a few minutes, they've organized themselves into a dominance, hierarchies and children by, um, by the age of four. Organize themselves into what are called transitive dominance hierarchies. This is transitive the mathematical principle that if a is bigger than B and B is bigger than C, then a is bigger than C. You know, if, uh, Joachim is, uh, somehow more dominant than Sally and Sally is somewhat more dominant than Jose Jose knows that he's got a kind of kowtow to Y came.

In fact, the phrase kowtow comes from these dominance hierarchies in cultures, in which one, bows down to the more dominant one. So it's like, so what's up with this? Well, it turns out that it [00:13:00] in species, after species, it confers reproductive advantage to be on part, uh, on top of whatever the hierarchy is, because it means you're going to be able to protect, um, your DNA and whether you're female or male, if you're connected with this, uh, basically with a power couple.

Um, your, you know, the chance of your genes passing on a greater. So we might imagine in all of these different species and an ancient hominids that, um, there were folks holding hands and singing kumbaya and not being concerned with social rank, but they tended not to be the ones that passed on their genes.

So the brains we've got our brains that are like super concerned with this and super interested in this. Um, and in humans, of course, you know, it's not all about gross dominance hierarchies of who can beat up whom or, uh, or even who gets the most of the resources. [00:14:00] But our social comparisons, it shows up in every conceivable social comparison of how am I compared to you and the way we experienced this is in fluctuating self-esteem. And we each have, different criteria that we use, but let's say. I'm hooked on intelligence because early on that worked for me to be able to feel, Hey, I've got a scale. Hey, you know, there's, there's something special about me. Well, then I'm going to go through the world in some way, thinking, am I smart enough?

And am I as smart as you? Or are you smarter than me? And. In fact even think that I'm intelligent means that I'm implicitly comparing myself to others and thinking yeah. Compared to that person. Yes. Oh, compared to that other person. No. So this whole enterprise of looking around us, seeing others and trying to figure out where [00:15:00] our rank is, is actually sadly, very deeply embedded in our, in our genes.

Now, luckily we also have some other instincts of Ms. Things toward cooperation toward nurturing toward a safe social connection that are antidotes to this. But these are instincts that are strong enough. I mean, the. Hierarchical and ranking and comparing instincts are strong enough that they tend to show up everywhere and they certainly show up cross-culturally and they certainly are deeply embedded in every culture.

So they're probably not going away much as, you know, the fact that we also evolve to be drawn to sugar and fat, right. Cause you know, go back long enough in the, in the African Savanna and that was associated with nutrients. So every culture has got its equivalent of a donut. Right. And, and we're all drawn to donuts.

Um, but the good news is we could learn over the course of a lifetime [00:16:00] that, you know, eating a diet, mostly of donuts isn't doesn't work out so well. Um, and in the same way, Orienting ourselves, mostly toward how am I going to feel special, feel good enough? How have some positive narrative about myself that putting our energy into that actually is kind of like eating a lot of donuts.

It, um, it feels very good in the short run, but not very good or in the long run. And it's not a sustainable path to.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah, one thing I just want to point out is there's. So we have this hard wired, um, piece of our brain that is really motivated to assert some specialness, some sort of dominance, some sort of a way that we stand out in a positive sense to kind of ensure that we're, you know, in a important enough position in our group to be able to pass on our genetic material.

Um, so I think that's sort of true and we know that to be the case, but then there's these interesting ways and you kind of alluded to this, that our early childhood experiences can really. [00:17:00] Um, reinforced some of that wiring. So you talk about in the book that you had an early childhood experience of, of being told that you were intelligent and that, that became something that you really felt like you were motivated to stand for and to prove like, okay, you know, here, where am I in the intelligence hierarchy?

And I think what's interesting is that it can also happen in the opposite direction. And I actually had the opposite experience. Not that I was told that I was unintelligent, but that I was a middle child surrounded by siblings who were highly intelligent, who school came very, very easily for and raised in a family where natural intelligence was really like something that was highly valued.

And so I was really motivated to prove like I can make it and I have a place in this tribe too. Um, so in a really different direction, I also got those early messages that I needed to prove some kind of specialness because I wasn't, um, naturally or genetically gifted in particular reason. So it was a very interesting.

Really different kinds of [00:18:00] messages early in childhood can, can really, concretize this desire to kind of prove our specialty.

Ron Siegel: Oh, absolutely. I mean, there's so many different developmental pathways around this. I mean, because you know, for me, pretty early on, I started relying on, uh, you know, being able to, you know, be kind of articulate and figure things out to compensate for how horrible I was at throwing a baseball, you know, and, you know, you know, the feeling of getting picked last for the kickball team, even, you know, in first grade and just how painful that was.

And then what happened for me for example, is I doubled down on the intelligence stuff, you know, like, oh, all right, I really need this because if I don't have this, then I'm going to fall into the abyss of feeling like, you know,

the lowest ranking male in the primate troupe. You know, that is a very unpleasant, um, experience, you know, Robert Sapolsky, the, uh, uh, the stress physiologist at Sanford, um, [00:19:00] after years of studying these kinds of, , relationships and stress physiology, he says, well, it's bad for your health to be the low-ranking male in a primary troop, right?

There's this constant stress of I've got to somehow, somehow, you know, prove myself. I have to somehow get out of this position. Um, because it's, you know, again, it's historically associated with not being able to pass on our genes and we evolved brains that were, um, it's not that it was purposeful. It's just that the organisms that had the brains that weren't concerned about, this didn't reproduce as much.

