

Opinion: A Happy Single's Post-Valentine's Day Reflections

by L.

This past Valentine's Day she loomed large again, drowning her sorrows with a pint of Haagen Dazs: the single woman as she appears in the mainstream media. I can honestly say I don't know her or women like her. Add my name to the growing number of women in the "happily single" category.

There is a huge disconnect between the stale image of the disenchanted woman longing for Prince Charming, with her grandiose expectations of dating (undoubtedly concocted by Madison Avenue), and the real dating experiences most women have had. After all, what sort of Valentine's Day are women taught to expect by countless advertisers with a financial stake in the holiday? Typically it involves a well-groomed man in a crisp tuxedo at her doorstep, a limousine waiting to whisk them off to the finest restaurant in town, a gift of fine jewelry, and rose petals to grace their path along the way.

But what is a woman's typical experience? Hours spent searching for the perfect gift for the not-so-perfect man, a two-hour wait at Applebee's on a Monday night for the same food she had over the weekend, the stumbling reaction of a guy when given boxers with hearts and lip marks on them ("Wow, thanks honey. I'll wear these Wednesday when I play basketball with the guys. I'll be the envy of the locker room!"), finding an area in her home for that new pink stuffed gorilla, and wondering if she'll stick with this guy until Sweetest Day.

By way of contrast, those of us who are not distractedly looking for Mr. Right may see Valentine's Day for what it can be. Many take this opportunity to show appreciation to close friends and relatives. Some of us even see our singlehood as dodging the bullet of having to endure the awkwardness of a new or wavering relationship on this "do or die" day. ("Did he remember Valentine's Day? Are we exchanging gifts? If so, what should I get him? Do guys even like flowers?") A number of us are amused at the ridiculous images of single women in the media while others are outraged at the far-fetched portrayals.

And when all is said and done, the discrepancy between expectations and the typical experience begs the questions of what really is normal. Here are a few statistics about Valentine's Day.

- Approximately one in four Americans do not celebrate the holiday at all.(1)

- Many, if not most, of the gifts purchased are for kids, kids' classmates, adult children, parents, grandparents, friends, neighbors, coworkers, teachers, pets, and other family members.

- This is the second largest card-exchanging day, behind Christmas.(2) (And you thought everyone was getting a three stone diamond necklace!)

- Flowers, candy, and cards are the most commonly purchased gifts.(3)

Those of us who embrace our singlehood observed this past Valentine's Day in a variety ways. Some bought gifts for friends, neighbors, coworkers, and/or family members. Some saw it as an opportunity to pamper ourselves in ways that might have been difficult to do if we were in a relationship, such as carving out a couple hours to re-read a favorite novel, go to the spa, or get in a great workout. The thrifty among us saw it as the eve of "50% off Chocolate Day" in stores around the country.

In addition to being Valentine's Day, February 14th was also International Quirkyalone Day (IQD). According to the Quirkyalone website, International Quirkyalone Day is "a do-it-yourself celebration of romance, friendship, and independent spirit. It's a celebration of all kinds of love: romantic, platonic, familial, and yes, self-love. International Quirkyalone Day is not anti-Valentine's Day. It's NOT a pity party for single people. It's an alternative -- a feel-good alternative to the marketing barrage of Valentine's Day and an antidote to the silicone version of love presented in shows such as Joe Millionaire and The Bachelorette. Above all, IQD is a celebration of romance, freedom and individuality."

Still looking for unconventional ways to honor Valentine's Day? Try the following next year.

- Volunteer at a battered woman's shelter. You will be helping someone in need and likely learn a few things yourself.

- Assist your nieces/nephews with their classroom Valentine's Day cards.

- Visit a nursing home, where widows welcome a smiling face on a lonely day.

- Send a gift to a recently divorced or separated friend who might need a reminder of how much they are appreciated.

- Just for fun, order Despair.com's BitterSweets(tm) candy, a different take on the popular conversation hearts, with "dysfunctional" and "dejected" sayings such as "TABLE FOR 1," "BE MY PRISON," "C THAT DOOR?," "P.S. I LUV ME," and "U+ME=GRIEF."
-LI>Above all, be thankful for the freedom you have as a single person!

Or just ignore the holiday if you feel like it! After all, Valentine's Day only comes once a year. This year's cards were tossed within 48 hours, the chocolates were devoured by the 3rd day (at most) and the flowers died within a week.

Meanwhile, some of us lucky happy singles are still celebrating: our independence lasts a lifetime!

L. enjoys the solo single lifestyle with the freedom to do what she wants, when she wants. She resides in Kentucky and works in the field of research. Her hobbies include reading, working out, and spending time with her dog.

(1) Maritz AmeriPoll. February 1999. <http://www.maritzresearch.com/release.asp?rc=169&p=1&T=P>

(2) Greeting Card Association. Souvenirs, Gifts, and Novelties. Sept.-Oct. 2004. http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0LMC/is_7_43/ai_n6275473

(3) International Mass Retailers Association. Discount Store News. Feb. 7, 2000. http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m3092/is_3_39/ai_59426699