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VÁVOJ STEREOTYPŮ V ROMANTICKÝCH FILMECH NAPŘÍČ 20. A 21.  
STOLETÍM

The development of stereotypes in romantic films across the 20th and 21st  
century

**Bakalářská práce**

**Autor:** Marie Kolajová

**Vedoucí práce:** Mgr. Josef NEVAŘIL, Ph.D.

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Marie Kolajová

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## Abstract

This thesis explores the transformations of romantic films over the past century and examines how these films reflect and reinforce cultural and societal attitudes towards love, gender, and sexuality. The study analyses the ways in which romantic films have reinforced stereotypes, as well as how some films have challenged these traditions and increased the representation of underrepresented groups. The six films used in the study-Roman Holiday, Love Story, Dirty Dancing, Pretty Woman, Me Before You, and The Half of It-serve as examples to support the thesis' argument. The conclusion highlights the progress that has been made but points to the need for further improvement in the accurate and fair representation of all groups in romantic films.

Key words: Stereotype, film, development, racial stereotype, gender

## Abstract

Tato práce zkoumá proměny romantických filmů v průběhu minulého století a zkoumá, jak tyto filmy odrážejí a posilují kulturní a společenské postoje k lásce, genderu a sexualitě. Studie analyzuje způsoby, jakými romantické filmy udržovaly stereotypy a vylučující normy, a také to, jak některé filmy tyto tradice zpochybnily a zvýšily zastoupení nedostatečně zastoupených skupin. Šest filmů použitých ve studii – Roman Holiday, Love Story, Dirty Dancing, Pretty Woman, Me Before You a The Half of It – slouží jako příklady podporující argumentaci práce. Závěr zdůrazňuje pokrok, kterého bylo dosaženo, ale upozorňuje na potřebu dalšího zlepšení v oblasti přesného a spravedlivého zastoupení všech skupin v romantických filmech.

Klíčová slova: Stereotyp, film, vývoj, rasové stereotypy, gender

## Introduction

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century, movies have reflected our society, both in terms of the themes explored and the portrayal of characters on screen. Unfortunately, this means that stereotypes have been present in movies for decades, perpetuating harmful and inaccurate ideas about different groups of people.

This thesis will deal with the development of stereotypes in movies of 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century. The reasons of choosing this topic are several, first of them is my personal interest in the topic of cinema, more specifically, an influence of my mother, who is a manager of cinema. Secondly, am I interested in the stereotypes in movies specifically, that means I have often observed a stereotype or more in films.

The aim of this thesis is to analyse and make a conclusion if there are changes or developments in occurrence of stereotypes in movies. However, the theme or the field of this topic is certainly wide, which leads to shortening the topic. I have chosen 6 films to analyse, 4 of them represent the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the last two represent the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These films are from various decades, more specifically from the 1950s I have chosen the film named *Roman Holiday*, from 1970s I have chosen *Love Story*, another one is from the 1980s called *Dirty Dancing*, the representative of the 1990s is the film named *Pretty Woman* and the 21<sup>st</sup> century films are *Me Before You* from the 2010s and from the 2020s the film named *The Half of It*.

I would like to find out whether there are stereotypes that have persisted for decades, whether any have disappeared and why, and whether new stereotypes have arisen, for example due to the social environment or the political situation.

This thesis is divided into theoretical and analytical parts. In the theoretical part, according to the mentioned sources, stereotypes as such and their influence are investigated, stereotypes present in films and, more specifically, in romantic films are highlighted, and then their development across the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. The practical part is focused on the analysis of the selected films. The films themselves are characterised and then the specific stereotypes present in them are identified. In the end of the thesis is portrayed the development of these stereotypes.

# 1 Stereotypes

## 1.1 Beliefs and generalisations

Stereotypes are a form of social categorization that can have both positive and negative effects on individuals (Allport, 1954). Stereotype is a monotonous, settled, habitual pattern of behaviour and thinking about people based on a variety of factors, such as race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, and socioeconomic status (Schneider, 2004). It may regulate the perception and evaluation of certain groups, influencing opinions, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviour. This behaviour can often lead to unfair treatment (Dovidio et al., 2010). According to Schneider (2004), stereotypes can be perpetuated through various forms of media, including movies, television, and advertising.

Stereotypes have been observed to play a role in reinforcing group identity and fostering a sense of belonging among individuals, but they can also lead to negative outcomes such as prejudice and discrimination (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2010; Hogg & Terry, 2003). It is crucial to acknowledge and address the detrimental effects of stereotypes by promoting education and raising awareness (Fiske et al., 2010; Hogg & Terry, 2003).

For example, an individual may hold a belief that all members of a certain religious group are intolerant based on their limited exposure to people from that group who they perceive as intolerant. This belief then becomes a generalization, and the individual may develop a stereotype that all members of that religious group are intolerant. Similarly, media portrayals of certain groups, such as portraying certain ethnicities as criminals or certain genders as overly emotional, can reinforce existing beliefs and generalizations, leading to the formation of stereotypes (Devine, 1989).

Despite the potential benefits of stereotypes, it is important to recognize and address the negative effects they can have on individuals and groups. One way to do this is through education and awareness-raising efforts that promote understanding and empathy across different groups (Blair et al., 2001). By challenging negative stereotypes and promoting positive ones, we can work toward a more inclusive and equitable society.

## 1.2 Definition of stereotypes

Stereotypes are widely recognized as a common way in which people categorize others based on group membership, usually with a negative connotation. According to Allport (1954), stereotypes refer to "a generalized belief about a group of people". Stereotypes can be formed based on a wide range of social categories, including but not limited to race, gender, age, and sexual orientation.

Stereotypes are often formed due to limited information or exposure to specific groups of people, and they can be reinforced by media and cultural messages (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Prejudiced attitudes can develop as a result of stereotypes, leading to discrimination against members of the targeted group. Socialization, including family, education, and media, can play a significant role in shaping stereotypes. For instance, children can internalize gender stereotypes through toys, clothing, and activities typically associated with specific genders, or through biased communication from parents, teachers, or peers.

It is important to note that stereotypes are not always negative and can be positive or neutral as well. For example, stereotypes can be positive when they serve as a source of pride or identity for members of a particular group. However, even positive stereotypes can be problematic if they are used to justify unequal treatment or discrimination (Brown, 2010).

## 1.3 Impact of stereotypes

Stereotypes can have a significant impact on individuals and communities. They can shape perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours towards others, leading to discrimination, prejudice, and inequality (Stangor, 2000). Stereotypes can limit opportunities and create barriers, reinforcing existing social hierarchies and power dynamics. One of the consequences is that the viewers subsequently have distorted preconceptions about certain groups of people, and their minds and behaviour are influenced by the stereotypes mentioned. People often take a negative stance towards different races, genders, and other groups in general without forming their own opinions about specific individuals or groups.

The negative impact of stereotypes and the potential harm they can cause has been well documented in social psychology research. For example, Jones et al. (1984) discuss the psychological implications of social stigmas, which can result in negative self-perception and



decreased self-esteem for members of stigmatized groups. Similarly, Dovidio et al. (2010) discuss how stereotypes can lead to intergroup conflict and social inequality.

Racial or ethnic stereotypes can result in discrimination in various areas such as employment, housing, and education. Individuals from marginalized groups may be unfairly characterized as inferior, dangerous, or less capable due to these stereotypes. As a result, they may face systemic discrimination and be excluded from opportunities (Pager & Shepherd, 2008).

Studies have shown that people are less likely to hire, promote, or provide favourable evaluations to individuals who belong to stigmatized groups (Crosby, Bromley, & Saxe, 1980; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990). Stereotypes can also influence interpersonal interactions, with people who hold negative stereotypes being less likely to initiate or maintain contact with members of the stereotyped group (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1991).

Gender stereotypes can also affect the workplace, particularly with regards to women. Women often encounter stereotypes that depict them as less competent, less ambitious, or unsuitable for leadership positions. These stereotypes can contribute to the "glass ceiling" effect, where women face barriers in advancing their careers, and also contribute to the gender pay gap (Heilman, 2012).

Moreover, stereotypes can affect cognitive processes, such as memory and attention. For example, research has shown that people are more likely to remember information that is consistent with their stereotypes than information that is inconsistent with their stereotypes (Hilton & von Hippel, 1996). Additionally, people who hold stereotypes may pay more attention to information that is consistent with their stereotypes and ignore information that is inconsistent with their stereotypes (Devine, 1989).

