

Episode 2: Kissing The Rock on the Mouth

Have you ever accidentally shared something with people and had it come off as extremely odd without meaning to? When I started my last job, I accidentally disclosed to my co-workers that I had a fantasy about Dwayne 'The Rock' Johnson deadlifting me and holding me over his head like a weight. When I realised that everyone was looking at me in abject horror, rather than backtracking, I decided to double down and yell "It's not a sex thing. I just think it would be nice." I am the queen of extremely good first impressions.

All those people were kind enough to pretend that I'm not a complete nutcase and for my birthday they printed out a picture of The Rock and stuck it to my desk, where it remained for the duration of my tenure in the role. Having Dwayne looking at me each day has given me ample time to ponder the question: why do we never see The Rock smooch?

I'm Alex. This is Pop Culture Boner, the podcast edition. Today, I'm thinking about Dwayne 'The Rock' Johnson.

I was trying to think about how to start this episode, because I actually unabashedly love The Rock. Do I need to do a little intro? Do I need to talk about why I love him? Could I even articulate why I love him? Probably not.

There's something distinctly wholesome about him – he started off playing

college football, pivoted to wrestling, dominated wrestling for most of my childhood, and then in my early teens he pivoted again to movies. And not just any movie. The greatest movie franchise of all time – The Mummy. I will not be following up this claim with a justification. Fuck off. It's the best. There's something kind of incredible about that adaptability and longevity in a career in entertainment. He's ended up as the one of the most highly paid actors on earth. I think he might actually be the highest paid TV star – he makes something like \$650,000 an episode for his show *Ballers*. You don't make that kind of cash if you aren't getting viewers.

Caity Weaver wrote an excellent profile on him back in 2017 for *GQ*. She spends some time riding around with him, and I really recommend reading it for the full effect, but I'll give you a little quote:

"Johnson tested well in what the film industry refers to as "all four quadrants": old men, young men, old women, and young women.

Broadly, the quadrants thing means that everyone likes him. Specifically, it suggests that if Johnson's personal magnetism were any stronger, birds in his vicinity might plummet from the sky, their internal navigation mechanisms thrown off by the force of his personality."

So, I'm not alone in my love. I may be

be alone in my desire to be used as a weight... but that's OK.

But for someone who is, more often than not, a leading man now, there is something weirdly sexless about The Rock. Now, I would never insult Dwayne by implying that he doesn't do well with the ladies in real life. He's 6 foot 4 and built like a tank with a smile that lights up a room (and several million dollars in the bank). I'm sure he's got fans. But somehow this hasn't translated into onscreen romance, even when he's in a leading role with an alleged onscreen love interest.

Now you could argue that this is because he's often in action films and they don't have a tonne of space for romance. But even then, there's an astonishing lack of sex or even the memory of sex, that writers usually throw in there to pad out the virility of these leading men. Let's take Vin Diesel as an example. He's been in the Fast and Furious films with The Rock, and I will talk more about those later, but in those films, he has an on-screen love played by Michelle Rodriguez, we're constantly reminded that they not only fuck, but that they're in love and when he's turned evil by Charlize Theron in the last film... spoilers, sorry. Are you invested in the 9 film story arc of the Fast and Furious? Is there even a story arc? Why is Oscar winner Charlize Theron in this movie? ANYWAY... When Charlize turns Vin Diesel evil, she's so drawn in by his sex appeal that she can't resist using that opportunity to kiss him. Even if you think about something else with Vin Diesel in it, like the xXx reboot – within the first like 20 minutes, he's having an orgy

with a group of English women for information. In both of these films, these are built into the plot to either give him emotional depth or establish him as somehow desirable – like a blue collar James Bond.

You just don't get that with The Rock. If we look at his role in the Fast and Furious films, he's got a daughter. Which means at some point we can assume that the character had a meaningful relationship with a woman. But he never really expresses interest in women in the series, aside from like... saving other female characters. It's implied in these acts, that he cares about them and that it isn't just some generic hero shit, but there's no sex there.

So, where's the heat? Well, I've done some incredibly scientific research. By which I, of course, mean, I've seen every film the Rock cinematic universe – it is a cinematic universe. These films are connected. Don't ask me how. Anyway, I've broken his characters down into three broad categories.

The first, I'm calling Big Hottie, No Touch. It does what it says on the tin – the Rock is large, and it's heavily implied by the women in his vicinity that they think he's extremely hot. However, and this is important – no one must ever act on this feeling. At one point, the Rock might catch the female lead as she falls, and they will have a moment of intense eye contact, thus allowing the audience to feel as though they could be boinking later, but no one must ever touch their lips to the Rock's lips.

