

The Key to Escaping the Couple-Envy Trap

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As a couples therapist, I often hear clients compare their romantic relationship with those of their friends or co-workers. Some do it to express satisfaction with their own partner. But more often, they wonder if they'd be happier with someone more attractive, more sensitive, funnier, smarter, or richer than the person they're committed to. Embedded in their ponderings are a host of other questions: *Am I missing out? Is my romantic life all that it could be? Am I?*

To compare is human. But this idealization of other couples elides how periods of boredom, burden, or dissatisfaction in a partnership are more expectable than worrisome. What distinguishes happy couples from unhappy ones isn't everyday conflict per se, but how each side thinks and communicates about it. Indeed, the University of Washington psychology professor emeritus John Gottman [found](#) that 69 percent of the problems among the married couples he's studied are ultimately never resolved. He, as well as other researchers, has observed that clashes commonly occur over [communication](#), [money](#), [parenting](#), or the division of [housework](#).

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