

Big Feelings

Tags: [#stress-management](#) [#emotional-intelligence](#)

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Dialogue

We've heard the advice, don't compare yourself to others.

In one study, more than 75 percent of people reported that they had recently assessed their self-worth by comparing themselves to others.

Myth: the less you compare yourself to others, the better.

Counterintuitively, science shows that what makes us miserable isn't comparison itself; it's when we don't compare ourselves to others enough.

We tend to compare our weaknesses to other people's strengths.

When comparison sends you down a dark spiral, it's because you're not comparing yourself enough.

Envy and the distinction between malicious envy and benign envy.

Helpful questions to move from malicious to benign:

- *"I'm inspired by __. Maybe I can learn from them, or ask them to be my mentor."
- "I haven't done what they've done . . . yet."
- "Every person is on their own journey. I'm grateful for mine."
- "If my favorite role models stopped what they were doing, I wouldn't be able to enjoy their incredible work."

Piece together the footage that was cut from someone else's highlight reel.

On bad days, you're more likely to marinate in envy. At those times, avoid upward comparisons. How to do this?

Social media -- how do you handle?

Compare the nitty gritty.

Compare present you against past you.

What have you changed your mind on?

Quotes

Highlight [page 26]: Anxiety is general unease because of an uncertain outcome. We feel anxious when we aren't sure how larger forces will interfere with our lives. • Fear is when we believe that something specific will happen (like tripping over your words during an important presentation, or a loved one dying).

Highlight [page 34]: If your anxiety in the face of uncertainty is so intense that sitting with it sounds unbearable, remember this: strong emotions—those that cause a physical sensation in your body—last about ninety seconds. We know that the urge to do something (anything!) when you're in peak panic mode can feel overpowering. The best advice we have is to force yourself to pause and just sit there. Tell yourself, "This will pass." Count to ninety. Or, if that sounds like too much, just count to five. Do it once and you'll likely find you can do it again.

Highlight [page 56]: We're guessing you've found yourself in similar spirals. Relentlessly pitting ourselves against others can make us resentful, anxious, and impulsive (true story: people are more likely to go bankrupt after their neighbor wins the lotto).² Comparison and envy also make us feel ashamed; "Envy is an ugly two-headed monster," says psychology professor Dr. Christine Harris. "One head wants what someone else has. The other head chews on the first for having these negative feelings."^{*}

Highlight [page 58]: To put it simply: Avoiding social media for a while can be useful (we'll talk about this more later in the chapter), but it doesn't mean your days of evaluating yourself against others are over.

Highlight [page 61]: Too often, we draw comparisons that torpedo our self-esteem. But chances are, when comparison sends you down a dark spiral, it's because you're not comparing yourself enough. You watch a ridiculously talented pianist breeze through Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 3, tell yourself, "I'm so bad at piano," and stop there. You don't think about the fact that that pianist spends every day practicing for hours and has been playing since he was a preschooler. Or you focus only on how long it took you to get a bachelor's degree, without giving yourself credit for what you achieved. Research shows that we tend to compare our weaknesses to other people's

Highlight [page 62]: COMPARISON | 41 strengths. When you compare more comprehensively, things start to feel more attainable. Priscilla needed to compare herself more to understand that she had overcome many more financial hardships than her peers had had to face. When she started to read statistics about how few people with parents who haven't gone to college earn a bachelor's degree, she began to feel proud of herself. "That helped me realize that it didn't matter how long it took me. I did it." A family friend also reminded her that life has one deadline: when you die. Every other

marker or timeline is something you set up for yourself. Realizing she had accomplished her goal helped Priscilla start to overcome her self-doubt.

Highlight [page 66]: Self-awareness helps you turn your feelings into something useful. The next time envy rears its head, explore what it's telling you. Ask yourself: • What do they have that makes me feel less than? • What void do I believe having it would fill? • Do I really want what they have? • If yes, how much, and is it worth taking action to try to get it for myself?

Highlight [page 68]: To shift your thinking from malicious to benign envy, try these phrases we heard from reader Aya: "I'm inspired by __. Maybe I can learn from them, or ask them to be my mentor."

Highlight [page 71]: In your more miserable moments, we recommend avoiding anything that is especially likely to trigger something called upward comparison, when you obsessively compare yourself to people you deem to be "above" you in some way. "When I go on Instagram, it's like socializing every second with everyone who's designed to make me feel the worst about myself," shared actress Cazzie David in an interview. "My exes' new girlfriends, people who have the career I want, Kylie Jenner."

Highlight [page 76]: A simple way to make this type of self-comparison a habit is to take a few minutes at the end of each month to reflect on these prompts: • What have I learned over the past few weeks? • What was difficult, and how would I approach it differently given what I know now? • What progress did I make?

References