This one is maybe the majority of The

Rock films. My favourite recent example was Rampage, where Dwayne can talk to a large Albino gorilla named George, who is his best friend in the whole world. George becomes infected by an alien space virus and gets really big and a bit mean, but The Rock can save him and also the world (by which I mean, one or two of America's large cities). There is no love interest in this film, but there are several extended sequences where women attempt to hit on the Rock in a fairly obvious way that borders on vulgar. The Rock says no, because his only real loves are teaching gorillas sign language and fighting alien viruses. No one smooches The Rock.

The second, we'll call One Kiss, No Tongue. This is essentially a variation on the first category, but usually with an added element of antagonism. The various women in the film think he's hot, and so does the female lead at her core, but mostly she just thinks he's annoying because she's a strong independent lady and he's getting in her way. But then she almost gets blown up or something and they make eye contact and have one single kiss. It takes 5 seconds total and we never mention it again.

I'll use Hobbes and Shaw as an example here, because I like the fight scene so much. This is a Fast and Furious spin off designed to give The Rock and Jason Statham more screen time. Jason Statham's sister is the feisty English love interest of The Rock who initially attempts to beat him to death by climbing him like a tree and smashing his face repeatedly with a motorcycle helmet. This is, of course, designed to give us the idea that they could fuck later.

They do not, but when they think they're going to die they share a single chaste kiss and then it is never mentioned again. As it should be.

The third and final category is my favourite – I'm calling it Divorced Dad Is Here To Tell You He's Sorry. The Rock and his wife got a divorce, but not because they weren't in love. It's because of some external factor, like he loves his job (which is saving people) too much, or he's being too hard on himself about the death of their child. Basically, they broke up because he was too good of a person. But fear not. The Rock is gonna show his ex-wife that he still holds a candle for her, by coming to her rescue during a natural disaster. Or a terrorist attack. Or a kidnapping. Take your pick. They do not kiss.

San Andreas is probably my favourite example of this trope. The Rock is a helicopter pilot and he saves his ex-wife from the top of collapsing skyscraper that kills Kylie Minogue (I'm not kidding). Meanwhile, his ex-wife's new boyfriend is somewhere else being a real jerk who leaves The Rock's children to fend for themselves. He's also killed by a collapsing skyscraper (still not kidding). Eventually, The Rock and his wife manage to resolve their differences when she convinces him to forgive himself for being unable to save their young daughter from drowning 10 years ago. Having punched the San Andreas fault in the face, The Rock and his ex-wife are reunited with their remaining daughter as an American flag unfurls across a drowned California. They have one kiss but it's so brief, to the point where she still has her eyes open, that my mum

had to text me and remind me it even occurred.

There are, of course, exceptions, but usually they either serve to prove the rule, or they're playing up something for comedic effect. Take Baywatch, for example. The Rock has a partner in this. For the life of me, I can't remember if they were married and I'm not watching it again to find out. (It is my least favourite in the Rock Cinematic Universe – the RCU.) Anyway, at one point they have to pretend they're making out in order to avoid detection by drug dealers and they share a steamy kiss. When I tell you I screamed in the cinema, I'm not kidding. I was so horrified by having to watch the Rock kiss a woman that I was unable to control my reaction. Exception that proves the rule.

Another good example is in the Jumanji reboot. In it, The Rock's body is an avatar in the Jumanji video game and so he spends the film mostly camping it up as an awkward teenage boy. It's surprisingly good and I recommend giving it a crack. Anyway, at one point he has to kiss Karen Gillan, except they're both being awkward teenagers sharing their first kiss in adult bodies. It goes horribly – I don't think they close their eyes. At one point, tongues are everywhere. And it's really funny. It's not supposed to be sexy, so it's not jarring or weird to watch. But I'm not going crazy - it's weird, right? Like... try and think of another male actor in a similar category to The Rock, who does mainly action or comedy, or some combination of the two, and who is so frequently cast as a lead, and who saves people, and who on some level kind of ticks the boxes for being a bit hot, but

who gets almost no on-screen action. Not even a little lip-to-cheek action. Not even a quick peck. Not even an implied quick peck. I can't think of one. I went over Vin Diesel's exploits earlier. Statham is in a million films where his action-hero-ness... actiony-ness... there has to be a better way to word this. The essence of his heroism... there it is...I have an English degree. Statham is in a million films where the essence of his heroism is tied to saving and then bedding ladies. As an example, I looked at the pile of Statham movies in Netflix's collection and just the top row has him kissing Jennifer Lopez and avenging the death of his girlfriend. Even when we reach back in the archives of action movie guys and look at people like Jean Claude Van Damme and Arnold Schwarzenegger – they still had girls to kiss.

