



We know ourselves from the inside. Everyone else, mostly from the outside. Perhaps that explains more than we think.

I came across a sentence recently that stopped me for a second: we compare everyone else's outside world to our inner world.

It sounds almost too simple. And yet, once you really think about it, it explains sooooo much.

We know every strange thought we have at 2 a.m. We know the conversations we replay three days later, the things we are insecure about for absolutely no logical reason, the ambitions we haven't quite figured out how to reach, the relationships we question, the decisions we postpone, the days when we feel brilliant and the days

when getting dressed feels suspiciously ambitious. We know every unfinished corner of ourselves.

Other people, meanwhile, arrive already kind of edited: We meet them at dinner when they are dressed, composed and telling us about the promotion - not necessarily the Sunday afternoon they spent wondering whether they had chosen the wrong career entirely. We see the holiday photo, not the argument in the hotel room twenty minutes before it was taken. We see the new apartment, the engagement, the beautiful skin, the successful launch, the effortlessly cool life in some sun-drenched city. We rarely see the uncertainty living quietly beside all of it.

And then we do something rather unfair: We take their visible life and compare it with our invisible one.

The information is completely unequal

There is an intimacy to knowing yourself that you will never have with another person. And that's beautiful. You know your contradictions. Your less flattering impulses. The jealousy you don't particularly enjoy admitting to. The mornings when you wake up confident and the afternoons when one minor inconvenience suddenly has you reconsidering your entire existence.

You know the gap between who you are and who you imagine you should already be.

With everyone else, we work with significantly less material: even the people we love deeply still choose what they tell us. Not necessarily because they are hiding anything. It is simply impossible to narrate an entire inner life. Most of us don't announce over coffee that we spent forty-five minutes comparing ourselves to someone on Instagram before arriving. We say, Hi, how are you? and then, almost automatically, Good.

There is an enormous imbalance of information here. We know ourselves in director's-cut format. Everyone else gets the beautifully edited theatrical release. No wonder we sometimes come out of the comparison badly.

Everyone looks more certain from a distance

I notice this particularly in environments where people are accomplished, polished and very good at appearing as if they know exactly what they are doing. From the outside, confidence can look almost architectural. Someone has the right job, the right clothes, the right relationship, the right apartment, the right contacts. Their life seems to have a shape yours hasn't quite acquired yet. Then you speak to them properly. And often, somewhere between the second glass of wine and dessert, the edges begin to appear. The person with the career you envy is thinking about leaving it. The friend whose relationship always looked perfect has been questioning it for months. Someone you assumed had endless confidence quietly admits they feel like an impostor half the time. Not because everyone is secretly miserable. I don't believe that either.

The point is much less dramatic: **everyone is human.**

People can be successful and insecure. Loved and lonely. Beautiful and uncomfortable in their own skin. Certain about one part of their life and completely lost in another. Someone can be living something you desperately want and still be struggling with something you know nothing about. Both things can be true at once. We just kind of tend to forget the second part when looking from the outside.

Maybe being a little weird is the most normal thing about us

Another part of the thought stayed with me: we see our own flaws in extraordinary detail and because we don't see everybody else's with the same clarity, we start

believing ours are somehow unusual. Maybe everyone else is calmer. More disciplined. Less needy. Less complicated. More certain. More emotionally evolved. Ha! A lovely theory. Almost certainly incorrect.

I think there is something strangely comforting about remembering that everybody has their own peculiar collection of fears, habits, sensitivities and irrational thoughts. Not in a we're all a mess kind of way - although some Mondays certainly make a strong case - but simply because imperfection is not an exception to being human. It is part of the arrangement.

The things we sometimes spend so much energy trying to hide are often the very things everyone else is quietly managing too. Their version just looks different.

Social media didn't create comparison. It perfected the conditions for it.

Of course, none of this is entirely new. Humans compared themselves long before there were Instagram stories.

But we have never had this much access to other people's visible lives. Before breakfast, I can theoretically know that someone is running along Bondi Beach, someone else just launched a company, another person is wearing vintage Alaïa somewhere in Paris and a fourth appears to have achieved inner peace through Pilates and a very expensive-looking green juice.

Meanwhile I am standing in my kitchen wondering why I opened the fridge. It would almost be funny if our brains were better at remembering that these are fragments. Because they are.

A photograph tells you that somebody had a beautiful moment. It does not tell you they have a beautiful life every second of every day. A career announcement tells you

somebody achieved something. It doesn't tell you what they sacrificed for it, whether they enjoy it or whether they cried in the bathroom two weeks earlier.

The mistake isn't enjoying other people's lives. I love seeing beautiful things, interesting places, people doing extraordinary work. Inspiration is one of the best things about being connected and I love that part.

The problem begins when observation quietly turns into evidence against ourselves.

She has figured it out. I haven't. He is further ahead. I should be there by now. And suddenly someone else's five-second glimpse becomes a verdict on our entire life...

What if we stopped using other people as proof?

Maybe the answer isn't to stop comparing ourselves entirely. That feels about as realistic as deciding never to check our phones again. Perhaps it is simply to become more suspicious of the comparison. To remember the missing information.

When someone's career makes yours feel inadequate, you don't know what their Monday morning feels like. When somebody's relationship makes you question your own life, you haven't been inside their private conversations. When someone's confidence makes you feel painfully self-conscious, you don't know what happens in their head when the room goes quiet.

And perhaps they are looking at something in your life with exactly the same misunderstanding. There is a strange possibility that while we are sitting somewhere thinking everyone else has figured out how to be a person, they are doing the same thing. Which makes the whole exercise slightly absurd.

Maybe we don't need to become less ambitious, less inspired or less interested in other people's lives. We just need to stop treating the outside of somebody else's life as more truthful than the inside of our own. Our inner world will always look messier because we are standing in the middle of it. We see the boxes that haven't been unpacked yet. Everyone else just sees the windows.

And maybe that is worth remembering the next time somebody else's life starts looking suspiciously perfect. They are figuring it out too. Just from the outside, you can't always tell.

