

The Big 3

Social Comparison · Catastrophizing · Overthinking (a.k.a. Rumination)

Your brain is running old operating software. Worse than Windows Vista, and slightly less stable than your uncle at Thanksgiving. It was built to keep a hairy little primate alive on a savanna, not to scroll Instagram at 11:47 p.m. wondering why Kevin from high school has a boat. The three big traps we're going after today, **comparing**, **catastrophizing**, and **overthinking**, are not signs that something is wrong with you. They're signs that your ancient survival wiring is doing its job a little too well in a world it was never designed for. Good news: once you know how the traps work, you can outsmart them. Let's go.

BIG 3, INCOMING

BIOLOGY + FIXES

WRITE-IN SPACE

1

SOCIAL COMPARISON

Your brain's built-in ranking algorithm. It's working. That's the problem.

THE BIOLOGY (a.k.a. why this happens): For 200,000 years, being kicked out of the tribe meant becoming a saber-tooth snack by lunchtime. So your brain evolved a hyper-sensitive status radar that never sleeps. It's constantly scanning the room, the feed, and the parking lot asking, "Am I above? Below? Safe? Included?" When you're winning, you get a little dopamine hit. When you're losing, cortisol shows up, your shoulders creep toward your ears, and your mood tanks. Now aim that ancient, life-or-death radar at 500 curated highlight reels a day, at people you barely know, doing things you'd never actually want to do, and voilà, you feel small for no good reason. Your brain isn't broken. It's just still living in 8,000 B.C., trying to keep you in the tribe.

PATTERN INTERRUPT › "There is always a bigger boat."

Someone will always have more. That's not a bug, it's math. Say the phrase out loud, then get back to rowing your own dang boat. Bonus move: for every scroll-envy moment, list ONE thing you already have that a younger version of you would have begged for. Gratitude is comparison's kryptonite.

WHAT WERE THE THOUGHTS BEHIND THIS TRAP?

Who were you comparing yourself to? What did you tell yourself? What did you feel in your body?

2 CATASTROPHIZING

One weird email becomes "I'm going to die alone in a van." Your brain, ladies and gentlemen.

THE BIOLOGY: Meet your amygdala, the tiny almond-shaped drama queen that runs threat detection in your head. Your amygdala is wired for FALSE POSITIVES on purpose, because evolution did the math a long time ago. On the savanna, mistaking a stick for a poisonous snake cost you nothing except a little embarrassment. Mistaking a poisonous snake for a stick cost you your life. So your brain would rather freak out 100 times over nothing than miss one real danger even once. Very helpful in 8,000 B.C. when the consequences were fangs and venom. Less helpful in 2026 when your boss types "can we talk?" and you go to DEFCON Level 5, start polishing up your resume, and scan your LinkedIn profile because you're definitely getting fired. Hint: you're not. You're just watching an ancient survival system misfire in real time.

PATTERN INTERRUPT › Run the THREE-Scenario Play

1. WORST CASE. What is the absolute worst thing that could happen?
2. BEST CASE. What is the shockingly great version you're forgetting to imagine?
3. MOST LIKELY. What actually tends to happen in situations like this? Live here. Plan from here.

Your amygdala only shows you #1. Your job is to force it to show you all three.

WHAT WERE THE THOUGHTS BEHIND THIS TRAP?

Worst case you feared? Best case you ignored? Most likely case you can actually plan for?

3 OVERTHINKING (RUMINATION)

Your brain, chewing the same thought like a dog on a sock. For six hours.

THE BIOLOGY: When you're stuck in a mental loop, your brain's idle-mode circuitry takes the wheel and starts replaying every awkward thing you said since 2007. It feels productive, like you're PROBLEM-SOLVING, but you're not. You're just marinating in cortisol on a treadmill. Rumination has been shown to physically shrink parts of the brain that manage memory and mood, while boosting anxiety and sleep problems. Here's the punch line worth tattooing on your forearm: thinking about it MORE is not the same as thinking about it BETTER. At some point, more thinking IS the problem.

PATTERN INTERRUPT › CATCH IT. SAY STOP. DISTRACT.

Catch yourself in the loop. That noticing is the whole ballgame. Say "STOP" out loud. Yes, out loud. Your dog will forgive you. Then DISTRACT with a body-based reset: 10 pushups, a cold splash of water on the face, a walk around the block, a call to a friend, load the dishwasher, anything that moves the body. Move the body, and you move the brain out of the loop.

WHAT WERE THE THOUGHTS BEHIND THIS TRAP?

What loop were you stuck in? What did you say to break it? What distraction actually worked?

RAPPIN' IT UP, YO:

You can't delete The Big 3, but you CAN out-name them, out-notice them, and out-move them. Never Tony, please.