## 2 Stereotypes in films

### 2.1 Clichés and stereotypes in films

Clichés in films are overused and unoriginal ideas or expressions that often perpetuate stereotypes. Clichés can be also defined as repetitive and predictable plotlines or character. These clichés can be seen in various aspects of films, including plotlines, character tropes, and visual representations. They can be seen in various aspects of films, including plotlines, character tropes, and visual representations. These stereotypes can limit the representation of diverse identities. For example, the "damsel in distress" cliché portrays women as helpless and in need of male rescue, reinforcing traditional gender roles and expectations (Smith, 2018). This cliché is often seen in action and adventure films where the female character serves as the motivation or reward for the male protagonist's heroic actions. Similarly, the "black best friend" cliché portrays characters of colour as partners to white protagonists, providing comedic relief or support but lacking their own depth and agency (Morris, 2017). Similarly, the "white saviour" cliché portrays white individuals as heroes who save people of colour from their problems, reinforcing the notion of white superiority and paternalism (Dyer, 1986). These clichés can perpetuate harmful stereotypes about women and people of colour, limiting their representation and reinforcing narrow and biased perspectives in films.

Stereotypes in films can also involve biased and simplistic portrayals of individuals or groups based on their identity characteristics. For example, racial stereotypes in films often portray people of colour as exotic, dangerous, or inferior, perpetuating harmful and dehumanizing narratives (Guerrero, 1993). These stereotypes can contribute to the marginalization and discrimination of these people of colour, perpetuating harmful beliefs and attitudes in society. Similarly, gender stereotypes in films can be prevalent, such as the "damsel in distress" cliché mentioned earlier, or the "femme fatale" stereotype that portrays women as seductive and manipulative characters (Mulvey, 1975). Another one is the "manic pixie dream girl" stereotype, which portrays women as whimsical and eccentric characters whose sole purpose is to inspire or change the male protagonist (Sharma, 2015). These stereotypes limit the representation of women and contribute to the perpetuation of gender biases and inequalities.

## 2.2 Types of stereotypes in films

Stereotypes in films can be categorized into different types based on the identity characteristics that they portray. Some common types of stereotypes in films include racial stereotypes, gender stereotypes, sexual orientation stereotypes, religious stereotypes, and disability stereotypes (Wang, 2016).

Racial stereotypes in films often involve the portrayal of people of colour as one-dimensional and homogenous groups, perpetuating harmful beliefs and attitudes towards them (Dines & Humez, 2013). For example, the portrayal of African Americans as criminals or gangster in action films, or the portrayal of Asian Americans as perpetual foreigners or martial arts experts, are common racial stereotypes in films that have been criticized for their lack of nuance and accuracy (Hunt, Ramón, & Villarejo, 2018). These stereotypes reinforce harmful prejudices and contribute to the marginalisation and discrimination of people of all backgrounds.

Gender stereotypes in films often involve the portrayal of women and men in traditional and limiting roles, reinforcing gender norms and expectations (Lauzen & Dozier, 2017). For example, the portrayal of women as overly emotional, overly sexualized characters or also, as it used to be in society, women created only for the household, women perpetually locked up in the kitchen, women with no opinion and forced to under-serve their husbands. Otherwise, the portrayal of men as dominant and aggressive characters or heroic and redemptive character types, the men who came to change the world are common gender stereotypes in films that confirm harmful views about gender roles and behaviour. (Beasley & Standley, 2002). These stereotypes can limit the representation of feminine and masculine identities and reinforce gender inequalities.

Sexual orientation stereotypes are stereotypes, which have gradually come to the surface over the last decade. A stereotype or more started to form, considering sexual orientation of the characters and society in general. Films often involve the portrayal of LGBTQ+ characters in many various ways. People from LGBTQ+ community are often referred to as one-dimensional and stereotypical caricatures (Wahlstrom, 2019). For example, the portrayal of LGBTQ+ characters as flamboyant and sassy, or as tragic and doomed characters, are common sexual orientation stereotypes in films that maintain damaging and outdated views about LGBTQ+ individuals (Ryan, 1992). These stereotypes contribute to discrimination against LGBTQ+ people and limit their representation in films.

There is a prevalent stereotype that emerged during the era of increased societal acceptance of diverse sexual orientations, when the notion of love and relationships extended beyond those between people of opposite genders to encompass individuals of all genders and sexual orientations. This stereotype involves the inclusion of at least one or two representatives from the LGBTQ+ community in movies, which has become a modern trend or even a perceived necessity in films released over the past five years. Over time, this representation has become an expected and ingrained stereotype among audiences (González-López, 2018).

Religious stereotypes in films often involve portraying people from certain religious groups as one-dimensional and often negative characters. (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). For example, the portrayal of Muslims as terrorists or Middle Eastern characters as violent and barbaric, or the portrayal of Jewish characters as greedy and cunning, are common religious stereotypes in films that may discriminate and distort the view of certain religious groups. (Shaheen, 2008). These stereotypes can contribute to the stigmatization and discrimination of individuals from these religious groups, reinforcing harmful biases and prejudices.

Disability stereotypes in films often involve the portrayal of individuals with disabilities as pitiable or inspirational, perpetuating harmful and ableist attitudes towards people with disabilities (Shakespeare, 2010). For example, the portrayal of individuals with disabilities as objects of sympathy or as "supercrips" who overcome their disabilities and achieve extraordinary feats, are common disability stereotypes in films that limit the representation of individuals with disabilities and reinforce harmful narratives about their abilities and worth (Longmore, 2003). These stereotypes can create discrimination of people with disabilities and can strengthen beliefs and practices in society that affect people with disabilities.

### 2.3 Function of stereotypes in films

Stereotypes in films serve various functions, ranging from narrative conventions and storytelling techniques to reinforcing societal norms and expectations. One function of stereotypes in films is to provide familiar and easily recognizable characters and storylines that audiences can easily understand and relate to (Katz & Shotz, 2018). For example, the portrayal of the "nerdy" character in high school films or the "bad boy" character in romantic films are stereotypes that audiences are familiar with, and they can quickly grasp the character's role and

function in the story. These stereotypes can be seen as narrative conventions that help create structure and cohesion in films and facilitate their audience's viewing and enjoyment.

Stereotypes in films also serve as shorthand representations of certain groups or identities, conveying societal norms, expectations, and biases (Lippman, 2007). For example, the portrayal of the "strong and independent" female character or the "mysterious and dangerous" character of colour are stereotypes that express certain social expectations and prejudices about gender and race. These stereotypes can reinforce existing social norms and expectations and shape audience perceptions and attitudes towards certain groups or identities.

Furthermore, stereotypes in films can also be used for comedic purposes, often relying on exaggerated or exaggerated portrayals of certain groups or identities for comedic effect (Kawamoto, 2015). For example, the portrayal of the "dumb blonde" character or the "clumsy helper" character are stereotypes that are often used for comedic relief in films. However, such comedic use of stereotypes can be harmful because it reinforces negative views and attitudes towards certain groups or identities and strengthens toxic prejudices and biases in society, and that can lead to judgement of the individuals or groups, which are portrayed in movies in stereotypical point of view.

### 3 Stereotypes in romantic films

#### 3.1 Typical features of romantic films

Romantic films have been a beloved genre in cinema for decades, captivating audiences with their heart-warming stories of love and affection. From classic Hollywood romances to contemporary romantic comedies, these films often follow a set of common features that contribute to their enduring popularity (Merskin, 2013).

One of the key features of romantic films is the portrayal of romantic relationships as an idealized form of love. According to Belsey (2017), romantic films often present an idealized version of love, where the protagonists are portrayed as perfect, and their love is depicted as pure and all-encompassing. This idealized love is often characterized by grand gestures, such as passionate kisses, heartfelt declarations of love, and dramatic reunions, which serve to create a sense of awe and wonder for the audience.

Moreover, romantic films often depict the protagonists as overcoming various obstacles to be together, such as societal norms, family disapproval, or personal struggles. This can be seen in classic romantic films such as *Romeo and Juliet* (1597), where the titular characters defy their feuding families to be together, or in modern romantic comedies like *Bridget Jones's Diary* (1996), where the protagonist navigates through self-doubt and societal pressures to find true love. This theme of overcoming obstacles resonates with audiences, as it reflects the universal desire for love to triumph against all odds.

Another common feature of romantic films is the emphasis on emotions and feelings. Romantic films often delve deep into the emotional lives of the characters, exploring their inner thoughts, desires, and vulnerabilities. This is evident in films like *The Notebook* (1996), where the characters' emotions are central to the story, and the film elicits strong emotional responses from the audience through its poignant portrayal of love and loss. Romantic films often use visual and auditory cues, such as soft lighting, melodious music, and close-up shots of characters' facial expressions, to evoke emotions and create a romantic atmosphere (Bordwell, 2013). These emotional elements draw the audience into the story and create a sense of emotional connection, making romantic films an immersive cinematic experience.

Furthermore, romantic films often depict love as a transformative force that has the power to heal and change individuals for the better. This can be seen in films like *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), where the power of love transforms the Beast into a prince, or in *Silver Linings*

*Playbook* (2008), where the love between the two protagonists helps them overcome their mental health challenges. This portrayal of love as a transformative force reinforces the idea that love can have a profound impact on individuals, inspiring them to become better versions of themselves.

Throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, the typical features of romantic films have evolved, reflecting changes in societal norms, cultural values, and technological advancements. This part aims to explore and analyse the typical features of romantic films in the 20th and 21st centuries, highlighting the shifts in themes, styles, and representations of romance in these two distinct eras of cinema.

### 3.1.1 Romantic films in the 20th century

According to Wohlwend (2019), romantic films of the 20th century tended to feature conventional gender roles, with male protagonists pursuing female love interests. These films commonly portrayed heterosexual relationships and followed a predictable narrative structure, emphasizing the development of romantic love between the main characters. The focus was often on an idealized and unrealistic depiction of love, including grand gestures of love and happy endings. These films typically reinforced traditional societal norms and values, presenting a heteronormative and often simplistic view of romantic relationships.

During the 20th century, classic Hollywood romance films were a prominent feature of cinema, characterized by their extravagant production, featuring glamorous stars, and epic love stories that appealed to audiences. The main characters in these films were often depicted as idealized versions of lovers, with a focus on the grand gestures of love, and an emphasis on romantic ideals that were often unattainable for most viewers (Hill, 2003).

Romantic films have been a beloved genre in cinema for decades, captivating audiences with their heart-warming stories of love and affection (Rusu, 2016). The 20th century saw the emergence and evolution of romantic films, which were characterized by distinct features that defined the genre during this era. Classic Hollywood romance was one of the notable characteristics of romantic films in the 20th century, with films known for their lavish productions, glamorous stars, and epic love stories that captured the imagination of audiences (Rusu, 2016). These films often portrayed larger-than-life characters who embodied ideals of love and romance that were out of reach for many viewers (Rusu, 2016). Despite their idealized

portrayal of romance, these films were popular among audiences and played a significant role in shaping societal norms and values related to romantic relationships (Rusu, 2016).

One prominent feature of romantic films in the 20th century is the portrayal of idealized love and relationships. Romantic films often presented an idealized version of love, where the characters fall deeply in love at first sight, overcome various obstacles, and ultimately achieve a perfect union. This idealized portrayal of love was often depicted through visually stunning settings, lavish costumes, and grand gestures, creating a sense of fantasy and escapism for the audience (Smith, 2009). Later there became to be an ideal of perfect relationship without any difficulties, which have differed in many ways from the reality. For example, in the classic romantic film *Gone with the Wind* (1939), directed by Victor Fleming, the relationship between the protagonists, Scarlett O'Hara and Rhett Butler, is depicted as a passionate and tumultuous love story set against the backdrop of the Civil War. The movie portrays a romanticized view of love, where intense passion and desire take precedence over societal norms and obstacles, resulting in a grand and epic love story.

Another typical feature of romantic films in the 20th century is the emphasis on gender roles and stereotypes. Traditional gender roles were often portrayed in romantic films, with male characters typically depicted as assertive, confident, and pursuing the female characters, who were often portrayed as passive, delicate, and in need of protection (Nelmes, 2012). These gender roles and stereotypes were often reinforced through the depiction of traditional gender norms, such as the male character taking on the role of the provider and protector, while the female character's primary goal was to find love and be in a romantic relationship. For instance, in the romantic film *Pretty Woman* (1990), directed by Garry Marshall, the female protagonist, Vivian, is portrayed as a vulnerable yet desirable character in need of rescue by the male protagonist, Edward, who is portrayed as a wealthy and powerful businessman. The film perpetuates traditional gender roles with the male character taking on the dominant role and the female character playing the submissive role, reinforcing gender stereotypes prevalent in romantic films of that time (Corber, 2001).

Furthermore, the portrayal of love and romance in 20th century romantic films was often intertwined with societal and cultural contexts of that era. Romantic films reflected the social and cultural values, norms, and expectations of the time period in which they were made, providing a window into the attitudes and beliefs about love, relationships, and gender roles during that era (Kaplan, 1987). For example, during the 1950s, the era of post-war conservatism



in the United States, romantic films often portrayed the idealized image of a perfect nuclear family, with traditional gender roles and heterosexual relationships as the norm. The films of this era, such as *An Affair to Remember* (1957) portray the characters' pursuit of true love and an idealized vision of a perfect romantic relationship as their ultimate objective.

The emergence and evolution of romantic films during the 20th century were marked by certain features that defined the genre of romantic films during this period. According to Bannister (2016), these features included the portrayal of idealized love and relationships, emphasis on gender roles and stereotypes, and the reflection of societal and cultural contexts of the time period. These films often presented an idealized version of love, with visually stunning settings, lavish costumes, and grand gestures that created a sense of fantasy and escapism for the audience. Traditional gender roles and stereotypes were often reinforced, with male characters taking on dominant roles and female characters playing submissive roles. Moreover, romantic films of the 20th century were also influenced by the societal and cultural values of the time, reflecting the attitudes and beliefs about love, relationships, and gender roles prevalent during that era (Bannister, 2016).

### 3.1.2 Romantic films in the 21st century

In recent years, the genre of romantic films has seen a significant evolution, reflecting the changing social and cultural landscape of the 21st century. According to Shang and Gao (2020), modern romantic films have departed from the idealized and simplistic portrayals of romance that were prevalent in the 20th century. Instead, contemporary romantic films focus on more realistic, varied, and nuanced depictions of love and relationships. There is a greater emphasis on inclusivity, representation, and authenticity, with diverse characters, unconventional storylines, and complex emotional dynamics. This shift in the genre of romantic films reflects the changing attitudes and values of modern society towards love and relationships, providing a more inclusive representation of romantic relationships in the 21st century (Shang & Gao, 2020).

One notable change in the genre of romantic films has been the departure from traditional gender roles, with a focus on more diverse representations of romantic relationships (Zhang, 2019). There has been an increased emphasis on inclusivity and representation, with films depicting LGBTQ+ relationships, interracial relationships, and unconventional forms of

romance. Films such as *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) and *Call Me by Your Name* (2017) have garnered critical acclaim for their touching and realistic portrayals of love beyond the traditional heteronormative framework.

Romantic films in the 21st century have moved towards more realistic and nuanced portrayals of love and relationships, with a greater emphasis on exploring the complexities of human emotions and the realities of modern love (Shang & Gao, 2020). This marks a shift away from idealized and simplistic depictions of romance that were common in the 20th century. Films such as *Blue Valentine* (2010) and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004) have received critical acclaim for their raw and emotionally honest portrayals of love, showcasing the struggles and conflicts that come with romantic relationships (Shang & Gao, 2020).

Furthermore, the influence of technology has also been a significant factor in shaping the portrayal of romance in contemporary films. The rise of social media, online dating, and virtual communication has changed the dynamics of romantic relationships, and these changes are reflected in modern romantic films. Films like *Her* (2013) and *You've Got Mail* (1998) depict the impact of technology on romance, exploring themes of virtual connections, digital intimacy, and the challenges of navigating relationships in the digital age. A certain unforced promotion of social media for the purpose of dating and connecting is therefore created, in that the film offers an ideal scenario of finding love online. (Smith, 2021)

Another notable feature of 21st century romance films is the growing emphasis on diversity and representation of different races, identities, groups of people from different backgrounds, etc. There is a growing awareness and demand for more inclusive and diverse portrayals of romance in films, with an emphasis on representation of different cultures, races, sexual orientations, and identities. Films such as *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018) and *The Big Sick* (2017) have been praised for their diverse casts and authentic portrayal of cultural nuances in romantic relationships, highlighting the changing landscape of romance in contemporary cinema. However, this feature could lead to idealizing and highlighting only the good features of the mentioned groups, distorted representation of different communities and races can result in biased behaviour of people towards previously mentioned groups. (Smith, 2023)

In addition, there has been a shift towards unconventional narrative structures and storytelling techniques in romantic films of the 21st century. Filmmakers have been experimenting with non-linear narratives, fragmented storytelling, and unique visual styles to capture the complexities of modern love. Films like *500 Days of Summer* (2009) and *La La Land* (2016)

have gained popularity for their innovative approach to storytelling, challenging traditional romantic tropes and providing fresh and unique perspectives on love and relationships. (500 Days of Summer, 2009; La La Land, 2016)

The portrayal of female characters in romantic films has also evolved in the 21st century, with a move towards more empowered and independent female protagonists who are not solely defined by their romantic relationships (Kulkarni, 2020). Female characters in contemporary romantic films are often portrayed as strong, multi-dimensional individuals with their own agency, desires, and aspirations. Films like *Bridget Jones's Diary* (2001) and *The Proposal* (2009) depict female characters who are complex, flawed, and relatable, breaking away from traditional gender roles and providing a more progressive and inclusive representation of women in romantic films.

