

Chicago Daily Law Bulletin®

Volume 164, No. 103

Serving Chicago's legal community for 163 years

'Book Club' hits perfect demographic

There's no way to spoil the ending of "Book Club," the chick-of-a-certain-age flick starring Jane Fonda, Candice Bergen, Diane Keaton and Mary Steenburgen as members of a book club that's met monthly for 40 years. It's the same as every fairy tale: happily, ever after.

Representing the opposite end of the horological spectrum from the Disney princesses, the "Book Club" women want the same thing that every heroine has wanted since Cinderella first picked up her broom — to be transported from a life of drudgery into one of adventure and love.

It is probably no coincidence that "Book Club" was released to coincide with the royal wedding, on which the curtain fell with the remarkable Ms. Markle riding away in a carriage drawn by white horses, her charming prince by her side.

This stuff never gets old.

"Book Club" employs the "Sex and the City" and "Golden Girls" device of assigning romantic storylines to four archetypically diverse friends: Fonda plays a successful sex-obsessed hotelier; Steenburgen is a housewife whose recently retired husband is adrift; Keaton is a widow whose daughters insult and enfeeble her with their condescending stereotypes about Third Age helplessness; and Bergen is a federal judge (with a cat named Ginsburg), whose son and ex-husband are about to marry young women who are roughly the same age.

The movie's message — that it is possible to find love at any age — is as reassuring as it is predictable. Famous folklorist Joseph Campbell taught us that the purpose of myths is to reinforce a



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society's shared values.

"Book Club" reinforces the shared starry-eyed, expectations of women and girls of every generation who grow up believing that the rainbow-hued arc of their personal story will bend toward a fairy tale outcome.

Fonda, still a sex-bomb at 80 (such durable fabulousness isn't in the cards for you unless you too were a Barbarella at 30 and, as mean girl Megyn Kelly pointed out, have a really great plastic surgeon), plays a sybarite with a policy against emotional attachment. The carnal knowledge of Bergen's judge has perished in the 18 years since her divorce, and the movie's comic relief is provided by her foray into computer dating. Steenburgen's jobless husband has performance issues.

The ladies approach life like 5-year-olds at water's edge. They noisily complain as the waves invitingly lick their toes, afraid to plunge into the unknown. Although they are financially secure and have plenty of agency, something is missing.

All four are romantically challenged until (in a shameless

Paramount cross-promotion) the book club reads E. L. James' "Fifty Shades of Grey." Then each of them experiences a romantic awakening. Dashing, doe-eyed Andy Garcia and smokin' hot Don Johnson step in and rise to the occasion. (No frogs were kissed in the making of this film.) Not since Hillary won the Democratic Party nomination has such an optimistic message been sent to the women of AARP.

As in the television sitcoms of the 1970s, each woman's story line ends with an object lesson. The moral is to remain open to opportunities at any age. Every woman is a "princess" when she removes the mask she wears to disguise her fear.

There's not much to be said of the movie's writing or direction. The film's four veteran actresses can breathe life into any script. The story is about wish fulfillment, and it hits its target as squarely as any Dickens novel that rewards an orphaned hero with an unexpected inheritance.

Today, when the pleasures of youth can be extended well into retirement, marriage expert Esther Perel advises us that we are likely to experience three distinct marriages — whether it is with the same person or not.

Our guiding myths about romantic partnerships and the role of women in them will have to be reinvented to accommodate our modern lifestyles in an age of feminism and female accomplishment.

We need the myths, as beacons of hope. They unite and encourage us — like the national anthem. These dowager princesses show us that agency, autonomy and partnership all reside in the best of all possible worlds.

And there is hope for us all.