

MAX PARADOX

PROBLEM? RELAX. YOU'VE GOT THIS!

Self-Help with a Sense of Humor ;)

Everyone Else Has It Better Than Me

How to Stop Comparing Your Life
to Someone Else's Highlight Reel



We have a problem. Relax. We can solve it—and have a laugh along the way.

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INTRO

You open Instagram for one perfectly innocent reason. Maybe someone sent you a message. Maybe you want to check the weather, even though Instagram has never once been responsible for meteorology. Three minutes later, you are looking at a former coworker standing on a beach in Greece with a drink that appears to contain its own tropical ecosystem.

She looks fantastic.

Her husband looks fantastic.

Their hotel looks fantastic.

Even the decorative towel swan looks emotionally stable.

You are sitting on your couch wearing sweatpants that have entered the "technically still clothing" phase of their life, eating crackers directly from the box because plates create unnecessary bureaucracy. Suddenly, a thought arrives:

Why does everyone else seem to be doing better than me?

This thought is rarely improved by further investigation.

You keep scrolling. Someone bought a house. Someone got promoted. Someone ran a marathon. Someone has apparently discovered the exact morning routine required to become wealthy, calm, muscular, fluent in Italian, and finished with email before 7:15 a.m. Another person posts a photo of their child calmly painting at a beautiful wooden table while sunlight enters the room at an angle normally reserved for luxury furniture catalogs.

Meanwhile, your family's creative activity this morning involved someone stepping on a charger and shouting a word that will not appear in the school newsletter.

Excellent.

You were reasonably satisfied with your life fourteen minutes ago. Nothing about your actual life has changed. Your job is the same. Your relationships are the same. Your bank account has not moved. Your kitchen still contains exactly the same suspicious container you have been avoiding since Tuesday.

But now your life somehow feels worse.

That is the strange power of comparison. It can turn an ordinary Tuesday into evidence that you have failed at existence.

The problem is not that you notice other people. Human beings have always compared themselves with one another. Your ancestors probably did it too.

"Gary has a better cave."

"Gary's fire is bigger."

"Gary's family seems happier."

"Yes, but Gary was nearly eaten by a bear yesterday."

"Still. Nice cave."

Comparison itself is not automatically harmful. Sometimes it helps. You see someone doing something well and think, I'd like to learn that. You notice a colleague earning more and realize you should negotiate your salary. You watch someone become healthier and decide that perhaps vegetables deserve one final chance before you formally classify pizza sauce as a serving of produce.

Useful comparison gives you information.

Unhealthy comparison gives you a verdict.

And the verdict is usually delivered by a judge who has reviewed approximately six percent of the evidence.

You compare your ordinary day with someone else's exceptional moment. Your kitchen on Wednesday morning versus their anniversary dinner. Your career uncertainty versus their promotion announcement. Your relationship after an argument about dishwasher loading strategy versus their vacation photo captioned My person. My best friend. My everything.

Nobody posts:

"Here is my best friend refusing to admit that bowls go on the top rack."

That does not mean the happy photo is fake. Most of the time, it probably is happy. The mistake is not assuming that other people experience good moments. They obviously do. The mistake is quietly turning those moments into a complete biography.

You see the promotion. You do not see the six years of boring work before it, the difficult manager, the applications that went nowhere, the Sunday-night anxiety, or the fact that the promoted person may now spend three evenings a week attending meetings titled "Strategic Alignment Sync."

You see the beautiful house. You do not see the mortgage payment.

You see the vacation. You do not see the delayed flight, the argument at the airport, the credit card bill, or the thirty-seven failed photos taken before the one where everybody appears naturally joyful near a fountain.

The internet has not invented comparison, but it has industrialized it.

Once, you compared yourself mostly with people you actually knew: relatives, coworkers, neighbors, maybe the annoyingly competent parent from your child's school who somehow brings homemade muffins to an event at 8:00 a.m. Today, your comparison group includes celebrities, entrepreneurs, fitness influencers, strangers in apartments you cannot afford, people ten years younger than you, people twenty years older than you, and a man in California who apparently sold his software company at twenty-six and now writes philosophical posts from a cold plunge.

This is not a fair competition.

It is not even technically the same sport.

Your brain, unfortunately, does not always care. It sees evidence of somebody succeeding and performs a quick audit of your own life. Career. Money. body. Relationship. Home. Travel. Social life. Parenting. Productivity. Hair.

Hair has somehow entered the annual review.