So that didn't become that didn't become part of the themes. The one that were randomly more into this kind of, uh, uh, comparative world, those were the ones that reproduced more. So that's the brand.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. And so the next thing I wanted to bring up and you, you offered this really fascinating genetic analysis of primates of chimpanzees versus [00:20:00] Bonobos. And I just think it's really interesting to think about it's a, both and situation because we, we are wired to, uh, you know, demonstrate our specialists, but also there's a part of our brain and, and, you know, evolution has conferred this on us as well.

That is really about joining and being a part of the, not in a dominant way. So I wonder if you can share a little bit about what that genetic analysis shows us.

Ron Siegel: Well, thank God. I mean, there, you know, and there are, um, uh, frequently there are, you know, analysis done of this, that, uh, chimps are more into this kind of, you know, comparative who's on top, uh, kind of organization and Bonobos are more into, well, frankly things like mutual masturbation, you know, as a way to resolve problems.

And in fact, there's more of that that goes on at feeding time. As you know, as though they've got this, this going like, okay, let's not, [00:21:00] let's not do ourselves in by fighting, you know, for dominance, let's find a way to share here. And they've, they've kind of evolved that as a strategy and we have both going in us as humans and, um, given that we are, uh, You know, sometimes intelligent creatures, uh, we can actually choose, right?

Which of these, propensities we want to, , reinforce. And there's a fascinating, reciprocal, circular relationship between safe social connection and this, , this

kind of, hierarchical competitiveness and concerns about self-esteem and all that stuff. When we are safely, socially connect.

And to make this less abstract when we're hanging out with a good friend where we can really talk about our experience and really share our insecurities and really share our [00:22:00] vulnerabilities, in fact, share how much it was painful for us when we didn't get something we wanted or when somebody else was excelling in a way that was hard for us, or when we felt like we were rejected or we felt like we weren't attractive enough, or, or that we felt like we were in a good enough person, we weren't being a good friend.

It doesn't always have to be about kind of crafts material values. It can be about our striving to be a good child, a good parent, a good friend, a good sibling, a good therapist, right. Um, noble things. But when we're feeling, when we're able to share with somebody, our vulnerabilities, and they're able to say, oh gosh, me too.

You know, this happens to me too. I know what that's like. It is so hard when this stuff happens. Our whole sense of self starts to shift. We shift from being a, me and a you to being a we. And, you know, we cultures vary tremendously in the degree to which we [00:23:00] stop with my skin. Right. Um, and we even see this when we become, if we become a parent, for example, you know, the sense of who I am really starts to extend, to include the child in many ways, particularly if it's a young child then, and we'll move in to protect and defend it and nurture the child with the same energy that we once used for our ourselves.

So when we're in these safely, socially connected spaces and moments, we feel like, uh, we, and. It activates the whole other instinctual system, so that we're just less concerned with how we're doing and it all relaxes and it feels really good. It feels really like, ah, you know, thank God. And the interesting thing is the way that the, the sort of reciprocal business works is when we're able to be less focused on trying to get wellbeing through achievement, social comparison, [00:24:00] proving ourselves in one way or another raising our self-esteem when we're doing less of that, it's actually easier to connect with other people because this stuff, the Hey look at me is what is huge in terms of getting a wet.

Um, in the way of people connecting with one another, I mean, look at the work environment, you know, when things go off the rails in the work environment, it's almost always because somebody's feelings were hurt. Somebody was trying to assert, oh, it's my idea. Not your idea. There was something like that.

And this, these kinds of, , trying to prove ourselves, trying to come out, looking good or feeling good about ourselves, actually get in the way of relationships in intimate relationships, you know, um, you know, we wound up in arguments or fights with, with, uh, um, with intimate partners, it's almost always because somebody did something to make the other one feel bad about themselves.

Right. We felt, I felt humiliated. I mean, as you know, as a guy, [00:25:00] when things go off the rails with me and my wife, it's almost always because indeed I did something that was. Not relationally attuned. Um, her feelings were hurt. She either expresses her hurt or her anger if it was, if it was bad enough. And then I feel ashamed that I messed up in some way, but I may not even notice.

I feel ashamed. I'll just get defensive because the feeling of I'm being a bad husband is so aversive that I defense say, no, no, no, actually, you know, I wasn't bad or wrong or whatever. And then of course the whole thing devolves, and you know, we're in an argument. So, so this so safe, social connection helps to get us.

out of this realm out of this instinctual realm of, of comparison and jockeying for position.

And as we get out of that realm, we're better able to connect to people. Um, there's a. Um, one of the chapters in the book, [00:26:00] uh, uh, you know, I wound up titling make a connection, not an impression, you know, what happens when we shift from how do I prove myself here? How do I show that I'm good in whatever realm I used to define me, how do I shift from that to how do I connect to this other person?

And when we do that, we start being less concerned with the self-esteem rollercoaster.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. It's like when we let go of the desire to be special in order to feel good, we actually can feel better and, and, and get a lot of our needs met, and I love the, I think that you said that it wasn't clear whether it was a Cherokee legend, but it may be a Cherokee legend of the old man teaching his grandson about life and feeding wolves, this, this metaphor.

And I wonder if you can share that because it really helps to demonstrate that we have this hard wiring, but we can choose how we respond to it. And this is so powerful about the whole [00:27:00] mindfulness movement is that there are things that we don't get to choose about how we are, how we're built as human

creatures, but we, with our beautiful prefrontal cortex can choose what we do with it, what we feed and what we sort of leave by the way.

Ron Siegel: Right. Th the story that gets passed around in different forms. And I really tried to dig up, does anybody know where it comes from? No, nobody actually knows, but it's often told as though it's a Cherokee story and, um, that, uh, there's a, uh, a boy who is, um, uh, terribly torn and conflicted about, you know, basically, uh, you know, whether to fight about something and stand up for himself or, um, or, or whether to.

