

2004 Dr. FUN's Stupid Cupid Awards

These mass media portrayals illustrate the 12 media myths and stereotypes of my **Dr. FUN's Mass Media Love Quiz**©. It's OK to enjoy them, but make sure you're aware of the unhealthy models they promote. For each myth, see the comparable **Dr. Galician's Prescription**™ in the Realistic Romance Awards listing.

Dr. FUN's Stupidest Cupid Award "Just Married"

As evidenced by the number of nominations, this mean-spirited movie (a top-grosser in more ways than one!) promoted nearly all 12 harmful myths — from the notion that your perfect partner is pre-destined and nobody can separate you to the dangerous belief that bickering and fighting mean that you're really passionate about each other. However, despite totally different values, Aston Kutcher and Brittany Murphy reunite for a "happy" ending.

Myth No. 1: Your perfect partner is cosmically predestined, so nothing/nobody can ultimately separate you.

Awardee: "Sleepless in Seattle"

The only realistic line in this movie is Rosie O'Donnell's (to Meg Ryan): "You want to be in love in a movie." Of course, *that* movie is the equally absurd sentimentalized "soul mates" classic, "An Affair to Remember," which is actually part of the plot of this very tired Meg Ryan-Tom Hanks vehicle. Insisting Tom is "the one," Meg breaks her engagement to pursue this "fated" relationship, which is based on nothing but Tom's radio voice. Wake me when it's over!

Myth No. 2: There's such a thing as "love at first sight."

Awardee: Pop song "Love At First Sight" (Kylie Minogue)

The title (repeated in the chorus) says it all — though a more apt description would be "lust" at first sight. The lyrics show the physiological and emotional pull of physical attraction, which is only one aspect of love: "And everything went from wrong to right, and the stars came out and filled up the sky...."

Myth No. 3: Your true soul mate should know what you're thinking or feeling (without your having to tell).

Awardee: Pop song "When You Say Nothing At All" (various recordings: Alison Kraus; Ronan Keating; Boyzone)

As we get to know our partners, we often develop a comfortable shorthand, but expecting the kind of mind-reading promoted by this song -- whose chorus argues, "You say it best when you say nothing at all." -- usually results in misunderstanding and suggests a lack of genuine intimacy.

Myth No. 4: If your partner is truly meant for you, sex is easy and wonderful.

Awardee: “Titanic”

These two star-crossed lovers are practically strangers, but their somewhat gratuitous sex scene in the back seat of a car in the ship’s hold is mythic (with requisite formula fog), graphically solidifying the idea that they’re meant for each other.

Myth No. 5: To attract and keep a man, a woman should look like a model or a centerfold.

Awardee: (Tie) Magazines and music videos; NBC-TV “reality” show “Average Joe”

The photos and headlines alone on covers of magazines like *Playboy*, *Maxim*, *Cosmo*, and even *Seventeen* are enough to make women without surgical enhancements and digital dimensions feel less than desirable and to make men expect something that doesn’t exist, while too many music videos encourage adolescent fantasies that are insulting to men as well as demeaning to women. And now men have to meet a similar standard: The first season’s winner on “Average Joe” (an “unscripted relationship drama,” according to its website) wasn’t one of the “average Joes” but rather a handsome and hunky ringer.

Myth No. 6: The man should not be shorter, weaker, younger, poorer, or less successful than the woman.

Awardee: “Something’s Gotta Give”

While it’s great (and rare) to see a 57-year-old woman as a romantic lead, Diane Keaton is *not* the same age as Jack Nicholson, who is 9 years her senior – though the movie is promoted as if she were. And why does she choose this womanizing, Viagra-dependent, commitment-phobic character over the more stable and loyal (and attractive) Keanu Reeves, whom she dumps rather mercilessly the minute the older man re-appears? Oh, yes: The soul mate thing (see Myth No. 1).

Myth No. 7: The love of a good and faithful true woman can change a man from a “beast” into a “prince.”

Awardee: “Beauty and the Beast”

This “tale as old as time” is the archetype of dysfunctional codependency that can lead to emotional and physical abuse. While we can and should support those attempting to change themselves, “good” women (and men) can’t be expected to magically transform the bad behavior of others. Even though parents feel they can “trust Disney,” they’d be wise to evaluate the messages in these fantasies and debrief their children, who should be warned that Belle’s attempts to reform her captor would be dangerous in real life. (This myth is better understood as metaphor about our own good side overcoming our own bad side!)

Myth No. 8: Bickering and fighting a lot mean that a man and a woman really love each other passionately.

Awardee: CBS-TV sitcom “Everybody Loves Raymond”

What are the people in this family doing together? Their non-stop bickering, blaming, and name-calling – over the pettiest of issues – shows that they don’t respect or even care for each other, despite their unmotivated making up. And why are we laughing at the scene of these relational accidents?

Myth No. 9: All you really need is love, so it doesn’t matter if you and your lover have very different values.

Awardee: “Two Weeks Notice”

In the final moments of this “opposites attracts” screwball comedy (reminiscent of a bickering and fighting Cary Grant-Rosalind Russell farce), Sandra Bullock’s compulsive, humanitarian attorney/social activist discovers that she’d be happy with Hugh Grant’s irresponsible, selfish playboy, whose sudden “transformation” is nice but not believable.

Myth No. 10: The right mate “completes you” – filling your needs and making your dreams come true.

Awardee: “Cinderella”

Like Snow White and Sleeping Beauty and all the fairy-tale “heroines” descended from this archetype, she can’t escape her environment without being rescued by a prince she doesn’t even know. What an intolerable burden on these poor men to say nothing of the total abrogation of responsibility by the women!

Myth No. 11: In real life, actors and actresses are often very much like the romantic characters they portray.

Awardee: Irrational fans of Ben Affleck and Jennifer Lopez who confused these stars’ reel lives with their real lives (and irrational newspaper editors who confused “The Breakup of ‘Benifer”” with Real Breaking News)

Many fans become disappointed when their superstar idols resemble fallible human beings. And, reinforcing the mythology, news editors eagerly seeking these readers and viewers covered the couple’s breakup not only with entertainment features but also alongside serious national news.

Myth No. 12: Since mass media portrayals of romance aren’t “real,” they don’t really affect you.

Awardee: Media critics who describe mythic and stereotypic portrayals as “completely harmless.”

Although we can still enjoy mythic portrayals of sex, love, and romance in the mass media, research shows they can lead to harmful unrealistic expectations. To label all these portrayals as completely harmless simply because they’re fluffy and vacuous is irresponsible.

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