The result is a moving target. Even when you catch up in one area, someone else appears ahead in another. You finally earn more money and discover that everybody seems to be traveling more. You take a good vacation and meet someone who has already visited forty-three countries. You renovate the kitchen and immediately encounter a person online whose pantry has individual glass containers labeled LENTILS in matching typography.

You own lentils too.

They are in a torn plastic bag behind the rice.

Apparently civilization has passed you by.

The deeper problem is that comparison often hides inside respectable-looking thoughts. It does not always announce itself as jealousy. Sometimes it arrives dressed as analysis.

"I'm just wondering whether I'm behind."

"I'm only trying to understand what I should be doing."

"I'm using other people for motivation."

Perhaps.

But if your "motivation" regularly ends with you feeling inadequate, frozen, resentful, panicked, or suddenly convinced that you need a new career, new apartment, new body, new relationship, and possibly new kitchen storage containers before Thursday, we may want to inspect the method.

This book is not going to tell you to stop comparing yourself with anyone forever.

That would be excellent advice if your brain were an obedient Labrador.

It is not.

Your brain compares automatically. The practical goal is different: learn to notice when comparison is useful, when it is distorted, and when it is quietly stealing your satisfaction without giving you anything valuable in return. You will learn how to separate information from self-judgment, stop using strangers as measuring devices, choose better reference points, reduce the situations that trigger useless comparison, and make decisions based on what you actually want rather than what appears to be winning online.

We will also deal with the irritating situations in which comparison feels justified.

What if your friends really are earning more?

What if someone younger really is further ahead in your career?

What if you genuinely have neglected something important?

Good. Then we deal with reality.

The solution is not to protect your self-esteem by pretending everybody else is secretly miserable. That is just reverse comparison wearing sunglasses.

Some people really do have more money than you. Some are fitter. Some have calmer marriages, bigger houses, better jobs, more impressive passports, nicer skin, and kitchen drawers that close on the first attempt.

Fine.

Their existence is not an accusation.

You do not need to win against every person you encounter in order to have a good life. You do not even need to enter most of the competitions your brain keeps registering you for.

That is where we are going.

Not toward a magical state where you see somebody's incredible life and feel absolutely nothing. You are a person, not a decorative stone.

Toward something much more useful: being able to see what somebody else has without automatically converting it into evidence that you are behind.

Because the goal is not to convince yourself that your life is better than everyone else's.

The goal is to finally notice that it does not have to be.

Chapter 1 - You Are Comparing Raw Footage to a Trailer

You are having a normal evening when your phone informs you that someone you vaguely know has achieved something impressive.

A former classmate has launched a company. A cousin has bought a house. A coworker is celebrating ten years of apparently uninterrupted marital bliss in a restaurant where the chairs look more expensive than your first car. You look at the photo, tap the little heart, and continue with your evening.

Except you do not continue with your evening.

Your brain opens a spreadsheet.

At first, the comparison seems harmless. Good for them. Then comes the second thought: Wait. What am I doing? Five minutes later, you are mentally reviewing your income, career trajectory, relationship status, retirement savings, physical condition, travel history, and whether buying an air fryer three years ago counts as personal development.

It does not.

But it made excellent potatoes.

The first major problem with comparison is not that you compare yourself with other people. It is that you usually compare two completely different kinds of information.

You know your own life from the inside.

You know the embarrassing parts, the unfinished plans, the stupid decisions, the mornings when you achieved nothing before noon except moving a pile of laundry from one chair to another. You know which goals you abandoned, which

conversations you handled badly, which purchases you regret, and how often you search “easy healthy dinner” before ordering something that arrives with fries.

Other people, however, are usually presented to you from the outside.

You see outcomes.

You see announcements.

You see finished kitchens, accepted job offers, engagements, vacations, graduation photos, race medals, business launches, anniversaries, smiling children, polished presentations, and people standing beside expensive objects with captions about gratitude.

You rarely receive the complete production archive.

Nobody sends you a seventeen-minute documentary called Tuesday: We Nearly Canceled the Vacation Because Mark Forgot the Passports.

You receive the beach photo.

This creates a simple but powerful distortion: you compare your entire dataset with someone else’s selected evidence.

Imagine applying this method anywhere else.

You are choosing between two restaurants. For Restaurant A, you receive every review written in the last five years, including the person who gave one star because it rained. For Restaurant B, the owner sends you six photographs of beautifully plated food and a note saying, “People love us.”

You would not call that a rigorous comparison.

Yet this is approximately how we evaluate lives.

Your Brain Fills in the Missing Parts