Uh, to be more connected and cooperative. And, uh, and he's talking to his grandfather and cause the kids really tormented by this and, and the grandfather says, uh, well, there are, you know, there are two worlds, uh, inside of you. [00:28:00] And one of them is, um, is loving, is caring, is, um, uh, wanting to connect and be, be selfless and wants to be honest and true.

And the other one is kind of scared and is angry and wants to make sure that he gets, um, everything that he needs and, and, and deserves, and is in our league Crowley, fighting Wolf, and you know, their war with one another. And that's, you know, that's what you're feeling inside yourself. And th the grandson says to his grandfather, well, Which one is going to win.

And the grandfather says, whichever one you feed. And I think that's the key idea that we can, we actually, we have these different instinctual propensities, but we can cultivate more of one or cultivate more of the other. And you [00:29:00] know, when we're frightened, uh, when we feel threatened, gosh, you know, this fight flight or freeze response takes over.

And, uh, you know, it's like we get really into looking out for number one and you know, how do I make sure that I get the respect that I deserve and how do I make sure that I look good? And, and how do I. When at whatever I'm doing so that I can, uh, feel good about myself. Uh, and, um, unfortunately that tends to dominate this other Wolf, right.

Which is our capacity to connect and see that we're really all in this together. And, , and we might actually find a way, , to use connection toward well-being, uh, instead of, rugged individualism, , for, for wellbeing, but it's, we're malleable. So we, we really can, um, we really can cultivate one or the other as the main way.

of being in the world.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah, we can be deliberate about which Wolf we feed. I love that message. I like that. [00:30:00] The way that you told the story just gave me goosebumps, because I think it's really a transformative way to think about these impulses that we just naturally we come by, honestly, but we can choose what path we take.

Given those impulses. One thing I want to speak to a little bit though, is, is this cultural piece that is so pervasive and that regen and your comment about rugged individualism brings it to mind because I think part of it is this fear that. Uh, defensive reaction when things aren't going our way that can really wake up that Wolf that wants to assert its dominance.

Part of it is just this omnipresent message that we get in, in our Western culture about how important it is, you know, for example, to like brand yourself, if you're going, if you're becoming a public figure. So I have a book coming out and there's this constant pressure to like brand yourself and show your expertise in a particular niche area.

And then as a parent, there's this sense that we need to make sure that our kids have really solid self esteem and raise them up. And these [00:31:00] messages are so pervasive that sometimes it's not just as a defensive reaction, but we think that this is what we're supposed to be doing.

Ron Siegel: th the, the, the message that pervades virtually all cultures is the pathway to wellbeing is making sure that, that you come out of. In some way, that, that you win in some way in w in whatever the thing is that you're, that you're hooked on. And, I think it's really interesting, you know, maybe we could do a brief exercise because sometimes this feels a little bit abstract and, , I find it helpful when, when exploring it to, you know, to, you know, to notice, okay, well, you know, is this actually relevant to me?

Are you up for that, but for, for our listeners as well. So I have a little exercise comes from the book about what matters to me, and this is just about seeing, okay, can, can we identify. What are the sort of building blocks of [00:32:00] self image or self-esteem, we're feeling okay about ourselves that we each use.

And, and I think if, if we can notice what they are then talking about this, , will feel, even more alive. , so, so here, because if we can do it as a little bit of a meditation of, of closing our eyes and, uh, taking a breath or two, and of course, if you're listening to this driving, please don't close your eyes.

Um, but, uh, I'm gonna do is, is read a list of things that other people, uh, tend to use as criteria to measure themselves as criteria to evaluate themselves. And the invitation is just to notice, are any of these relevant to me or have any of these been relevant to me or do they feel like they've got some juice to them or Sallians?

Um, so let's start with skills and talents. Okay. Who's smarter. Am I smart enough? We talked about that one. Um, or who's more creative. Am I creative enough? Do I have good taste? [00:33:00] Am I talented or am I good at sports? Am I good enough at sports? How are others at sports compared to me? Sometimes that one gets us more when we're younger. And then of course there are accomplishments who earns more money. Do I earn enough? Am I paid enough for what I do and closely related? Am I respected enough? Who gets more respect? Do I get enough respect? If you are a parent, you mentioned parenting, you know, who has the better looking better behaved or more successful children are my kids doing well enough?

And if you happen to have a partner who has the better looking better behaved or more successful partner is my, is my partner good enough? And in general, how am I doing at work? How do I compare to other. Then this group membership, right? Do I come from a good enough family? Did I go to a good enough college?

If I went to college or who has more friends, who's more popular. Am I popular enough [00:34:00] ever have feelings about being in the in-crowd or not being in the in crowd or in general, who gets more attention? Do people pay enough attention to me? And then there are our identities, you know, how do I feel about my race, my ethnicity, my gender, or perhaps my sexual orientation.

Do I feel good about these things? Am I proud? Am I ashamed? And then how are we in relationships? Am I a good enough friend? Good enough parent. Am I good enough child? I good enough sibling or coworker. How do I feel about myself this way? And then our D our adherence to values, you know, who's a nicer person.

Am I nice enough? Am I as honest as I need to be, or should be, am I as generous as I should be as caring, [00:35:00] forgiving, or my socially aware enough? Am I aware of justice and injustice or others more tuned than me? then of course there are the physical qualities, right? Am I attractive enough? Who's thinner.

