

That's a Lot of Goop

By Reg P. Wydeven
September 16, 2018

As a comic book nerd, I love all of the Marvel Cinematic Universe movies. Not only are their standalone hero movies great, but the individual chapters are all woven together to form one overarching story in outstanding ensemble films.

It all started with 'Iron Man.' The 2008 movie introduced us to Tony Stark, the self-proclaimed billionaire genius playboy philanthropist played by Robert Downey, Jr. Stark uses his money and smarts to create the Iron Man suit.

Tony's love interest is Pepper Potts, portrayed by Gwyneth Paltrow. Because she is so trustworthy and has such integrity, Pepper takes over Tony's role as CEO of Stark Industries when he becomes a full-time superhero.

That's why it's so hard to believe, and so disappointing, that Pepper misled everyone in real life.

Like her Marvel movie counterpart, Paltrow is the head of Goop, a huge corporation. Like 'Iron Man,' it was launched in 2008, starting as a weekly e-mail newsletter. It provided insight into Gwyneth's personal life and offered new age advice, such as "police your thoughts" and "eliminate white foods." The newsletter became a lifestyle website that has over 3 million visitors a month.

Instead of just offering advice, Goop got into the business of selling products that would enhance your life. Goods are sold through the website and in local pop-up shops across the country. The wares include a makeup and skincare line, a clothing line, perfume and scented candles, and vitamins and supplements. The items are touted as being organic and vegan and are generally pretty expensive.

Paltrow endorses all of the products, uses them herself, and touts all of the wonderful ways that they improve your life. Some consumers and watchdog groups, however, assert her claims are as fictitious as the comic books on which her movies are based.

Paltrow and Goop have come under fire for promoting and selling products and treatments that have no scientific basis, lack effectiveness, and are recognized by the medical establishment as harmful or as misleading. In 2017, the consumer advocacy group Truth in Advertising filed a complaint with the government regarding over 50 health claims made by Goop as dangerous and false.

The government listened. Prosecutors from 10 counties in California sued Goop for false advertising, alleging the company did not have scientific backing for health claims it made for three products it sold online. Two of the products were the jade and rose quartz vaginal eggs, which were promoted as a way to "balance hormones, regulate menstrual cycles... and increase bladder control." The third was a mix of essential oils that was advertised as a way to "help prevent depression."

The prosecutors alleged these descriptions were "not supported by competent and reliable scientific evidence." According to Orange County District Attorney Tony Rackauckas, one of the participants in the suit, "It's important to hold companies accountable for unsubstantiated claims, especially when the claims have the potential to affect women's health." He added that, "People have been selling snake oil for a long time. This is just another type of snake oil."

The company admitted no wrongdoing, claiming there was an "honest disagreement" about the claims, but Goop wanted to settle the case "quickly and amicably." So the company agreed to pay \$145,000 in civil penalties, offer customers refunds, and no longer make any claims "regarding the efficacy or effects of any of its products without possessing competent and reliable scientific evidence that substantiates the claims."

After learning of the action over the jade and rose quartz eggs, Goop scrambled to respond, because they wanted the lawsuit over-easy.

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