

**“Realistic Romance Guru” Dr. Mary-Lou Galician
Announces Winners of her
*Dr. FUN!’s Stupid Cupid & Realistic Romance® Awards
for Mass Media Portrayals of Sex, Love, & Romance***

**Two Vastly Different Reese Witherspoon Vehicles Top Both Lists:
“Sweet Home Alabama” Gets Overall Stupidest Cupid Award,
while “Legally Blonde” Is Honored with Realistic Romance® Grand Prize**

February 9, 2003 — Valentine’s Day, America’s favorite celebration of love and romance, is at hand and Arizona State University media researcher Dr. Mary-Lou Galician has inaugurated her **Stupid Cupid & Realistic Romance® Awards for Mass Media Portrayals of Sex, Love, & Romance**.

Galician, head of the Media Analysis and Criticism concentration in the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication at ASU, is a media literacy advocate. She also is an expert on the influence of mass media portrayals on real-life relationships as well as the author of *Sex, Love, & Romance in the Mass Media: Analysis & Criticism of Unrealistic Portrayals & Their Influence*.

The Stupid Cupid Awards are intended to draw attention to media examples that Galician says people should never use as models for their own lives. Each Stupid Cupid “winner” reinforces one or more of the 12 mass media myths and stereotypes of sex, love, and romance in Galician’s *Dr. FUN!’s Mass Media Love Quiz* (online at www.asu.edu/cronkite/faculty/galician/drfun/), a 12-item questionnaire that assesses unrealistic expectations. Each item in the quiz relates to one of the dozen myths that Galician’s research has identified as affecting American’s perceptions of romance.

The Realistic Romance Awards honor the rarer portrayals that embody one or more of *Dr. Galician’s Prescriptions for Getting Real About Romance* — corresponding “antidotes” to the 12 myths and stereotypes in the quiz.

“Ironically, two vastly different Reese Witherspoon vehicles topped the two opposing awards lists,” Galician said. The movie “*Legally Blonde*” earned the Realistic Romance Grand Prize for healthiest portrayal, while “*Sweet Home Alabama*” received the Overall Stupidest Cupid from Galician.

“*Sweet Home Alabama*’ deserves the Stupidest Cupid because the mean-spirited movie promoted just about every myth in my *Mass Media Love Quiz* — 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,” Galician said.

“Although ‘*Legally Blonde*’ has some totally unrealistic college and courtroom aspects, it offers a good model of Realistic Romance,” Galician explained, “because the Valley Girl in this fantasy transforms herself into a top Harvard Law School student, turns enemies into friends, and empowers a variety of other people along the way.

“Wisely dumping her shallow earlier crush whose values are clearly inferior to hers, she ultimately and rewardingly partners with a man who shares her idealism and social activism,” Galician added. “He’s a lawyer, too, and he’s her friend. These two respect and honor each other.”

Galician’s “Stupid Cupid” designations for the 12 individual myths include popular movies *Serendipity*, *Romeo & Juliet*, *The Princess Bride*, *Entrapment*, *As Good As It Gets*, *The Mexican*, *Pretty Woman*, *Maid in Manhattan*, *Jerry McGuire*; television soap operas; *Playboy*, *Maxim*, *Cosmo*, and *Seventeen*, and “media critics who describe mythic and stereotypic portrayals as ‘completely harmless’.”

Those honored with the more exclusive Realistic Romance Awards for rarer healthier portrayals include *CastAway*, *While You Were Sleeping*, *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, *28 Days*, TV’s *Life with Bonnie* and *Mad About You*, *Newsweek*’s December 9 (2002) cover story on teen abstinence, and Alanis Morissette’s music video, *Precious Illusions*.

“Unfortunately, Stupid Cupid nominees abound in the media,” Galician explains, “but it’s much more difficult to find examples of healthy models of sex, love, and romance that are entertaining and appealing.”

Galician’s research of what she calls “The Romanticization of Love in the Mass Media” examines how mass media portrayals of sex, love, and romance affect nearly everyone — men and women, young children and seniors, singles and couples — even though we might not realize it.

“People in my studies with unrealistic expectations are less satisfied in their own romantic relationships,” says Galician, “and many of these unrealistic expectations come from media we enjoy without fully considering how they influence us at a subconscious level.”

Galician insists that her work “is *not* about censorship or avoiding media. It’s all about being a wise media consumer, about using the media instead of the letting media use you, and about ‘getting real about romance’ to be more successful and happier.”

She notes, “It’s important to take time to consider how mass media portrayals at the least reinforce — if not create — unrealistic expectations that most of us can’t dismiss completely. First we have to understand where they come from. Then we must learn how to analyze and critique them and, most important, how to reframe them more constructively.”

With her husband, Dr. David Natharius, an expert in gender communication and conflict resolution, she conducts Realistic Romance® Workshops and Seminars.

Galician's book offers her seven-step system for analyzing and criticizing unrealistic portrayals. She even includes suggestions about how parents should debrief their children after they view cartoon classics like "*Beauty and the Beast*" and "*Lady and the Tramp*," which are seemingly harmless but filled with myths and stereotypes.

For this inaugural year of the Awards that Galician promises will be an annual Valentine Week event, she expanded the timeframe beyond 2002 media portrayals, and she chose the winners primarily from her own nominations and from those suggested by her students and presentation audience members.

"Dis-honorable mentions" as well as honorable mentions were included. The complete listing of all awards with their citations is on her website.

Next year, the public will be able to participate in the voting — so Galician invites mass media consumers to begin thinking now and throughout the year about their choices for next year's awards.

"We can still enjoy the 'escape' that unrealistic romantic media portrayals offer us," Galician says, "but it's not wise to use them — or media celebrities — as models in our real lives.

"It's much healthier and smarter to make yourself the hero or heroine of your own true love story."

Her ultimate advice: "Get real!"

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For more information about Galician's *Dr. FUN!'s Stupid Cupid & Realistic Romance® Awards* or to arrange a print or broadcast interview with "Dr. FUN!" (who IS indeed a very FUN interview!), contact Dr. Mary-Lou Galician at DrFUN@asu.edu or 480-965-5066.

*A complete listing of Dr. FUN!'s Stupid Cupid & Realistic Romance® Awards
for Mass Media Portrayals of Sex, Love, & Romance
(including "dis-honorable" and honorable mention awards)
— with a citation that explain why each award was made —
appears on Dr. Galician's web site*

www.asu.edu/cronkite/faculty/galician/drfun/

You can take her *Dr. FUN!'s Mass Media Love Quiz©* online on her website,
where you will also find
her *Dr. Galician's Prescriptions for Getting Real About Romance*.