Am I thin enough? Who's taller. My tall enough. Am I sexy enough? Do I look young enough? Who's stronger and better physical shape. Am I fit enough? And. Then, if you will just know, take note of maybe one of those, one of the things I mentioned that felt like ding, that rang a bell, right. That that was, oh yeah.

Yeah. This has been important to me. And just imagine, or remember a time where that quality, that attribute got validated, where you felt yeah. Pretty good about yourself. Like, yeah, I am this way, you know, smart or talented or attractive or [00:36:00] kind, or good, whatever it is and exaggerate for a moment, the posture of how that felt like the, oh yeah.

I am pretty good. And maybe even put your hand on the part of your body where you feel that feel the self-esteem boost because it's a physical thing. Right. And just enjoy that for a moment because sadly, it's not going to let. Cause now I'm going to ask you to remember the opposite or imagine the opposite where that very same quality was like.

Hmm, Nope. Don't have it. Nope. Blew it. Nope. Not, you know, not good enough and exaggerate that posture a little bit and maybe put your hand over the part of your body where you feel that, that, where you feel the feeling of a self-esteem collapse, feeling a failure, not good enough. And just feel that for a moment, but no worries, because that's not going to [00:37:00] last forever either. And I just come back to a neutral posture and take a couple of breaths and come back to open your eyes. Thank you for doing that. Uh, both Yale. Thank you. And those who are listening to the podcast and I'll do this with groups sometimes, and I'll ask, so how many people found at least one of those issues to be relevant?

And you know, a lot of hands go up, they say, well, who found more than what to be relevant? And a lot of hands go up. And then I say, who found almost all of them to be at one point in their life relevant and batch hands go up for that too. And frankly, I came up with this list by chest, like noticing my own mind.

Right. And, and seeing the things that have popped up for me and the things that have popped up from my clients. Um, you know, when we see, oh my gosh, there are so many different ways that we can evaluate ourselves. And then we start to notice to come back to your question, you know, gosh, [00:38:00] how many cultural messages are there?

That if only you were smart enough, if only you were thin enough, if only you bought the right car, if only. You were hanging out with the in-group if only if

only if only in fact this is how we sell stuff to one another, like we sell stuff with the prompts, all the imagery and ads, virtually all of it is about this.

You'll be able to feel good about yourselves. If you buy my product, do my thing. Right. Use my surface, whatever it is. Um, you know, when I was working on this book forever and, uh, you know, I would, uh, I, I fly around on an airplane, some to teach and you know, the, the, the drama at the gate. Okay. We're going to start with the first class passengers, right.

They paid an exorbitant amount for their ticket. Bless you. That's fair. And then, you know, the people in serving in the military and that's, that's honoring them. That's very nice and people, little kids make sense, um, and all that, but then [00:39:00] we start with the social class stuff right now we will have the executive platinum plus passengers.

Board followed by the platinum and then the gold and then the silver and God forbid, you should be part of what, of the eight proletariat, you know, allowed on the plane to slink with your bag and look for a place, you know, and it's like, what are we selling here? It's all this stuffs. It's so pervasive in the culture.

And it's so pervasive. We're like fish in water. We don't get it that, oh, maybe the whole realm of social comparison while deeply, deeply embedded in our genes is not something that we have to put our energies into. And, and that, that we don't have to be addicted to getting the next good feeling about ourselves, but we could find other more sustainable pals to wellbeing.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. And so I want to transition into talking about what that actually looks like. Cause it's, it's sort of well and good to say, you know, let's, let's sort of unhook from this [00:40:00] addiction to self esteem and, um, to proving our value in our specialness, but it's sort of like, then what do we turn towards? And, and maybe we can even just start with like a specific clinical example.

This one was shared by a colleague of mine, but it's something that I see a lot of. And, and to be frank, it's something that I'm guilty of participating in too. And the question is really how can parents talk to their kids in a way that doesn't get them stuck in the same trap? And so the case example is, um, a client whose elementary age daughter was being hard on herself after a mistake.

And she's sharing this in session. And the mother's explaining that she told her daughter, um, in response, uh, that, oh, but you're so good at dance. You're the best one in the class to kind of try to raise her back up and that. Client, the

mother is always going on and on about what a genius the daughter is and telling her she's so smart and talented.

And as my colleague was explaining to me, you know, her, her, uh, response in session was to sort of challenge her gently on the value of that [00:41:00] approach, but that, but that the mother really couldn't see why it was so problematic. And so I'm curious how you would counsel such a parent in your office.

Ron Siegel: Well, it, it's such a strong instinct, right? To cause this, this is, this is what happens as we, you know, as we try to regulate our emotional life, right. We learn in many situations that, oh, that feeling of not getting picked for the kickball team and that, and, and that, that horrible collapse feeling goes away.

When I have the feeling of getting the highest grade on the test in the, you know, in the third grade classroom. Right. And we have this experience over and over that when we have a self-esteem boost, it temporarily makes all of the pain and all of the injuries of the, of the collapses go away. So. get hooked on it.

You know, this is, this is, this is crack, right? This is like, it feels really, really good. And it makes [00:42:00] the pain go away for a little while. So it's absolutely natural. We get hooked on. It's actually natural that this mom would want to save her kid from her kid's pain by seeing if, Hey, have some crack, you know, think of how smart you are or think of, you know, how you won the mathletes or whatever it was. The problem is this crack and it just addicts us too. It, uh, addicts us to this and keeps us more deeply entwined. And this comes to the, the really interesting difference between, um, uh, developing self-esteem and developing self-compassion because self-esteem is inherently comparative. We may not think that we say, oh, I don't compare myself to others.

I have inner standards, but where did those inner standards come from? Where did we get the image of how I want to be in the world or who I should be in the world while somebody taught it, taught us that, or we started scoping at looking at other people. So [00:43:00] it's, it's the inner image is a compare we're comparing to this inner image, right.

