

I finished watching the first season of *Nine Perfect Strangers* on Hulu yesterday and immediately wanted to write a review comparing it to *The White Lotus*.

This is mainly because I've seen tons of people compare the two shows on social media, some going so far as to reject *Nine Perfect Strangers* entirely. I'd already read many of these criticisms before starting the new wellness show, so I approached with the hope of proving those critics wrong. After all, *Nine Perfect Strangers* is based on a book that hit the shelves three years before *The White Lotus* aired, and its premise suggested a focus on wellness themes more so than the socioeconomic commentaries *The White Lotus* makes.

Once I finished the show, I knew I wanted to approach my review from two angles: the questions and ideas the shows raise, and their plots and cinematography styles.

I think both shows do an excellent job in their commentary on the money people spend working toward wellness. Their characters represent a specific archetype—the affluent yet spiritually restless individual. But *The White Lotus* definitely explores this theme further than *Nine Perfect Strangers*. Characters like The Ratliffs in season 3 represent the rich and spiritually conflicted archetype perfectly, and their individual storylines dive into their performativity and privilege against the backdrop of 'betterness.'

*Nine Perfect Strangers*, on the other hand, primarily introduces the idea of money as a segue into the rising divide between the healthcare system and the wellness industry. It's no secret that the wellness industry, which is valued at nearly 4 trillion dollars as of 2022, appeals to those looking for solutions beyond the scope of American healthcare. There's a scene in *Nine Perfect Strangers* where the character Lars says, "People are mis-dosed, misdiagnosed all the time. The opioids that turned Tony into an addict were prescribed by a doctor. The argument could be made that it's the real doctors who are killing us."

I thought this scene was brilliant because it highlights the exact argument that so many of those entrenched within wellness make. There's a major survivorship bias here—those who are helped by alternative medicine often become vocal advocates, while those for whom it did nothing may simply never talk about it. Thus, the only opinions you'll hear of those from the wellness industry are positive. On the other hand, the American healthcare system is both critiqued and praised.

While both shows investigate the processes of grief, enlightenment, and self-transformation, they go about these investigations in wildly different ways. *The White Lotus* aims to make viewers hate the characters for these journeys, while *Nine Perfect Strangers* makes us pity them. I think this is because the latter focuses on the characters' backstories and traumas, while the former merely focuses on how wealthy they are. Socioeconomic characteristics, I believe, are at the center of what make *The White Lotus* characters so interesting.

As for the plots and cinematography, the shows are drastically different. I'm no movie critic by any means, and I have little to no experience in film analysis. But I did notice *Nine Perfect Strangers* utilizes the 'fishbowl' lens far more than *The White Lotus*. This makes sense, considering the former is a show about psychedelic use, and wants us to place ourselves in the

scenes alongside the characters. *Nine Perfect Strangers* also follows characters along spiritual journeys more than *The White Lotus*, which in its latest season is more vacation-oriented.

Do both shows have mystery and wellness? Absolutely. But they treat those elements with entirely different intentions. *The White Lotus* uses mystery as a tool for social critique. It's less about resolution and more about exposing the absurdity of privilege. *Nine Perfect Strangers*, meanwhile, leans into mystery to propel healing arcs and character transformation. While one show wants to leave you unsettled and suspicious, the other ultimately wants you to believe in the possibility of change, no matter how ethically ambiguous the process is.

And on that last note, I'd suggest reading [this review](#) by Andrew Penn of Psychology Today. If you're interested in the show's idea that psychedelics and emotional distress have the potential to cause enlightenment and revelation, this review is a definite read.