### 3.2 Typical stereotypes in romantic films

Romantic films have been a popular genre in cinema for many years, captivating audiences with tales of love, passion, and relationships. However, despite their widespread appeal, romantic films often rely on stereotypical portrayals of characters, relationships, and gender roles. These stereotypes can perpetuate unrealistic expectations of love and relationships and reinforce harmful gender norms. This part will provide typical stereotypes in romantic films and how they are depicted and their potential impact on audiences. (Greer, 2016)

One common stereotype in romantic films is the portrayal of gender roles that conform to traditional norms. Women are often depicted as passive, dependent, and emotional, while men are portrayed as assertive, dominant, and protective (Karam & Gökçearsan, 2018). For example, female characters are often shown as “lady in distress” who need to be saved by male characters, reinforcing the stereotype of women as weak and in need of male protection (Branston & Stafford, 2010). The men characters are usually portrayed as physically attractive, financially successful, and possessing almost supernatural qualities, such as unwavering charm, intelligence, and confidence. He is often shown as the epitome of masculinity, embodying traditional gender norms, and sweeping the female protagonist off her feet. This perpetuates gender stereotypes where women are expected to be vulnerable and seek emotional fulfilment through romantic relationships, while men are expected to be assertive and take the lead in pursuing romantic partners. For instance, in the film *Twilight* (2008), the female protagonist,

Bella Swan, is often portrayed as passive, fragile, and in constant need of protection from the male protagonist, Edward Cullen. This reinforces traditional gender roles where women are expected to be submissive and reliant on men for their emotional well-being, rather than being portrayed as independent and empowered individuals.

Moreover, female characters in romantic films are often portrayed as overly emotional and sensitive, while male characters are shown as rational and logical. This reinforces the stereotype of women being overly emotional and irrational, while men are expected to be composed and level-headed (Tasker, 2001). Such portrayals can perpetuate harmful gender stereotypes and limit the representation of diverse and complex gender identities in romantic films.

Another stereotype in romantic films is the idealized portrayal of romantic relationships. Romantic films often depict a fantasy version of love and romance, with exaggerated gestures, unrealistic standards, and a focus on physical appearance and material possessions. Grand romantic gestures such as serenades, extravagant gifts, and sweeping declarations of love are often depicted as the norm, creating unrealistic expectations for romantic relationships (Karam & Gökçearslan, 2018). These idealized portrayals can contribute to the perpetuation of unrealistic and unattainable standards of romance, leading to dissatisfaction or disappointment in real-life relationships when they do not meet these exaggerated standards.

Many romantic films promote the idea that love is all you need and that it can overcome any obstacle or challenge. This "love conquers all" stereotype can be seen in films where characters' problems are quickly resolved by their romantic relationship, often without addressing real-life complexities and conflicts that can arise in relationships. (Lipman and Kosloff, 2018) For example, in the film *The Notebook* (2004), the main characters' love for each other is portrayed as transcending all obstacles, including social class differences, family disapproval, and even memory loss. This idealized portrayal of love can create unrealistic expectations among audiences, leading to disappointment and dissatisfaction in real-life relationships where challenges are not easily overcome by love alone.

According to Warner (1993), many romantic films perpetuate heteronormativity, which upholds the assumption that heterosexuality is the norm and marginalizes other sexual orientations from mainstream narratives. This can reinforce the societal expectation that romantic relationships are primarily heterosexual, disregarding the diversity of sexual orientations and relationships beyond the binary gender norms. For instance, in the film *Bridget Jones's Diary* (2001), the central focus is on the heterosexual romantic relationship between

Bridget Jones and Mark Darcy, while the only LGBTQ+ character, Tom, is portrayed as a comedic companion with a limited role in the story. This exclusion of LGBTQ+ characters and relationships from mainstream romantic films can contribute to the marginalization of LGBTQ+ individuals and perpetuate heteronormative beliefs (Warner, 1993).

In recent years, a stereotype of the opposite meaning of the aforementioned issues concerning the LGBTQ+ community has emerged. It is no longer an under-representation or mockery of the LGBTQ+ community that is the problem, but rather their presence in contemporary films is so common that it has become a stereotype. A certain representation and positive contribution from members of that community is therefore expected. (Ismail, 2020)

It is important for filmmakers to critically examine and challenge these stereotypes in romantic films to promote more diverse and inclusive representations of love and relationships. This can involve portraying characters with more depth and complexity, challenging traditional gender roles, depicting realistic and healthy relationships that address real-life complexities, and including LGBTQ+ characters and relationships in mainstream narratives. For example, films that depict healthy and equitable relationships where individuals of all genders have agency, emotions are depicted in a nuanced manner, and diverse sexual orientations are represented can help challenge and break free from these stereotypes (Tasker, 2001).

Audiences can play a crucial role in combating harmful stereotypes present in romantic films by critically engaging with the messages and representations portrayed (Niemer & Mohr, 2021). Being aware of such stereotypes can enable individuals to challenge and reject them, thus promoting more diverse and inclusive depictions of love and relationships. By doing so, audiences can encourage the film industry to create more accurate and representative portrayals of romance and relationships.

### 3.2.1 Generally expected stereotypes

Romantic films have the potential to perpetuate societal stereotypes despite being a popular genre in cinema. It is essential to recognize the commonly perpetuated stereotypes in romantic films and acknowledge the need for more inclusive and diverse representation in this genre. (Lipman & Kosloff, 2018).

Gender stereotypes are widely present in romantic films, particularly with regard to the portrayal of women as vulnerable and dependent on men for their happiness and fulfillment

(Lipman & Kosloff, 2018). This is exemplified in films like *Cinderella* (1950), where the female protagonist is portrayed as a passive victim who requires the rescue and validation of a male counterpart. Such depictions perpetuate harmful gender norms and reinforce traditional power dynamics in relationships.

A common stereotype in romantic films is the portrayal of women as passive, waiting for a man to save them or take their breath away. This reinforces traditional gender roles where women are expected to be submissive and dependent on men. A study on gender roles and stereotypes in Disney films conducted by Martin (2016) found that female characters are often defined by their physical appearance and relationships with men rather than their individuality and independence.

In many romantic movies, men are often depicted as being the aggressive pursuer of women, even when their behaviour crosses the line into harassment. For example, in the film *The Notebook* (2004), the male lead repeatedly pursues the female lead despite her initial rejection, ultimately leading to a romantic relationship. This perpetuates the harmful notion that persistent pursuit is acceptable in romantic relationships, even when it disregards the other person's boundaries (Lipman & Kosloff, 2018).

Romantic films often depict men as emotionally detached and uninterested in commitment, while women are portrayed as seeking long-term relationships. For instance, the film *He's Just Not That into You* (2009) portrays women as obsessing over men who are not interested in them, perpetuating the stereotype that women are clingy and require a man's affection to be happy (Savage, 2017).

Romantic movies also tend to perpetuate racial stereotypes, often by portraying characters of different races in limited and stereotypical ways. For instance, characters of colour are often relegated to supporting roles or portrayed as exotic or overly sexualized. In the movie *Memoirs of a Geisha* (2005), Japanese culture and geisha identity are misrepresented and fetishized, perpetuating harmful stereotypes about Asian women. (Pang, 2006)

Moreover, romantic movies often lack representation of interracial relationships, further reinforcing the notion that romantic relationships should occur within the same race. This can contribute to the erasure of diverse relationships and promote homogeneity in romantic portrayals (Higgins, 2019).

In recent years, there has been a push for more diverse and inclusive representation in romantic movies. Films like *Love, Simon* (2018) and *The Half of It* (2020) have showcased LGBTQ+ relationships, challenging traditional notions of gender and sexuality. Katz and Earp (2019) argue that the media has a powerful role to play in shaping societal attitudes towards same-sex relationships, and that positive representation can help to reduce discrimination and promote acceptance.

### 3.2.2 The development of stereotypes

Stereotypes have been present in romantic films since the beginning of the genre. As the genre has evolved over time, some progress has been made in challenging traditional gender roles in recent years, many of the same stereotypes persist.

The earliest romantic movies, such as *It Happened One Night* (1934) and *Gone with the Wind* (1939), often depicted women as homemakers whose main goal in life was to get married and start a family. In contrast, male leads were often portrayed as confident and successful, with high-paying jobs or positions of power (Leyda, 1972). These early movies perpetuated gender stereotypes by reinforcing the idea that women are passive objects of desire, while men are active and successful.

In more recent times, there has been some progress in challenging traditional gender roles in romantic movies. However, many of the same stereotypes persist. Women are still often depicted as passive and in need of rescue, to which points the exemplary stereotype the "damsel in distress". While men are still portrayed as confident and successful. According to research by Rudman and Glick (2010), romantic movies often perpetuate traditional gender roles, such as men as providers and women as caretakers. They argue that these stereotypes can be particularly damaging for young viewers who are still forming their beliefs about relationships and gender.

In recent years, there has been some progress in challenging traditional gender roles in romantic movies. For example, the film *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018) depicted a strong and independent female lead who pursued her career goals and challenged the expectations of her family and society (Chi, 2020). Similarly, the movie *Love, Simon* (2018) featured a gay male lead, challenging the idea that romantic movies must only feature heterosexual relationships.