In the same way that we might overtly compare to somebody out there. So when the kid has the failure experience instead of, oh, well you were so good in basketball last year, or look at how well you did in the math competition. Uh, self-compassion if we went to develop self-compassion instead starts with acknowledging the pain of it.

Okay. Oh, sweetheart. I understand that really, you know how that really hurt. And you know, when I was your age, um, you know, I, I was, I was really into drama and I wanted to be in the school play and I didn't get chosen for the part. And, you know, it w I was heartbroken. It was really hard. I know this stuff really hurts.

And, you know, sweetie, all of us, sometimes we win at this stuff and sometimes we lose. Sometimes we feel we're [00:44:00] successful and sometimes we feel we fail and it really hurts, you know, when this happens, but the good news is we can Sue. We can be here for, for each other. Let me give you a hug, sweetie. You know, I know, I know this is hard.

Yael Schonbrun: I love that because it's, it's, it's really sort of, um, this idea of connecting. In place of showing your dominance or proving your worth it. And it's sort of like a very concrete way to do that. So rather than bolstering up this, the steam connect where your child is, and I love that language. Cause it's it's language that you can direct to yourself in sort of a self-compassionate

Ron Siegel: Absolutely. Absolutely. Because you know, we all, there's a few reasons why it's absolutely impossible to win. Um, one of them is something that we might call narcissistic recalibration, which is a fancy way, of saying things that once floated our boat, we now habituate to, and they don't work [00:45:00] anymore. Um, uh, you know, remember how good it felt when we figured out how to put the, uh, concentric size, uh, plastic or wooden doughnuts in different cultures in different, um, it comes in plastic or wooden depending on the toy, but on the pole, right.

It took form that multicolor, the rainbow colored cone. Uh, many of us had that as a, as a child's toy and yeah, it's great. And Hey look, mommy and daddy, I didn't know that. Well, you know, that wouldn't float our boat so much today and, and, and because I trained therapists a lot, I'll sometimes. Uh, talk to therapists who worked hard to get a terminal degree, right.

And, and maybe to get licensed to practice, um, and, and all that. And remember how good it felt that day of finally getting your terminal degree or getting your, your license. And then I'll say, I was just curious, how many of you woke up this morning feeling really good about yourself because you have your terminal degree and everybody starts laughing, except maybe there's one newly minted therapist who like [00:46:00] raises their hand, you know, sheepishly and says, why is everybody laughing?

You know, it's because we, we habituate to whatever it is. And then we need something more in order to feel in order to. Feel good about ourselves. And frankly, in order to distract us from and override all of the accumulated pain of all of the moments in which we felt not good enough, you know, we all were all broken heart in this way.

We all carry, I mean, I talk about kickball, but you know, every girlfriend that ever, you know, whatever, didn't work out every, you know, time that, you know, I said something that. Dumb or, or, or I didn't strategize well about something and it didn't work out well. Um, you know, hundreds and hundreds of examples.

I mean, some people have big T trauma of really horrible things that have happened in their life, but even people who have been very fortunate and very blessed have a huge legacy of all these hurts basically about self-esteem [00:47:00] collapses times in which we felt like we.

didn't make it. Like you were talking about, you know, what it felt like to have really smart siblings and, you know, uh, you know, I can only imagine that there are all these broken hearted moments of, ah, ah, that that really hurts.

And then we, you know, we try to build ourselves up and have another victory to make that go away. Well, an alternative is let's approach compassionately that pain, of course, that hurt. Nobody likes to be picked last for kickball team. Nobody likes to have brilliant siblings, even if you like them. For other reasons, it's like what a brain,

Yael Schonbrun: yeah.

Ron Siegel: you know?

And, and, uh, and if we can. Recognize that we're, we all have this pain, then we can work to heal it bit by bit. In fact, the, um, an overarching thing that we can do, and this is hard and I'm not saying I pull this off well, regularly in my own life is every time we have another one of these disappointments currently, can we [00:48:00] use it as an opportunity to heal other disappointments and collapses that it reminds us of because when it happens now, when, um, you know, somebody else gets more attention than I do professionally about something, or I could go on with a long list of things that, that I currently, you know, still get hooked on, even after writing the book.

Um, and this happens, you know, on my bedroom, in my better moments, I'm able to say, all right, so why is this reminder? W, you know, what's, what's this feel like? And I start to realize, oh Yeah.

this feels like, you know, being the little kid and my older brother and his friends were sort of letting me tag along, but I wasn't really part of the group.

And it didn't, you know, and it's like, what about me? You know, and all these feelings, or even, you know, gosh, this felt like that break up that relationship where, you know, when, when love [00:49:00] relationships break up, it's not just the loss of the relationship, but it's almost always the, we go from feeling, Hey, you know, I'm really, you know, attractive and interesting and, and wonderful to be with because it's wonderful person wants me to, if this wonderful person doesn't want me, oh my God.

You know, I'm, I'm a wretched failure. Right. And you know, it's not just about losing love. It's about losing our feeling about ourselves. Um, and our. Herself event, our positive self evaluation. And so when we take the current loss and we use that as a sort of avenue to with self-compassion by being kind to ourselves, um, look at, so what's the past hurt here.

And it's very interesting to the degree to which we can do that. It's like, oh, all right. So my current losses are actually teachers. These are, these are, these are my therapists. Um, a good friend of mine, Michael Miller. He passed on it to me.

