

The Myth of the One (MOTO)

Lila, a thirty-year-old marketing director, is getting married in just two months. And so far, all she knows for certain is that she's absolutely terrified to take the next step. She nervously fidgets on the denim blue couch in my office as she wonders aloud, "Is it even fair to stand in front of him and his entire family and say yes when I'm having all these doubts? I mean, I'm just supposed to know, aren't I?" I resist the gnawing urge to jump in and try to save her from the pain she's feeling today, a pain I've seen hundreds of times before. Instead, I readjust in my chair and wait as she continues, "Of course, the hard part is that he's actually amazing. I've never been treated better in my entire life! We laugh all the time, share similar values, and really care about each other. He's exactly the kind of partner I would have hoped for. But I don't always have that feeling, you know what I mean?"

I know exactly what Lila means and, my guess is, so do you. She is about to make one of the biggest commitments of her life, and she would like to be absolutely certain that she isn't making a mistake. She would like to have that feeling, the one she was promised she would feel one day, an indicator she has found the right person. She would like to have reassurance that, in committing to this person, she won't ever feel regret or hurt or find herself falling in love with someone else. She would like certainty that, out of all the millions of options in the world, the person she has chosen will fulfil her, excite her, challenge her, and love her, no matter what, until the end of time. In short, Lila is asking me how she can possibly move forward when her reality doesn't match up with the love story she was promised.

We all know the story; it's practically imprinted on us since birth. Girl meets Boy (it's usually just that binary), and they have instant chemistry, an undeniable attraction. He's the man she always dreamed of, the dashing knight who takes away her pain and completes her so that she wants for nothing. She is his soul mate, the woman he's waited for all his life, who accepts him unconditionally and knows exactly what he needs without his ever needing to express it. Together, they live in perfect harmony, craving nothing and no one else in life because they have one another. Two perfect children and an impossibly large (and somehow affordable) home follow suit as they grow old together, nestled by the cosy fireside of their love. Boy and Girl have found "The One," their soul's counterpoint in another. We look on and think, "Those two figured it out! They really are the lucky ones..."

Now consider the thousands of ways you've been told this story, what we'll call the "Myth of the One." Have you ever heard it described as a myth, which honours some level of fantasy and untruth? More likely you understood it to be a fact of life. Consider then how you grew up to expect some version of this story in your adult relationships, and perhaps how disappointed you might have felt to discover it wasn't quite as easy as you had hoped it would be to find this particular brand of love. The Myth of the One, which I'll refer to in this book by the shorthand form MOTO, sounds like this: "If only you find the right one, the right person, all your pain and suffering will vanish, and you'll live happily ever after. You won't need to work too hard on your relationship, because it will feel natural and easy! You'll just know it when you feel it, and if you don't feel it, you're probably settling."

But that's just not true. And while real love is somewhat less glamorous, it is no less worthy. The actual process of loving another person takes willingness, patience, and plenty of hard work. Good relationships are hard to find and even harder to maintain, requiring herculean efforts of vulnerability, patience, and selflessness to thrive—they are not for the weak of heart, and they certainly don't just happen to us. To love fully, we must choose to lower our walls and resistances, allowing another person to see us, to see all of us, even the I can't show these parts of me; they're ugly and unlovable parts. Real love requires that we constantly evaluate and re-evaluate our own blocks and insecurities and that we commit not only to the other but to a process of endless self-growth.