Furthermore, romantic movies often present a narrow and idealized view of love and relationships that can be damaging to real-life relationships. Viewers can create unrealistic ideas about relationships and try to find their way to complex romantic dynamics in real life. (Ward & Friedman, 2006).



## 4 Analysis of chosen romantic films

### 4.1 Introduction to analytic part

This analysis aims to critically examine the portrayal of stereotypes in popular romantic films, with a focus on gender roles, class distinctions, disability, etc. For the analysis I have chosen six romantic films from various decades of 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century. Films representing the 20<sup>th</sup> century are *Roman Holiday* (1953), *Love Story* (1970), *Dirty Dancing* (1987) and *Pretty Woman* (1990). For the representatives of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have I chosen films *Me Before You* (2016) and *The Half of It* (2020). The films were selected according to the genre, time of production, popularity, and the presence of stereotypes.

The analysis will first provide an overview of the mentioned films and their features a characteristic. Later in the analysis are portrayed the stereotypes mentioned in the certain movies and at the end of this part there is into the portrayal of gender roles, class distinctions, and disability in each film, examining how these portrayals reinforce or challenge stereotypes.

### 4.2 Characteristics of selected films

#### 4.2.1 Roman Holiday

*Roman Holiday* (1953) is a film that stands out as one of the most beloved romantic films of all time. This timeless classic directed by William Wyler tells the story of Princess Ann, played by the incomparable Audrey Hepburn, who embarks on a journey of self-discovery while on a diplomatic visit to Rome. The film, set in the 1950s, takes viewers on a visual journey through the city's stunning architecture, iconic landmarks, and vibrant culture. (IMDb, n.d.)

One of the most remarkable characteristics of *Roman Holiday* (1953) is its ability to transport viewers to another time and place. Through the lens of the film, the audience gets a glimpse into the post-war era of Italy and the bustling city of Rome. From the Colosseum to the Trevi Fountain, the film offers a stunning visual experience that captivates audiences.

Perhaps the most significant characteristic of *Roman Holiday* (1953), however, is its portrayal of the transformative power of love. Throughout the film, we see the developing relationship between Princess Ann and Joe Bradley. As they explore the city together, they fall in love, despite the many obstacles that stand in their way. Through their journey, we see how love can

transcend social class, status, and expectations. We witness the transformation of the characters as they learn to embrace their true selves and their desires.

The whole film is filled with humour and wit. The author used clever one-liners and witty banter that keeps the audience engaged from beginning to end. Gregory Peck's portrayal of Joe Bradley, the American journalist, is spot-on and provides the perfect foil to Audrey Hepburn's endearing and innocent performance as Princess Ann. The film's humour is a perfect balance to its more serious themes, making it an all-around crowd-pleaser.

The film's themes of self-discovery and personal transformation are timeless and resonant, making *Roman Holiday* (1953) a film that continues to captivate audiences to this day. Its message of living life to the fullest, despite the challenges that come with it, is one that has inspired generations. As a result, the film has become a symbol of hope, joy, and romance that stands the test of time.

#### 4.2.2 Love Story

*Love Story* (1970) is a classic romantic drama film that was released in 1970, directed by Arthur Hiller and starring Ryan O'Neal and Ali MacGraw. The movie is based on a novel of the same name by Erich Segal, who also wrote the screenplay. *Love Story* (1970) tells the story of a wealthy Harvard Law student and a working-class Radcliffe College student who fall in love and marry despite opposition from their families.

One of the key characteristics of *Love Story* (1970) is its emotional depth. The film explores themes of love, loss, sacrifice, and class differences, and does so with great sensitivity and nuance. The relationship between the two main characters, Oliver, and Jenny, is portrayed with great tenderness and realism, and the chemistry between the actors is tangible. Their love story is both romantic and tragic, and audiences cannot help but be moved by their journey.

The film opens with the iconic line "What can you say about a twenty-five-year-old girl who died?" and from this moment on, the audience knows that they are in for an emotional ride. We are then taken back in time to when Oliver and Jenny first met and fell in love. Despite coming from very different backgrounds, the two are drawn to each other and soon become inseparable.

As the story progresses, we see the challenges faced by the couple as they try to make their relationship work. Oliver's father, who disapproves of the match, cuts him off financially, forcing Oliver to take a job and live modestly. Meanwhile, Jenny struggles to adapt to Oliver's

wealthy lifestyle and the expectations of his family. Despite these obstacles, the couple remains deeply in love and decides to marry.

However, tragedy strikes when Jenny is diagnosed with a terminal illness. The couple's love is put to the ultimate test as they face the prospect of losing each other. Their love for each other shines through in their determination to make the most of the time they have left together. The emotional impact of the film is heightened by the fact that we know from the opening scene that Jenny will not survive, and we are left to witness the heart-wrenching aftermath of her death.

Another characteristic of *Love Story* (1970) is its iconic soundtrack. The film features a score which includes the famous theme song "Where Do I Begin?" composed by Francis Lai (1970). This song has become synonymous with the film, and its haunting melody perfectly captures the bittersweet nature of Oliver and Jenny's love story. The score as a whole is simple, yet powerful, and adds an additional layer of emotional depth to the film.

*Love Story* (1970) is also notable for its timeless appeal. Despite being released over 50 years ago, the film's themes and characters remain relevant today. The movie's exploration of class differences and the challenges faced by young people in love are still relevant, and its depiction of the power of love to overcome obstacles is universal. *Love Story* (1970) has remained a classic of the romance genre and is still beloved by audiences around the world.

#### 4.2.3 Dirty Dancing

*Dirty Dancing* (1987) is a classic romantic drama film that was released in 1987. Directed by Emile Ardolino and written by Eleanor Bergstein. Set in the summer of 1963, the film follows the story of a young girl named Frances 'Baby' Houseman, played by Jennifer Grey, who falls in love with a charismatic dance instructor named Johnny Castle, played by Patrick Swayze, while on vacation with her family. *Dirty Dancing* (1987) has several characteristics that have made it a beloved film.

*Dirty Dancing* (1987) is known for its compelling storyline. The film tackles several themes, including class differences, love, and sexual awakening. The movie's plot is centred around Baby, a sheltered girl from a wealthy family, who is on vacation with her parents and sister at a resort in the Catskill Mountains. Baby discovers the world of dance through Johnny, a working-class dancer at the resort. She falls in love with him and learns how to dance. The story is told in a way that allows the audience to relate to the characters and their struggles. The movie

shows how Baby's relationships with her family and Johnny change as she discovers her sexuality and becomes more independent. The film's storyline is a classic coming-of-age tale that many people can relate to, and this is one of the reasons why the film has remained popular.

Another characteristic that makes *Dirty Dancing* (1987) a memorable film is the chemistry between the two lead actors, Jennifer Grey, and Patrick Swayze. Their on-screen chemistry is electric, and their performances are some of the bests in their respective careers. Grey's portrayal of Baby is endearing and relatable, while Swayze's performance as Johnny is charismatic and charming. The two actors' dance sequences are mesmerizing, and their chemistry helps to elevate the film's romantic tension. Their iconic dance scene is one of the most memorable moments in cinema history and has become a cultural phenomenon. The chemistry between Grey and Swayze is one of the primary reasons why *Dirty Dancing* (1987) has become a timeless classic.

This *Dirty Dancing* (1987) film is known for its incredible soundtrack. The movie's soundtrack is a compilation of songs from the 1960s and 1980s that perfectly capture the mood and atmosphere of the film. The soundtrack includes iconic songs. The music plays an essential role in the film and helps to set the tone for each scene. The songs are used to express the emotions of the characters, and they create a sense of nostalgia for the audience. The music also plays a significant role in the dance sequences, and it helps to make the scenes more impactful. The music from *Dirty Dancing* (1987) has become iconic, and many of the songs are still played and loved by fans today.

#### 4.2.4 Pretty Woman

*Pretty Woman* (1990) is a classic romantic movie that was released in 1990. It was directed by Garry Marshall and starred Richard Gere and Julia Roberts in the lead roles, and it became a huge hit. There are several characteristics of the movie that make it a timeless classic.

One of the most significant characteristics of *Pretty Woman* (1990) is its storyline. The movie tells the story of a wealthy businessman, Edward Lewis (Richard Gere), who hires a beautiful and charming prostitute, Vivian Ward (Julia Roberts), to be his companion for a week while he's in Los Angeles for business. What starts off as a purely transactional relationship gradually turns into something more meaningful as the two of them start to develop genuine feelings for each other. This storyline is one of the key reasons why *Pretty Woman* (1990) became such a

popular movie. The idea of a wealthy businessman falling in love with a prostitute was an unconventional and daring concept for a movie in the 1990s, but it worked incredibly well and struck a chord with audiences worldwide.

