

How to Avoid Becoming Your Partner's 'Manic Pixie Dream'

'We are all looking for an idealized version of our partners.'

By Gretchen Brown

Research shows that the things we see in movies and on TV have an impact on the way we see the world.

When only white men play CEOs, it suggests they're the only people who can be CEOs. Portrayals of unrealistic body types can hurt body image and self-confidence.

And the couples we see in movies can give us unrealistic expectations about what relationships are supposed to be like.

The most common — and most talked about — relationship trope in the early 2000s and 2010s was the "Manic Pixie Dream Girl," a name coined by a critic to describe Kirsten Dunst's character in the 2005 movie "Elizabethtown."

But the term has been retroactively used to describe dozens of characters since then — Natalie Portman in 2004's "Garden State," Cara Delevigne in 2015's "Paper Towns," Kate Hudson in 2000's "Almost Famous" and Zooey Deschanel in basically everything.

The 2010s also brought reactionary "Manic Pixie Dream Guys," like the protagonist in "The Fault in Our Stars," or even Adam Scott in "Parks and Recreation."

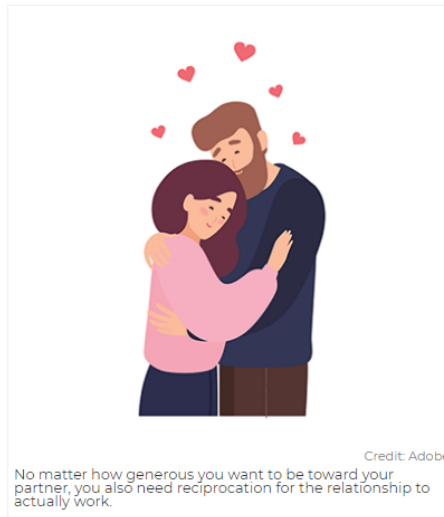
No matter the gender, the basis is the same: the character only exists as a love interest to prop up the main character's ambitions, show them adventure, be sweet and quirky and endlessly supportive and not have any real personality of their own. They're two-dimensional.

Sometimes, that's what you want in a movie character. But what happens when that's what you expect out of your real-life partner?

"We are all looking for an idealized version of our partners," said Noelle Cordeaux, a life coach and clinical sexologist. "We want to see in them what we want for ourselves or believe will lend us currency."

Unrealistic (and unfair) expectations

In 2013, Akilah Hughes wrote about her boyfriend calling her a Manic Pixie Dream Girl for HelloGiggles (a website founded, ironically, by Zooey Deschanel):



“

"Snuggled up on the couch on a brisk October Sunday, my boyfriend looked deep into my eyes and whispered sweetly that I was his 'Manic Pixie Dream Girl,'" she wrote.

She's not the only one this has happened to. There are dozens of Reddit threads with folks sharing stories about being "manic pixie-zoned."

Hughes ultimately decided that being called a "Manic Pixie Dream Girl" wasn't a bad thing — she knew her boyfriend saw her as the protagonist of her own life.

But others say they've felt trapped in a box, exhausted from trying to hold up to an unrealistic image.

tooyoungkitty 34 points • 2 years ago

I used to think that being idealized in a princess or dream girl type way was ideal until it happened to me. I was no longer a person capable of having flaws, doing wrong, or making mistakes. It feels really weird to be put on a pedestal and it made my own feelings of having flaws feel fake or invalidated. I also felt like I had to live up to this flawless version of myself so it was a lot of pressure.

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If you've ever felt like the manic pixie dream girl in someone's life, how did it turn out?
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"I used to think that being idealized in a princess or dream girl type way was ideal until it happened to me," Reddit user tooyoungkitty [wrote](#).

"I was no longer a person capable of having flaws, doing wrong, or making mistakes. It feels really weird to be put on a pedestal and it made my own feelings of having flaws feel fake or invalidated."

Licensed psychotherapist Amy Rollo says this tendency to idealize partners often boils down to attachment style.

"For many individuals, they have an avoidant attachment style where they believe there is a 'perfect' person somewhere," she said. "The grass is always greener. They either put an ex on a pedestal or are searching for some dream partner."

noaoats 46 points • 14 days ago

not a partner but someone I went on a few dates with- this is exactly what turned me off from him. he used to compare me CONSTANTLY to Jess from New Girl. we have some similar mannerisms but it got to the point where it was excessive. he was also obsessed with the movie '500 Days of Summer' and often compared me to Deschanel in that movie as well (see a trend?).

at the end of our first date he showed me a list he had made on his phone called '500 Days of Noaoats'. it was pages and pages long and had all these activities he had planned for us to do over the summer.

he would have had an amazing summer with whoever the girl he had dreamt of

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Say it with me now: There's no such thing as a [dream partner](#). Idealizing your partner, she said, actually devalues them.

"You are saying their needs do not matter, and they are worthy in the relationship only if they attend to only your needs."

Fun at first, but not sustainable

It might feel good to be put on a pedestal at first. But if you're constantly feeling like you're up against an idealized version of yourself, you might be your partner's "Manic Pixie Dream" person.

The first thing to know: No matter how generous you are toward your partner, you need reciprocation for the relationship to actually work.

You can't exist just to fix your partner's problems.

"Marriage research indicates that emotional needs should be equal," Rollo said. "In fact, Dr. John Gottman, the leading marriage researcher, discusses the term 'emotional bank account.' Everytime you attend to your partner's needs, you are depositing into the account. However, this account can't be one-sided."

Even Deschanel, who plays Summer in 2009's "500 Days of Summer," is often mistakenly called a "Manic Pixie Dream Girl" in that role.

In reality, the movie is exposing protagonist Tom's habit of constructing a dream girl in his mind. His relationship with Summer doesn't work out because she won't fit that mold.



Joseph Gordon-Levitt ✓
@hitRECordJoe



Watch it again. It's mostly Tom's fault. He's projecting. He's not listening. He's selfish. Luckily he grows by the end.
twitter.com/_EmperorJustin_

Emperor Justin @_EmperorJustin_

Still haven't forgiven Zooey Deschanel for what she did to Joseph Gordon-Levitt in 500 Days of Summer.

♥ 172K 2:38 AM - Aug 7, 2018



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If your partner becomes uncomfortable by the thought of you pursuing your own dreams, or indulging your own interests, it might be time to reconsider the relationship, says dating expert [Celia Schwyer](#).

"You are not an empty vessel with no motivations and dreams of your own," she said.

"You are your own person, and it's best that you discover yourself in your own terms — what you want, what you like, and where you want to be without anyone depending on you to make their lives livelier and more exciting."



By [Gretchen Brown](#)

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