I don't know where he heard it. He said, you know, I know many people [00:50:00] who have been ruined by success. Not that many who've been ruined by failure, right? Because if we use it, well, it becomes an opportunity to grow. So anyway, so one, I realized I started in a, in another place. I want to come back to it. So one reason why we can never win at this is this narcissistic recalibration things that used to work don't work.

The other reason is even if we're right, really, really at the top of our game, we're literally in the Olympic gold medalist and we have won the gold in this particular sport. So we are the best in the world. What are the chances of being the best in the world in four years? Whether the has been eight years, not so great, right.

Newton was right. What goes up, comes down. And, uh, so, you know, basically if we're putting our eggs in this basket, there can't get broken. It doesn't, it really doesn't work in a sustainable way. So it really is really important to put our,

[00:51:00] our eggs in this other basket of, you know, kind of the safe social connection.

And you asked about other things, there, there other things that are also quite helpful and are renewable and sustainable resources. Um, one of them is engagement. I mean, you've alluded to mindfulness, you know, on a few occasions and I've spent a lot. You know, practicing, writing and teaching about this. Um, simply engaging more fully in the simple, very ordinary moments of our lives is an alternative to be present, to eating a Tangerine and enjoying the flavor and the texture, looking at a tree and really getting its, you know, its beauty and its magic.

These kinds of very savoring, simple, basic moments of our lives. It's not subject to this stuff. Right. You can save for it. I can save for it and you're enjoying it. Doesn't take away from my enjoying it nor vice versa. We can, you know, we can, we can do this together. Um, [00:52:00] and it's, it's renewable and it means even when we're engaging in more complex tasks, like say teaching, which you know, whereabouts are doing right now.

Right. Um, you know, what's the difference between teaching. I'm mostly thinking, how do I sound? Was everybody think, was that clever? Was that not clever? Are they going to like this? Will they be interested in the book once they, I can go there? No question. And that's part of what's going on in this organism at this moment, but there is another part of me that genuinely feels, you know, if this can be a little bit useful to somebody, if this can help just to relieve someone else's pain around this in the way that we all have pain around this.

Well, that would be meaningful. And that would be great. So let me try to do that here and. And it's different. It's, it's a different way of engaging with work and whatever we do for work, there's always a part of it, which is about proving ourselves, [00:53:00] um, and trying to feel good about herself and another part, which is about just trying to get the task done or doing something that's consistent with our values.

And we can sense it when we're more focused on one or the other, and we can kind of enjoy ourselves toward, um, toward that, which is more sustainable and is better for us and others.

Yael Schonbrun: I love that. And so, as you're talking, I'm thinking of this recent example that I'll share. So I have a book coming out in the fall, which,

um, I probably mentioned too often. , but, um, a few weeks ago was when the endorsements were due back.

And so I'm writing these endorsements from people who I really admire, who I've asked, you know, to, to read the book and I'm sort of, you know, chomping at the bit to find out what they think, you know, with anxiety, but also with some excitement and they come in and I, I feel so confident that when they come in, I'll finally feel good about.

Th this work that I've poured my heart and soul into and taken a lot of years to write. And I'm sure you feel the same way about your books and they, every single one, as it came in, there was sort of this [00:54:00] initial, okay. They, they read it and, and, you know, they were willing to endorse it and how exciting, and then I'd read the endorsement and I'd say, D did they really like it?

And is that far enough? And I found myself and I'm admitting this publicly. I found myself actually going to other books that these, uh, indoor

Ron Siegel: right. No. Yeah,

Yael Schonbrun: pairing what they had written about

Ron Siegel: yeah, yeah,

Yael Schonbrun: getting curious, did they like it as much as this other book that I know is great, is this good enough? And really getting hooked on that.

And th the, the south for me, as you're describing was to reconnect to, uh, a sense of pride that I wrote this book, and I hope that it will be helpful for some people. And it, it, isn't a perfect book because no such book exists. And then, you know, really at the end of the day, reconnecting with my kids is the thing, the only, the only way that it can kind of really move on from it.

And, and it's, it's just really uncanny that, you know, you keep hoping that there'll be something that'll reassure you, [00:55:00] that you're good enough. And that what you put out into the world is special and unique and, and wonderful. And it just never quite does the trick

Ron Siegel: well, it's it's because it is because even when it's cause nine, cause what goes up, comes down and we recalibrate, right? Like, you know, um, yourself of even a month or two ago to think that this person endorsed my book, you think, wow. I would feel like I had totally done it. I had totally succeeded.

And now it happens in immediately the recalibration, but is it a heartfelt enough endorsement?

You know, do they really, you know, it's talking about this stuff is part of what frees us from this stuff because we have to be able to notice it notice is pervasiveness and then share it with other people. And especially if somebody says, I know exactly what that feels like, it's like, phew. You know?

Cause, cause there's [00:56:00] another mythology here, which is really important. This is the mythology that only losers are preoccupied with this stuff, right? If you were really a good author, if you were really a skilled psychotherapist or a real one, not one, who's an imposter, you wouldn't have these insecurities.

You would simply know that what you do is valuable and valid and important in the world. And, you know, we've seen political figures posture this way. You know, that look at that person, they showed insecurity. They're obviously inadequate and weak. Um, no, it is not only, I mean, I have gone, you know, depending on which day you ask me, there'll be days where I think, yeah, the whole reason I wrote this book is just because I'm just much more insecure than everybody else.

And, you know, I never got over the kickball team and, you know, uh, I wasn't good at throwing a baseball and I, you know, I just never worked it through and that's why I wrote this book. Right. Maybe. Some days, I feel that is the case, but on other days I'm [00:57:00] able to feel, now there's something much more universal about this, and this is useful to speak out loud and we can help one another with it and help one another in part, by just noticing the thousands of times in the course of a day that something along these lines comes up, you know, I actually wound up writing the book originally.