Another characteristic of *Pretty Woman* (1990) that contributed to its success was the chemistry between the two lead actors, Richard Gere, and Julia Roberts. Their on-screen chemistry was palpable, and their performances were nothing short of exceptional. Richard Gere played the role of the suave and sophisticated businessman perfectly, while Julia Roberts was the perfect choice for the role of the sassy, street-smart prostitute. The chemistry between the two actors was so natural and effortless that it made the movie even more enjoyable to watch.

The movie also has a great soundtrack, which is another characteristic that makes it stand out. The soundtrack features songs from some of the biggest artists of the 80s and early 90s. The songs are all perfectly placed in the movie, and they help to enhance the emotions and feelings that the characters are experiencing.

*Pretty Woman* (1990) also has a strong theme of transformation. Vivian's character undergoes a significant transformation throughout the movie. At the beginning of the movie, she's a prostitute who is struggling to make ends meet. However, as she spends more time with Edward, she starts to gain more confidence in herself and her abilities. She transforms from a timid and unsure woman into a confident and independent individual who is capable of achieving her dreams. This transformation is inspiring and empowering, and it's another reason why the movie has resonated with so many people over the years.

#### 4.2.5 Me Before You

*Me Before You* (2016) is a 2016 British-American romantic drama film directed by Thea Sharrock and adapted from the novel of the same name by Jojo Moyes. The movie tells the story of Louisa "Lou" Clark (Emilia Clarke), a young and quirky woman who takes a job as a caretaker for Will Traynor (Sam Claflin), a wealthy and successful man who became a quadriplegic after a motorcycle accident. The film follows their relationship as they grow closer and learn valuable lessons from one another.

One of the key characteristics of *Me Before You* (2016) is its portrayal of disability and the challenges faced by individuals who live with it. Will's accident leaves him with limited

mobility and unable to perform even the most basic tasks on his own. The movie provides an honest and unflinching look at the realities of life for people with disabilities, including the physical and emotional toll it can take on both the individual and their loved ones. It also sheds light on the obstacles faced by people with disabilities when it comes to accessibility and social inclusion.

The film also explores the themes of love, loss, and the pursuit of happiness. Lou and Will come from very different backgrounds, but they find common ground in their shared experiences of feeling stuck and unfulfilled in their lives. As they spend time together, they begin to develop feelings for each other, but their relationship is complicated by Will's desire to end his life through assisted suicide. The film raises important questions about the right to die and the ethics surrounding end-of-life care, while also showing the transformative power of human connection and the importance of living life to the fullest.

Another notable characteristic of *Me Before You* (2016) is the performances of the lead actors. Emilia Clarke, best known for her role as Daenerys Targaryen on "Game of Thrones," delivers a standout performance as Lou. She brings a sense of warmth and compassion to the character, while also conveying the frustration and desperation she feels as she struggles to find her place in the world. Sam Claflin, known for his work in "The Hunger Games" franchise, gives a nuanced and affecting performance as Will. He captures the character's bitterness and resentment at his situation, while also showing the vulnerability and tenderness that lies beneath his tough exterior.

In addition to the strong performances, the film's visual style is also worth noting. The cinematography and production design create a world that is both beautiful and melancholy, with a muted colour palette that reflects the emotional tone of the story. The use of music, particularly the haunting score by composer Craig Armstrong, adds an extra layer of depth and emotion to the film.

#### 4.2.6 The Half of It

*The Half of It* is a film that was released in 2020 and directed by Alice Wu. The film is a coming-of-age story that follows Ellie Chu, a high school student from a small town in America, who is asked to write love letters for a fellow student named Paul Munsky to his crush, Aster Flores. The film delves into themes of identity, friendship, and love, and has received critical acclaim for its originality, depth, and humour (Wu, 2020).

One of the main characteristics of *The Half of It* (2020) is its exploration of the complexities of identity. Ellie Chu is a Chinese American teenager who feels like an outsider in her small town. She is intelligent, introverted, and does not fit in with the other students at her high school. The film shows how Ellie struggles to navigate her own identity and figure out who she is. She is often asked to translate for her father, who speaks little English, and feels a sense of responsibility to her family and culture. At the same time, she is also trying to find her own voice and express herself in a way that feels authentic to her.

The film also explores the theme of friendship. Ellie and Paul's relationship is initially based on a transactional exchange, with Ellie writing love letters for Paul in exchange for money. However, as they continue to work together, they develop a deep friendship that is based on mutual respect and understanding. The film shows how friendships can develop in unexpected ways and how they can provide a sense of support and belonging.

Another characteristic of *The Half of It* (2020) is its exploration of love. The film does not follow the traditional tropes of the genre. The love story between Paul and Aster is not straightforward, and the film shows how love can be messy, complicated, and uncertain. Ellie is also in love with Aster, but the film does not reduce their relationship to a simple love triangle. Instead, it shows how love can be multifaceted and how it can take many forms.

The film's humour is another characteristic that sets it apart. *The Half of It* (2020) is a funny film that uses humour to explore serious themes. The characters are witty and sarcastic, and their interactions are often hilarious. The humour helps to lighten the tone of the film and makes it an enjoyable watch.

## 5 An analysis of stereotypes of selected films

### 5.1 Stereotypes portrayed in *Roman Holiday*

*Roman Holiday* (1953) is a timeless classic that has captured the hearts of audiences worldwide since its release in 1953. While the film is primarily known for its romantic storyline and stunning visuals of Rome, it also contains subtle stereotypes and societal norms of the era it was made. Through its portrayal of gender roles, social class, and cultural differences, *Roman Holiday* (1953) reveals the stereotypes that were prevalent in the 1950s.

One of the most notable stereotypes in the film is the traditional gender roles portrayed through Princess Ann and Joe Bradley. Princess Ann is depicted as a delicate, innocent, and helpless character who needs protection from the world. Joe, on the other hand, is portrayed as a strong, dominant, and protective figure. He is the one who takes charge of the situation and rescues Princess Ann when she finds herself in trouble. These gender roles were typical of the era, where women were expected to be dependent on men and men were expected to be the protectors and providers. The film perpetuates this stereotype by positioning Joe as the hero who saves Princess Ann from her sheltered life.

Another stereotype portrayed in *Roman Holiday* (1953) is the societal norms associated with social class. Princess Ann is a member of the royal family and is expected to follow a strict set of rules and regulations. She is not allowed to have personal freedom or the opportunity to live an ordinary life. Joe, on the other hand, represents the working class, a journalist who can live his life as he wishes. The film highlights the stark differences between these two worlds and emphasizes the importance of following societal norms based on one's social status. It reflects the societal values of the 1950s, where social class was a significant determinant of a person's life opportunities.

The film also portrays cultural stereotypes through its depiction of Italian culture. The film portrays Italy as a place of chaos, where people are loud, passionate, and live life in the moment. The film's portrayal of Italian culture perpetuates the stereotype of Italian people as passionate and unstructured. The film also emphasizes the stereotype of the "exotic other," where Italy is portrayed as a place of mystery and intrigue. These stereotypes reflect the values of the 1950s, where cultural differences were often exoticized and misunderstood.

However, despite the stereotypes portrayed in the film, *Roman Holiday* (1953) also subverts them in several ways. For instance, while Princess Ann is initially portrayed as a helpless



character, she eventually breaks free from her societal restrictions and embarks on a journey of self-discovery. Her journey reflects the changing values of the era, where women were beginning to challenge traditional gender roles and assert their independence. Similarly, Joe's character is also complex, as he is not just a hero but also someone who takes advantage of the situation to further his career. His character subverts the stereotype of the ideal man and highlights the complexity of human nature.

## 5.2 Stereotypes portrayed in Love Story

*Love Story* (1970) is a classic romance film that was released in 1970. The movie tells the story of Oliver Barrett, a wealthy Harvard law student, and Jennifer Cavalleri, a working-class girl studying music at Radcliffe College. The film portrays the couple's passionate and tumultuous relationship, which is ultimately cut short when Jennifer dies of leukemia. Despite the enduring popularity of the film, it has been criticized for perpetuating certain stereotypes.

One of the most notable stereotypes in *Love Story* (1970) is the portrayal of Jennifer as the typical "manic pixie dream girl." This term refers to a type of female character who exists solely to inspire and improve the life of a male protagonist, often through unconventional or whimsical behaviour. Jennifer fits this stereotype perfectly, with her quirky personality, love of literature, and artistic pursuits. She is portrayed as a free-spirited and independent woman who captures Oliver's heart and helps him to break free from the constraints of his wealthy upbringing. However, her character is underdeveloped, and we'll never know anything more about her than that she's Oliver's love. This reinforces the stereotype that women exist primarily as objects of male desire, rather than as complex individuals in their own right.

