

# 88 Open Essays: 71 "A Feminist's Guide to Rom-Coms and How to Watch Them" (Canvas Accessible)

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## A Feminist's Guide to Rom-Coms and How to Watch Them

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#argument, #valuebasedargument, #analytic, #sharedvalues, #pathos, #logos, #ethos, #kairos, #advice, #artsandculture

"Love's Messenger" by Marie Spartali Stillman, Delaware Art Museum is in the Public Domain

Valentine's Day is right around the corner, which means lots of chocolate, teddy bears, and single ladies being made to feel especially inadequate. Some might celebrate Galentine's Day instead, some might skip on acknowledging the holiday at all, and some, myself included, will be holed up watching romantic comedies.

The internet is filled with lists of which rom-coms will "get you through" Valentine's Day—the assumption seems to be that, otherwise, we singles would be festering alone in our living rooms, drinking vodka and singing "All By Myself" à la Bridget Jones. I enjoy the genre, but as a feminist I have some qualms.

Romantic comedies, particularly "the classics" of the genre, can be problematic by today's standards of feminism. Movies like *Pretty Woman* and *Princess Bride* tend to perpetuate harmful gender stereotypes and romanticize men's predatory behavior.

Not to mention they are usually limited to depicting heterosexual relationships between an attractive cis man and an equally, perhaps even more, attractive cis woman. (LGBTQ folks: Here's a list of rom-coms that drown out the heteronormative noise.) Lastly, if rom-coms are marketed to single women, then why are they mostly written and directed by men? (That's a rhetorical question.)

Despite all this, rom-coms are stunningly popular. How do you reconcile your love of rom-coms with your staunch feminism?

Monique Jones, a pop culture critic and entertainment journalist, says that it's OK if you like problematic rom-coms. "That doesn't make us any less of an activist, it doesn't make us any less down for the cause. It's just being a human—and being part of a culture that has indoctrinated us to believe certain things, whether or not they're true," she says.

However, as feminists we do have to hold ourselves accountable, Jones says. Here are three tips on how to be a responsible rom-com consumer.

## 1. Be aware of how you're internalizing the underlying messages

One of the biggest problems with the genre is that it tends to reinforce problematic ideas of romance. Contrary to rom-com plots, it's actually not an outrageous notion for a man to love you "just as you are" (Bridget Jones's Diary, Trainwreck, Pretty Woman, Grease), but it actually is outrageous for a man to consistently ignore your rejections and relentlessly pursue you (The Notebook, 10 Things I Hate About You, 50 First Dates, Breakfast at Tiffany's).

"There are a lot of patriarchal things in society that we've grown up with that we've just assumed are normal. And those same ideals get stuck in these movies. That's why so many of them don't get called out as being problematic, even though they are indicative of larger problems in society," Jones says.

Once you're aware of the patriarchal underpinnings of these movies, you can more objectively decide what you believe is romantic. For example, maybe you don't think it's romantic to pretend to be someone's fiancée while they are in a coma and have no idea who you are. It's creepy, Sandra Bullock.

## 2. Be conscious of what/who you are supporting

This takes some research, but it's worth it (IMDB will be your new best friend). Jones suggests learning what you can about the movie: Who's the director? Who wrote it? Who acts in it? What's the premise? "If you don't feel offended, then I think it's fine to watch," Jones says.

And for the movies we don't feel good about—like anything involving Woody Allen—consider skipping it. "I can't justify having my head in the sand just to support somebody like Woody Allen," Jones says. She skips anything with his name attached to it.

"I never liked his movies anyway. They don't speak to me, first of all, as a woman, and second of all, as an African-American woman," she says. "I know all the film critics and film students that I have been in contact with say that Woody Allen is a master at doing this and that. But I don't align with anything that he does or is. And that's how I go about it. If what the person does doesn't align with my core values, then I just can't do it."

There are funnier, more romantic movies than Annie Hall, anyway.

### 3. Opt for rom-coms with fewer or zero problems

I know the classics are, well, classics, but why not watch a movie that takes a healthier approach to romance? "There are always movies that are smaller productions, and they might not have the big box-office dollars, but they're still well-crafted, well-made movies," Jones says.

Here's a list of five from Thought Catalog to get you started: Warm Bodies, She's Out of My League, Celeste and Jesse Forever, My Best Friend's Wedding, and Kate and Leopold (sarcasm).

So, my fellow feminist rom-comphiles, don't be discouraged.

There are still a lot of things people can enjoy about romantic comedies, Jones says. "With as much choice as there is out there, a person doesn't have to give up their romantic comedy love altogether."

Ayu Sutriasa is the digital editor for YES! Magazine. Her article is reprinted from YES!.

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