Um, you know, it was several years ago and there I was already in my sixties, uh, having spent. Literally for decades involved in meditative practices, largely in Buddhist traditions, which have as their explicit goal, less, self-preoccupation less, self-centeredness less concerned with, you know, who I am and how I compared to others.

There's, you know, that literally like for the monks, you know, so you'll be at peace on your death bed, not attached to this organism. Right. And here, you know, spend that for four decades and for, you know, four-plus decades as a psychologist. Right. And you [00:58:00] would think that what the goal of

psychology and psychotherapy would be to develop some kind of secure, stable, coherent sense of self.

Neither had happened. Right. I was still going up and down regularly with, you know, I opened my email in the morning and, you know, to be perfectly honest is always some fear. Like, is this going to be something that's gonna make me, if I really examined it, feel good about myself or bad about myself? Like this is, this is actually what's going on with each email.

It might just be, did I respond adequately to the previous email? Did this person, like what I said, does somebody think something I'm working on isn't good enough? And I need to revise it, noticing these fluctuations happening sometimes several times an hour or several times a minute and thinking, so is it just that I've completely failed this project of life?

Which is, am I supposed to be a professional at it? Right. Like teaching other people how to live a library, you know, maybe I'm complete failure or maybe this is just [00:59:00] a pervasive. Built into our DNA and built into our culture. And it is really hard to free ourselves from this, but still worth, worth trying to do it.

And. On good days. The ladder is my.

conclusion. And, uh, and when I talked to you, I told you, and I talked to other people that I think of them, and I think, well, that's a person that I respect and they're reporting. This happens to them. That's reassuring to me. It's like, okay, all right, maybe this is universal.

And if we view it this way, we can all, we can all help each other, um, with it and not buy into the other messages that are everywhere out there. Right. Um, about, Yeah, I mean, my God, the stuff about parenting, right? Like, what you should do to be the optimal parent. And I dunno, a single parent that I respect that feels, oh, I'm a good parent.

You know, it's like, you know, there, there, there's so many things that go wrong. Right? So many things that we do when we think, I can't [01:00:00] believe I.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah, but I mean, your message is like to embrace that. So I, in fact, love one of the titles. I love a lot of the titles of the chapters, but one of my favorites is you're not that special and other good news, right? That, that not only is it useful to accept, it's actually wonderful. There are gifts and accepting and embracing our ordinariness.

And when you can speak a little bit to that and maybe even, um, respond to this question of what are some of your favorite practices for embracing and really savoring our ordinary.

Ron Siegel: Yeah.

absolutely. It's in the moments that we, that we get that. It's like dropping a hot coal, you know, I've been clinging, clinging so hard to, how do I feel good about myself? How do I feel good about myself? How do I hold on to this feeling? And, and, you know, we, we sort of roughly divide up into two categories.

Either those of us who, you know, were like, ER, in pu right. Oh God, I failed [01:01:00] again. Right. Or we're stressed out constantly thinking, Hey, I'm winning, I'm winning, I'm winning. But we're constantly stressed out trying to try to keep it up. And when we do embrace, our ordinariness is like, ah, I'm neither better nor worse than anyone else, nor than these inner images.

I'm just this like, you know, human being, trying to figure out what to do with, you know, this particular manifestation of millions, of years of evolutionary history. And there's all sorts of things we can do. Uh, I'll just name some of the exercises that are in the book. Uh, you know, Yeah, one of them is writing a self-esteem autobiography.

This, this is something I've sort of been doing in bits and pieces for a long time, which is just to start seeing how do we get hooked on this? How did it manifest early? Like what was our first memory of feeling pretty good about ourselves and our first memory of feeling pretty crappy about ourselves.

And can we, you know, can we revisit that and [01:02:00] just notice them and noticing them throughout the, throughout the years of our lives and which ones used to be relevant and now aren't, which ones have become relevant that didn't use to be relevant. So that helps give us perspective. It's, it's super helpful to do that.

Um, there are some exercises that are more that are kind of cognitive that I find really interesting. I actually got these from the somewhat, a mad cap, cognitive behavioral therapist, Albert Ellis, um, So, okay. Where do you get the idea that having this or that quality was important and was good? And then where do you get your value system?

Like, is this like acute, let's say I'm hooked on intelligence. Is this like cumulative grade point average since birth, like how many intelligent things

have I done since I was born versus things that I think are were dumb that I've done. I was born. And that's how you get to feel good or bad about myself, or is it just since I've been an adult or is it just like the last month or the last week had less hour?

Like what's the grading system here [01:03:00] and, and how did I, who taught me that? You know, so sometimes just like looking at this with open eyes starts to free us. and then there's all the sort of emotional work to be done. The stuff I was alluding to before. How can I take each of these collapses and use it as an opportunity to heal the pain of the previous collapses?

Because ultimately we need, you know, there's no shortcut, we need to heal the pain and open to the pain of these losses because, but when we're no longer afraid of that, those memories, then when something new comes up today, that kind of reminds me of it. I don't crash as badly. It's not, it doesn't have, it doesn't have the impact.

And then there are the other kind of positive psychology things that are really. Practicing gratitude, keeping a gratitude journal, super useful because in a moment of gratitude, a few things are happening. One is it's freeing us from our desire and our feeling of not enough, right. And not good enough because we're actually appreciating something.

We have something that's a gift in our life. And there are so [01:04:00] many gifts in our lives. I mean, you know, not for people perhaps who are in really horrible situations, but for many of us who have enough to eat and have some social connections and, and, uh, are physically reasonably well. I mean, my gosh, what gifts compared to the suffering of the world, um, And the other thing about gratitude is it's inherently relational.