Another stereotype perpetuated by *Love Story* (1970) is the notion that true love involves sacrificing one's own dreams for the sake of the relationship. This is exemplified by Jennifer's decision to drop out of college and abandon her music career to marry Oliver. While this may be seen as a romantic gesture, it reinforces the idea that women should be willing to give up their own ambitions in order to support their partner's success. This message is problematic, as it suggests that women should be defined by their relationships with men, rather than by their own accomplishments and ambitions.

Furthermore, the film reinforces gender roles and stereotypes in its portrayal of Oliver as a wealthy, successful man who is expected to provide for his family, while Jennifer is relegated

to the role of a supportive wife and mother. This is exemplified by a scene in which Oliver presents Jennifer with a mink coat as a gift, implying that her worth is tied to his ability to provide material goods for her. Additionally, the film portrays Jennifer as the primary caregiver for their child, while Oliver is shown working long hours to support the family. This reinforces traditional gender roles and suggests that men are not expected to take on a significant role in raising children.

### 5.3 Stereotypes portrayed in *Dirty Dancing*

*Dirty Dancing* (1987) is a classic film that has remained popular for over three decades. The movie is known for its compelling storyline, iconic soundtrack, and the chemistry between the two lead actors. However, the film is known for portraying several stereotypes.

The first stereotype portrayed in the film is the "magical negro" trope. This is evident in the character of Tito Suarez, a Latin American musician who works at the resort. Tito is portrayed as a wise and mystical character who possesses knowledge and skills that are beyond that of the other characters in the film. Tito is also used to help the white characters in the film, particularly Baby, to achieve their goals. The use of the "magical negro" trope is problematic because it reinforces the idea that people of colour exist only to help white people and that they have no agency of their own.

The film also portrays the stereotype of the "bad boy with a heart of gold." This is evident in the character of Johnny Castle, who is a working-class dance instructor at the resort. Johnny is portrayed as a tough, streetwise character who is initially resistant to Baby's advances. However, as the film progresses, it becomes clear that Johnny has a sensitive and caring side, and he eventually falls in love with Baby. The stereotype reinforces the idea that women are attracted to men who are tough and rebellious, but who also have a sensitive and caring side. It also reinforces the idea that working-class men are more authentic and genuine than wealthy men.

Finally, the film portrays the stereotype of the "femme fatale." This is evident in the character of Penny Johnson, Johnny's dance partner. Penny is portrayed as a sultry, seductive woman who uses her sexuality to manipulate men. The stereotype reinforces the idea that women who are sexually assertive are dangerous and manipulative. It also reinforces the idea that women who use their sexuality to get what they want are morally corrupt.

#### 5.4 Stereotypes portrayed in *Pretty Woman*

*Pretty Woman* (1990), a romantic comedy movie released in 1990, tells the story of a wealthy businessman, Edward Lewis (Richard Gere), who hires a prostitute, Vivian Ward (Julia Roberts), to be his companion for a week while he is in Los Angeles for business. While the movie has been praised for its engaging storyline and memorable performances, it has also been criticized for the way it portrays certain stereotypes, particularly those related to gender and class.

One of the most prominent stereotypes portrayed in the movie is the “Prostitute with a heart of gold” stereotype. Vivian, the main female character, is a prostitute who is presented as being kind-hearted, loyal, and ultimately deserving of love and respect. Many criticize this stereotype for perpetuating the idea that sex work is something that only damaged, desperate women or women in need of rescue engage in. Additionally, it reinforces the idea that women must be sweet, submissive, and nurturing to be seen as worthy of love and affection.

Another stereotype that is perpetuated in *Pretty Woman* (1990) is the idea that women are solely defined by their appearance. Throughout the movie, Vivian is objectified and sexualized by the male characters, including Edward, who initially hires her for her looks and treats her as little more than an accessory. The movie reinforces the idea that a woman's worth is primarily determined by her physical attractiveness, rather than her intelligence, personality, or accomplishments. This stereotype is particularly damaging for young girls who grow up believing that their value as human beings is determined by their looks.

Furthermore, the movie also perpetuates stereotypes about class and wealth. Edward, the male protagonist, is portrayed as being wealthy, powerful, and successful, while Vivian is from a lower socio-economic class and is forced to engage in sex work in order to make ends meet. The movie suggests that money and social status are the key determinants of a person's value and worth. This reinforces the notion that those who are wealthy are inherently superior to those who are not, and that success is only achievable through wealth and status.

Moreover, the movie also perpetuates the stereotype that sex work is an easy and glamorous profession. Throughout the movie, Vivian is shown wearing designer clothes and jewellery, staying in luxury hotels, and having access to all the trappings of wealth and success. This depiction of sex work glosses over the harsh realities of the profession, including the risk of violence, exploitation, and disease. This glamourization of sex work can be damaging, as it can

lead to unrealistic expectations of what the job entails and can make it more difficult for sex workers to advocate for their rights and safety.

### 5.5 Stereotypes portrayed in *Me Before You*

*Me Before You* (2016) is a romantic drama film that portrays various stereotypes that are often associated with disabled individuals. While the film attempts to shed light on the challenges faced by quadriplegics, it also perpetuates some common misconceptions about disability.

One of the most significant stereotypes in the film is the notion that disabled people are a burden on their families and caregivers. Will's parents are shown struggling to come to terms with his disability, and they are portrayed as being emotionally and financially drained by his condition. Similarly, Lou's family is shown to be struggling financially, and her decision to take the job as a caretaker is driven by a need to support her family. This portrayal reinforces the image that disabled people are more of a burden than persons of natural value and worth.

Another stereotype portrayed in the film is the idea that disabled people are defined by their disabilities. Will's entire identity is shaped by his injury, and his character is reduced to little more than a tragic figure who is unable to experience the joys of life. Similarly, Lou's role in the film is to bring joy and purpose to Will's life, reinforcing the idea that disabled people need to be saved or rescued by able-bodied individuals.

The film also perpetuates the stereotype that disabled people are asexual or incapable of experiencing romantic love. Will's character is shown as being bitter and angry, and he initially resists Lou's attempts to form a romantic relationship. This portrayal reinforces the idea that disabled people are not desirable or worthy of romantic love, which is both untrue and harmful.

Furthermore, the film portrays disabled people as being limited in their abilities and interests. Will is shown as being a successful and ambitious businessman before his accident, but after becoming disabled, he is no longer able to pursue his dreams. This portrayal reinforces the idea that disabled people are unable to achieve their goals or contribute to society, which is both inaccurate and harmful.

While *Me Before You* (2016) attempts to portray the challenges faced by disabled individuals, its portrayal of stereotypes is damaging and confirms mistaken ideas about disability. The film's portrayal of disability as a burden reinforces negative attitudes towards disabled individuals,

and its reduction of disabled characters to tragic figures perpetuates the myth that disabled people are defined by their limitations.

### 5.6 Stereotypes portrayed in *The Half of It*

*The Half of It* (2020) is a coming-of-age film that explores themes of identity, friendship, and love. While the film has been praised for its originality and depth, it also portrays certain stereotypes that are worth examining.

One of the main stereotypes portrayed in *The Half of It* (2020) is the Asian-American stereotype. Ellie Chu, the main character, is a Chinese American teenager who lives in a small town in America. Throughout the film, she is portrayed as intelligent, hardworking, and reserved. While these are positive traits, they also perpetuate the stereotype of Asian Americans as being model minorities who excel academically but lack social skills. The film reinforces the idea that Asian Americans are outsiders in American society and struggle to fit in.

Another stereotype portrayed in *The Half of It* (2020) is the gay stereotype. The film portrays Paul Munsky, a high school athlete who is struggling to come to terms with his sexuality. He is shown as being clumsy, awkward, and unsure of himself. While these are common experiences for many people who are coming out, the film reinforces the stereotype that gay men are weak and effeminate. The film also perpetuates the idea that coming out is a traumatic experience that requires a lot of emotional labour.

The film also portrays the stereotype of the small town. The town in which the film is set is portrayed as being backwards, conservative, and narrow-minded. The people who live in the town are shown as being intolerant of anyone who is different from them. While this is a common stereotype of small towns, it is also a simplistic portrayal that does not capture the complexities of small-town life.

The film also reinforces gender stereotypes. The female characters in the film are portrayed as being emotional, sensitive, and nurturing. They are shown as being interested in romantic relationships and are often the objects of desire for male characters. The male characters, on the other hand, are portrayed as being confident, assertive, and aggressive. They are shown as being interested in sports and other traditionally masculine activities. While these gender stereotypes

are common in Hollywood films, they perpetuate harmful ideas about gender roles and limit the range of expression for both men and women.

*The Half of It* (2020) also reinforces the idea that love is always romantic. The film's central love story is between Paul and Aster, and it is portrayed as being the only meaningful love story in the film. While the film does explore the idea of platonic love, it does not give it the same weight as romantic love. This reinforces the idea that romantic love is the ultimate goal of all relationships and ignores the importance of friendships and other forms of love.