It gets even weirder when you consider The Rock's sexless-ness in the context of the Fast and Furious franchise, in particular. I'm sure most of you know about the no-loss agreement that the male cast have negotiated. Heaps of people have written about it – particularly Vulture and The Wall Street Journal. To very quickly summarise - you may have noticed that in the any of the more recent films from that franchise, especially the ones where Jason Statham, Vin Diesel and The Rock share the screen, that no one ever loses a fight. Vulture points out that even when you feel like there is a loss – like Jason Statham's character blowing up the Rock – it's still reframed as heroic because he gets blown up to save his partner. The Wall Street Journal is even more specific. Here's the quote:

"According to producers and crew

members on the films, Mr. Statham, 51 years old, negotiated an agreement with the studio that limits how badly he can be beaten up on screen. Mr. Diesel, 52, has his younger sister, a producer on the films, police the number of punches he takes. And Mr. Johnson, 47, enlists producers, editors and fight coordinators to help make sure he always gives as good as he gets."

This contractually negotiated pissing contest says a lot about the way actors perceive themselves and their masculinity on film. They have to fight in order to achieve the ultimate goal of being the biggest and best boy on screen, but they also have to bend the simple rules of a two-man fight (i.e. that someone has to lose) in order to maintain that big fancy best boy title.


In my humble opinion, as someone who loves watching shit blow up on screen, I think it makes for really interesting fight choreography. How can you possibly bend what are again the EXTREMELY SIMPLE rules of a fight in order to ensure that none of these big shiny lads loses? I don't know but they've managed to do it for like 4 films now.

There's something really interesting about these types of Hollywood portrayals of masculinity and heroism, particularly when you compare it to like, Eastern action films. Kung Fu movies for example, usually have the hero learn a lesson through a particularly humiliating loss, and this loss steels their resolve to learn more about their craft and hone their skills in order to ultimately triumph. American action films don't have that, because the hero can never

be flawed and he's not mastering any craft. He already knows how to pulverise anything that gets in his way and his only weakness is that he cares too much about doing The Right Thing. With no lesson to be learned by anyone, an ensemble cast has nowhere to go but into this death spiral of everyone being the biggest and the best until you end up with a 9 movie franchise.

And I can hear you saying, "Alex - what could this possibly have to do with our friend Dwayne not having sex onscreen?" Fair. It's taken us a while to get here. I apologise. Somehow, Dwayne 'The Rock' Johnson, has managed to position himself as the purest of all onscreen heroes. Statham and Diesel, Van Damme and Schwarzenegger, are all distracted by the charming feminine wiles, the wily feminine charms, of leading ladies. And while, yes, they might save them from big sharks, nuclear bombs, burning buildings, natural disasters, and ambiguously Eastern European dudes with bad haircuts, they also waste valuable minutes by pulling them into steamy embraces during key plot points. They're distracted from the ultimate mission. They cannot be Hollywood's most special boy, because they are tarnished by sinful thoughts. The sluts!

Dwayne, on the other hand, has never been distracted from the mission in his life. Sure, he may Care Too Much, and the people he Cares Too Much about might be women, but they are The Good Average Women of America. They're wives. Or single mothers. Or daughters. Or law enforcement officials being framed by other, corrupt law enforcement officials. And he doesn't want to kiss any of them



unless it is absolutely mission critical. This is what it takes to build the perfect American action hero – a sexless, big strong muscle boy. Like a large, violent doll – a sentient G.I. Joe. We might laugh at fragile masculinity on display as three dudes posture over who can take which punch at what point in time, but part of me thinks it's almost refreshing that this posturing doesn't involve James-Bondesque fucking of everything with a pulse. I think the sexless-ness is actually the key to his success. Big studio action movies are always a junk-heap of opinions because there are so many hands that touch the production, from the script through to the casting, through to the final cut. They're almost never saying something cohesive. In trying social times, the escapism of big stupid blockbuster movies becomes an even stronger siren song. And the blank slate of The Rock's ultimate goodness is what keeps audiences coming back in huge numbers, even for the stuff that's basically hot garbage. Despite his huge size and enormous personal charm, we can rest assured that The Rock is not trying to fuck us, or our wives. He just wants to save the world. Or a small American city.

That's the end. This was 100% an excuse to talk about my personal theory of Dwayne Johnson film canon. I was once sharing this theory with a friend of mine after a few wines, and he interrupted me and said "Alex, I love you but it's 1am and you're shouting and the neighbours can definitely hear you." So I would say I'm a little bit invested in the RCU. That's Rock Cinematic Universe. If you've got an opinion on The Rock's filmography, let know how about it next time you see me at the pub. Unless it's about The Mummy movies. I don't want to hear anything

bad about them.
Peace.

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Episode written by Alex Johnson and produced by Wes Fahey.

Theme tune by Wes Fahey. (Soundcloud: [lee snipes](#))

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