So in a moment of gratitude, we're grateful for, or towards someone, whether it be God or our friends or, um, the natural universe, it connects us to something larger than ourselves. So that becomes, um, really powerful. And some things involved, you know, going on diets of sorts like around certain social media stuff.

We haven't talked about that, but when you know this stuff is getting amplified horribly, you know, how many Facebook or Instagram posts read woke up this morning? Had the runs again, think I'm going to get a bad performance review at work and my girlfriend or [01:05:00] boyfriend is going to leave me right now.

It's like, here I am doing fantastic things in a fantastic place looking great. And you're not here, you know, you know, they're, they're all designed to keep us addicted to this. And, uh, you know, that's, you know, the, the purveyors of social media, the reason why there's an opportunity to like things are noticing and, and psychologists, wire people up, and they put them in labs and every time we get alike, there's the square to dopamine in the nucleus accumbens,

and there's that reward of yes, I'm winning. Yes. Popular yet, you know, so we kind of have to go on a little bit of a diet about that and decide, you know, when I'm feeling, if I'm struggling with something emotionally, maybe I shouldn't be trying to find the likes. Maybe I, maybe I should take the time to be with this and be kind to myself and heal myself rather than, rather than get an, a score and other victory in order to try to feel better about myself.

So, so it's really very, uh, there's a lot of different approaches. We can [01:06:00] take it. You know, the book I talk about, we have to work with our heads because we got to see this cognitively, like where'd I get these crazy ideas. We got to work with our hearts. We got to work with. All the ways our hearts have been broken around this and, and we've been in pain and we got to work with our habits, you know, all right.

Instead of checking my phone, I'm actually going to go for a walk and bring myself into the present and appreciate a tree because when I'm in nature, I'm not so into, you know, what does the tree think about me? You know? Um, uh, you know, I start to, I start to connect with something else. So, so it's, it's, um, a lot of possibilities and different tools are gonna work better for one person than another.

But, uh, there really are things we can do that, can lighten this up for us.

Yael Schonbrun: Well, and I just want to add a darker intervention that I actually loved, which is, um, you have, you have a section in your book where you talk about impermanence and sort of recognizing our, our ordinary mortality and how this is kind of a hard factor. You know, it's sort of natural to want to think that we can overcome this.

You know, we'll be the one special person who [01:07:00] doesn't age or doesn't get sick who lives forever, but that actually embracing it can help bring you back into the

Ron Siegel: Yeah, absolutely.

Yael Schonbrun: And I absolutely love the exercise that one of your colleagues does on his presentation notes. Where he writes on the top of it dead soon,

Ron Siegel: Absolutely.

Yael Schonbrun: am I'm feeling this?

I'm going to write that at the top of my presentation notes dead soon, really matter.

Ron Siegel: it's, it's such a profound leveler, right? Cause it's like, okay. Um, you know, you could go to the cemetery and yeah. You get to have the bigger tombstone whoopee for you, but it's like, You know, all this stuff is so obviously, um, silly when we, you know, when we realized that, you know, life's a limited trip and we're, we all get born, we all die.

And, uh, um, there's another exercise that I eat that I do, which is, you know, kind of a rough one, which is imagining the death of our social self. Right. Imagining, you know, what it will be [01:08:00] like for our loved ones and everything when we're gone. And it, I, you know, it's, it's, it's challenging, but it's like, oh gosh.

So what am I worried about?

Yael Schonbrun: Totally. I wanted to end our conversation with a quote from a book that we're going to be discussing at this month's book club. And, um, it's a little bit of a segue into my sharing that you'll be the guest of , you'll be the guest of extraordinary honor at our August book club to discuss your book, the extraordinary gift of being ordinary.

But this month's book is a novel called the midnight library by Matt Hague. And the main character is Nora. It's this really trippy book that really explores. Themes of impermanence and getting hooked on narratives. And the quote goes as follows. Nora had always had a problem of accepting herself from as far back as she could remember, she had the sense that she wasn't enough.

Her parents who both had their own insecurities had encouraged that idea. She imagined now what it would be like to accept herself completely. Every mistake [01:09:00] she'd ever made. Every mark on her body, every dream she had ever had, every Lester longing, she had suppressed. She imagined accepting it all the way she accepted nature, the way she accepted a glacier or a Puffin or the breach of a whale.

She imagined seeing herself as just another brilliant freak of nature, just another sentence animal, trying her best and in doing so, she imagined what it was like to be free.

Ron Siegel: No, absolutely what a wonderful quote and that's, that's exactly what we're talking about here. And that is, you know, when we have these moments, that's how it feels. You know, it's like, ah, it is an extraordinary gift. You know, these, these moments of just, you know, being an Oregon.

Yael Schonbrun: So, thank you so much for your time. We're really excited to see you in August for our book club. Um, so please jot down your conundrums challenges, your, your insights, and bring them to our book club and Ron, where can people find out more about you and your work?

Ron Siegel: Um, [01:10:00] so the easiest is, uh, you know, I have a website, uh, Dr. Ron Siegel. So Dr. R O N S I E G E I.com. And, um, you know, there's all sorts of stuff there. There's a lot of, a lot of free materials, a lot of resources, a lot of presentations that you can check out if you're, uh, if you're interested,

Yael Schonbrun: Thank you so much and we'll look forward to seeing you in August.

Ron Siegel: looking forward to it. Thanks so much for inviting me today and for your, your really thoughtful questions and for your own sharing of your experience. Cause that's, that's really what helps to free us all.

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