While *The Half of It* (2020) portrays certain stereotypes, it also subverts them in important ways. For example, while Ellie is portrayed as being reserved and introverted, she is also shown as being confident and independent. She is not afraid to speak her mind and is unapologetically herself. Similarly, while Paul is portrayed as being unsure of himself, he is also shown as being brave and willing to take risks to pursue his happiness.

In conclusion, *The Half of It* (2020) is a coming-of-age film that portrays certain stereotypes. While these stereotypes can be harmful, the film also subverts them in important ways. The film's message is one of acceptance and self-discovery, and it encourages viewers to be true to themselves and to embrace their individuality. *The Half of It* (2020) is a thoughtful and entertaining film that is sure to resonate with audiences of all ages.

## 6 Development of stereotypes across the certain time period

The development of stereotypes in movies is a long and complex history that has been shaped by many factors, including the social and cultural attitudes of the time, the commercial and economic interests of the film industry, and the changing political and social landscapes. From the early days of cinema, films have reflected and reinforced stereotypes that have limited representation for marginalized groups, but they have also been a powerful tool for challenging stereotypes and increasing representation for those who have historically been excluded from mainstream media.

One of the earliest and most pervasive stereotypes in cinema is the “damsel in distress” trope, which portrays women as helpless and in need of rescue by a male hero. This stereotype can be seen in films like *Roman Holiday* (1953) and *Love Story* (1970), both of which feature female protagonists who are dependent on male characters to achieve their goals. In *Roman Holiday* (1953), Princess Ann is initially portrayed as naive and sheltered, but she is ultimately liberated by the male reporter who shows her the world outside of her palace. Similarly, in *Love Story* (1970), Jenny is portrayed as fragile and in need of protection from her boyfriend, who ultimately sacrifices everything to be with her. The stereotype of “damsel in distress” is less common in today/s cinema than it used to be in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The increasing wave of feminist movement and the trend of woman capable to take care of herself has slightly replaced the mentioned old way of understanding women and femininity.

Another common stereotype in cinema is the “tough guy” trope, which portrays men as strong, aggressive, and dominant. This stereotype can be seen in films like *Dirty Dancing* (1987) and *Me Before You* (2016), both of which feature male protagonists who are physically powerful and in control of their surroundings. In *Dirty Dancing* (1987), Johnny is a confident and skilled dancer who takes charge of his relationships with both the female protagonist, Baby, and his colleagues at the resort where he works. In *Me Before You* (2016), Will is initially portrayed as a successful and powerful businessman, but his physical disability leads him to seek control over his life and ultimately make the decision to end it. The stereotype of the “tough guy” is an ever-present stereotype, portrayed in the film as one that women desire or are attracted to.

The “gold digger” stereotype is another common trope in cinema, particularly in romantic comedies like *Pretty Woman* (1990). This stereotype portrays women as materialistic and shallow, using their sexuality to manipulate men and gain access to wealth and power. In *Pretty*

Woman, Vivian is initially portrayed as a sex worker who is hired by a wealthy businessman, but she ultimately falls in love with him and proves her worth as a partner. This stereotype is in most of the cases not presented in the movies and one of the reasons could be the increasing political correctness of today's times.

However, not all films perpetuate negative stereotypes. In recent years, filmmakers have made efforts to challenge traditional gender and sexuality norms and increase representation for marginalized groups. *The Half of It* (2020), for example, features a complex and nuanced portrayal of LGBTQ+ characters, challenging stereotypes and increasing representation for the queer community.

Another important stereotype in cinema is the portrayal of racial and ethnic minorities. For much of cinema history, people of colour have been largely absent from mainstream films, and when they have been represented, they have often been reduced to one-dimensional stereotypes. Films like *Roman Holiday* (1953) and *Love Story* (1970) are examples of films that reinforce racial and ethnic stereotypes by portraying characters from other cultures as exotic and foreign. In these films, characters from different cultures are often portrayed as mysterious, inscrutable, or dangerous, perpetuating negative stereotypes and contributing to a culture of discrimination.

However, there have been many films that have challenged these stereotypes and worked to increase representation for people of colour. *Dirty Dancing* (1987), for example, features a diverse cast of characters from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, all of whom are portrayed as complex and multidimensional individuals.

In recent years, there has been a growing movement in the film industry to increase representation for people of colour and other marginalized groups. Films like *The Half of It* (2020) reflect this movement, portraying characters from different racial and ethnic backgrounds in complex and nuanced ways. By challenging traditional stereotypes and increasing representation for all groups, these films are helping to create a more diverse and inclusive film industry.

It is worth noting that the film industry is not the only source of stereotypes in our culture. Stereotypes are present in all forms of media, as well as in everyday interactions and social attitudes. However, films have a unique power to shape our perceptions of the world and influence the way we think about different groups of people. By challenging stereotypes and



increasing representation for marginalized groups, filmmakers have the potential to create a more inclusive and equitable society for all.

Overall, development of stereotypes in movies is a complex issue that has evolved over time. While early films perpetuated negative stereotypes and contributed to a culture of discrimination and exclusion, more recent films have challenged traditional stereotypes and increased representation for marginalized groups, ultimately leading to a more diverse and inclusive film industry. However, there is still much work to be done to ensure that all groups are represented fairly and accurately in cinema.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the development of romantic movies in the 20th and 21st centuries has been marked by a complex interaction between social and cultural attitudes, economic and commercial interests, and changing political and social landscapes. From the early days of cinema, romantic movies have reflected and reinforced stereotypes that have limited representation for marginalized groups, perpetuating a culture of discrimination and exclusion. However, they have also been a powerful tool for challenging stereotypes and increasing representation for those who have historically been excluded from mainstream media.

Analysis has shown that there are stereotypes that have persisted in films for decades, such as the stereotype of the "tough guy", which still appears in films today. There are also stereotypes that have almost disappeared, such as the stereotype of the "damsel in distress" or the "gold digger", the reasons for the disappearance could be women's independence and political correctness. However, there are also stereotypes that have appeared in the 21st century, and these are stereotypes concerning the LGBTQ+ group, which could be both positive or negative, as mentioned in thesis.

The six films mentioned in this thesis - *Roman Holiday*, *Love Story*, *Dirty Dancing*, *Pretty Woman*, *Me Before You*, and *The Half of It* - are examples of how romantic movies have evolved over time, reflecting changing attitudes and cultural values. While some of these films perpetuate negative stereotypes, others challenge traditional norms and increase representation for the stereotypical groups. By examining the development of romantic movies across the 20th and 21st centuries, we can see how these films have played a crucial role in shaping our perceptions of love, gender, and sexuality, and how they continue to influence the way we think about these issues today.

Overall, the development of romantic movies reflects the larger societal and cultural changes that have taken place over the past century. While there is still much work to be done to ensure that all groups are represented fairly and accurately, the progress that has been made is a proof that film can challenge stereotypes and increase the representation of excluded groups. As we continue to evolve as a society, it is important that we continue to overcome traditional stereotypes and pursue a more diverse and inclusive film industry that reflects the richness and complexity of the human being.

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## ANNOTATON

Jméno a příjmení:	Marie Kolajová
Katedra nebo ústav:	Ústav cizích jazyků
Vedoucí práce:	Mgr. Josef Nevařil, Ph.D.
Rok obhajoby:	2023

Název práce:	The development of stereotypes in romantic films across the 20th and 21st century
Název práce v angličtině:	The development of stereotypes in romantic films across the 20th and 21st century
Anotace práce:	Bakalářská práce se zabývá vývojem romantických filmů ve 20. a 21. století a zkoumá, jak tyto filmy odrážejí a posilují společenské a kulturní postoje k lásce, genderu a sexualitě. Analyzuje, jak tyto filmy posilovaly stereotypy a vylučující normy, stejně jako zpochybňovaly tradiční vyprávění a zvyšovaly zastoupení okrajových skupin. Na příkladu šesti filmů – Roman Holiday, Love Story, Dirty Dancing, Pretty Woman, Me Before You a The Half of It práce analyzuje samotný vývoj stereotypů zastoupených v romantických filmech.
Klíčová slova:	Stereotyp, film, vývoj, rasové stereotypy, gender
Anotace práce v angličtině	The bachelor thesis explores the development of romantic movies across the 20th and 21st centuries, examining how these films reflect and reinforce social and cultural attitudes towards love, gender, and sexuality. It analyses how these films have perpetuated stereotypes and exclusionary norms, as well



	as how they have challenged traditional narratives and increased representation for marginalized groups. The thesis uses six films - Roman Holiday, Love Story, Dirty Dancing, Pretty Woman, Me Before You, and The Half of It - as examples to support its argument and concludes the development of stereotypes in romantic movies.
Klíčová slova v angličtině:	Stereotype, film, development, racial stereotype, gender
Přílohy vázané v práci:	-
Rozsah práce:	Cca 37 Pages
Jazyk práce:	Angličtina