



Sex, Love, and Romance in the Mass Media: Analysis and Criticism of Unrealistic Portrayals and Their Influence

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Your perfect partner is cosmically predestined. There's such a thing as "love at first sight." If your partner is meant for you, sex is easy and wonderful. These True or False questions are included in [Dr. FUN's Mass Media Love Quiz](#) which appears at the beginning of Mary-Lou Galician's textbook, *Sex, Love, and Romance in the Mass Media: Analysis and Criticism of Unrealistic Portrayals and Their Influence* (ix).

The statements presented in the quiz are myths about sex, love and romance perpetuated by the media. These myths, Galician contends, can lead to unrealistic expectations that can make us dissatisfied with the reality of our lives. The purpose of the book, then, is to help students "identify, illustrate, deconstruct, evaluate, and reframe the mass media's mythic and stereotypic portrayals of sex, love, and romance" (6).

Part I of the book is intended to build a foundation for analysis and criticism of mass media's portrayal of sex, love and romance. Chapter One examines definitions of love, sex, and romance. For each term she lists synonyms from her word processing program's *Thesaurus* and definitions provided by the *American Heritage Electronic Dictionary*. Chapter One also briefly covers the work Harold Lasswell and Marshall McLuhan.

Chapter Two looks at myths and stereotypes of sex, love and romance. Here Galician considers classical mythology of the ancient Greeks, the works of Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, and evolutionary psychologist David M. Buss. The chapter then defines stereotyping, again relying on dictionary definitions.

While Chapter Two deals with "unrealistic" models of love, Chapter Three provides more "realistic" models of "appropriate coupleship" (53). Here the reader will find [Dr. Galician's Prescriptions for Getting Real About Romance](#) meant to "dis-illusion" the

student's false ideas of love and romance. She provides several models of "realistic" love from psychologists and self-help authors such as Judith Sills (1984) and John Gottman (1994; 1999).

Chapter Four focuses on the storytelling devices of the mass media that frame constructions of sex, love, and romance. Here, Galician emphasizes that the mass media are selling not just products or services, but also particular viewpoints. This leads to Chapter Five, where she covers the mass media's influence on socialization focusing on the work of Albert Bandura and George Gerbner.

Chapter Six details a seven-step "dis-illusioning" process that includes 1) Finding a mediated portrayal of sex, love, and romance that is a manifestation of one of the myths from the [Quiz](#) 2) Describing the manifestation, 3) Analyzing what stereotypes or myths underlie the portrayal, 4) Evaluating the "unrealistic" portrayal, 5) Reconstructing a more "realistic" portrayal, 6) Considering the impact the analysis had on the student personally, and 7) Publishing or broadcasting the student's insights.

Part II of the text centers on the applications of the foundations provided in Part I. Each chapter in this section analyzes one of the 12 myths found in [Dr. FUN's Mass Media Love Quiz](#) considering specific media manifestations of "unrealistic" portrayals in the media. To "dis-illusion" these myths, she follows the "Seven-Step Dis-Illusioning Directions" found in Chapter Six. At the end of each chapter, Galician provides a worksheet serving as a checklist so that students can be sure to have included everything to begin a formal analysis. She also provides a sample completed worksheet and formal analysis and criticism in the Appendix.

While the primary strength of the text is its accessibility, utilizing the language and writings of self-help books, instructors may find it severely limited. First, Galician acknowledges that her perspective centers on heterosexual relationships in Western culture. Because she centers only on Western male-female relationships, she reestablishes heterosexuality and Western values as the "norm." Second, she identifies herself as a "personist" rather than a feminist and makes it clear that she does not tolerate "male-bashing" (7). This approach serves to deny the role of patriarchy in the construction of gender and romance in the media. Finally, Galician fails to mention the influence race and class can have upon media portrayals of love and sex. As a result, issues of social power in the production, reproduction and reception of such images are overlooked.

While the textbook is intended for use in a Media and Society course, it may be more useful to consider Galician's book as an artifact of contemporary American culture. The text mirrors television therapy, where social issues are couched as personal problems, to be solved on an individual level through a series of simplistic and prescribed steps. In this way, *Sex, Love, and Romance in the Mass Media* exemplifies a convergence of popular culture, the mass marketed self-help phenomenon, and traditional academics.

Works Cited

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