

The One Upper  
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There's a phrase I hear from time to time called 'one upping'. You know it. When you're proudly telling the story of finishing your first half marathon in just over two hours and the person you're telling it to says "Oh yeah, that was my goal for the first few races I ran too, but now I'm way under a one forty five" Great. Thank you so much for that. Excuse me while I eat this entire pizza.

Or when you tell a story of a particularly difficult struggle you've endured. "My parent died, then I lost my job and then I told the entire country a monster sexually assaulted me but I wasn't brave enough to say anything until now then hundreds of men lashed out at me and told me I deserved it and then I lost another job and now a family member is having a health scare" and the person you're telling it to says "Oh I just lost someone I really care about too and my car died". Ok. Thank you. Excuse me while I drink this entire bottle of wine.

We roll our eyes when people say "I just don't know what to say". We hate it when they say "Oh that happened to me too, but even worse". And we entirely loathe when they say "It's going to be fine, I promise." Is it? Is it really? How exactly do you know that? Excuse me while I lay here staring at the ceiling for the next hour. Maybe two.

But what if we're looking at this entirely the wrong way? Maybe when people are one upping us it isn't even a conscious decision. Maybe their subconscious knows better. Maybe the 'real them' sees that the 'real you' desperately needs to know... you're not alone. "So fuck it", says the real them. Tell her she's not alone. She needs to know that. Even if she's rolling her eyes. Even if it comes out sounding like I'm one upping her pain, she needs to know that the person standing in front of her experienced a similar thing. Even if it wasn't exactly the same situation.

I don't know what it's like to be raped, but I know what it feels like to be rendered helpless from a sexual assault. To actually question who I am at my core and wonder if I'll ever be able to right it again. I know what it feels like to be full of shame. I don't know what racial injustice feels like. But I know what it's like to speak my truth and have a man say "sounds like you've been talking to your little girlfriends lately". I know what it's like to have to swallow that in order to keep my job. I know what pure rage feels like. I don't know what it's like to climb Mount Everest, but I know what it's like to round the bend in a half marathon with burning lungs from a 15 degree morning, see the finish line and instantly feel the urge to vomit and poop at the same time. I know what a screaming body feels like. I don't know what it's like to be in a physically abusive relationship, but I know what it's like to feel truly unsafe. To have the hair on my arms stand up just by the way someone says "good morning", knowing in my bones that anything could happen that day. I know that terror. I don't know what it's like to have a loved one hanging by a string of hope to life but I know what it feels like to walk home from school knowing one of these days I'd find my dad had finally done it. I know what daily panic is. I don't know what being punched in the face feels like but I know what it's like to have a boy stand in front of a group of kids and say to me "no one wants a fat cow like you around, there's no room". I know what that heartbreak feels like. I don't know what it feels like to hold my child in my arms and have my heart explode, but I know what it's like to read stories to my niece and hear her laugh with her entire body and know she got that from me. I know what pure love feels like.

Those are 'just feelings' right? And don't we all have those feelings? Are mine more important than yours? Is my pain bigger than yours because I've lost a parent too soon but you've lost your best friend? Is my love less than yours because you've loved your children and I've merely loved my entire family? Maybe. But maybe not.

The end result of any life experience is just a feeling. But aren't feelings absolutely everything? At the end of the day when we close our eyes and all that's there is who we truly are... we're all left with our feelings aren't we? The pain, the love, the power, the helplessness, the lust, the guilt, the shame, the trust, the rage, the grief, the elation, the confusion, the pride, the panic or the peace that day brought us. Just varying degrees of it. And wouldn't it be so much better to know the person standing across from you had the exact same feeling last night when they laid in bed left with their utter loneliness?

So maybe we keep one upping each other. Then we'd all know how truly not alone we are. We all have the same feelings. Maybe if we tell the person standing in front of us, then the person overhearing our conversation will have the courage to tell the person standing in front of them and the person in front of them and the person in front of them. Maybe. Just maybe... one upping is simply another way to say... "Me too, love. Me the hell too."