Gender roles in romantic comedies

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Odjel za anglistiku

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Zadar, 2022.

Izjava o akademskoj čestitosti

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Zadar, 7. veljače 2022.

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1. Introduction

Popular culture's audience is growing rapidly and it is becoming more and more famous every day. It is therefore important to analyse its influence on people and their everyday lives. By using a discursive approach, one can realize the consequences and effects that popular culture has in the real world. What is important is how the popular culture represents notions and concepts as sometimes such representation can be prejudicial and stereotypical. The most commonly represented stereotypes are the ones about race, nationality, and gender. Occasionally, specific stereotypical representation can be connected with the particular director or film producer, and sometimes it can be related to specific genres. For that reason, the main aim of this thesis is to observe and analyse gender roles in romantic comedies by using a specific theoretical framework - representational and discourse theory. The analysis is based on selected romantic comedies which are divided into two categories – older, which were produced around 2010, and newer romantic comedies, produced around 2020 – to comprehend whether there has been progress and/or change in the representation of gender in romantic comedies. For the purpose of this research, gender roles were divided into several spheres and were analysed accordingly. There is a total of four spheres, that is types of gender roles: occupations, personality traits, domestic behaviours, and physical appearance. Personality traits are further divided into feminine and masculine traits regarding emotionality, asking for help, being nurturing/self-servant, dominance/submissiveness, and perspective towards love.

Amy M. Blackstone argues that gender roles are marked based on society's beliefs, attitudes, and perspectives towards individuals based on their gender. Gender roles can be seen as a result of the interconnection of individuals, their society, and the environment. What is at risk here is the fact that individuals believe that they should act accordingly to what society and culture expect from them only on the basis of their gender. Such socially constructed gender varies from one culture to another, each one of them prescribing different roles to men and women. Blackstone lists several disciplines according to which gender roles exist due to different reasons. For instance, ecological discipline argues that gender roles are the product of interactions between individuals and their community; biological perspective believes that some roles are innate to women, and others to men; sociology teaches us that people are not born with prescribed gender roles, but that they are taught; because gender roles are learned, feminist perspective advocate that they can be then unlearned (Blackstone 335-336). Nevertheless of the basis of gender roles, they are worthy investigating because they navigate

men and women how to behave. As a consequence, some people subject to such roles and live their lives accordingly, even though they might want to live it differently.

Regarding romantic comedies, there are difficulties in defining them since almost every narrative consists of its two main elements: a love story and humour. Tamar J. McDonald defined romantic comedies as films whose central narration is the search for love which is represented in a good-humoured way and often has a happy ending. The usual plot in this genre is man meets a woman, falls in love with her, but then loses her so he needs to regain her again in which he mostly succeeds. There are as well other main topics of the plot of romantic comedies, such as leaving a partner at the altar, the masquerade, and the embarrassing gesture which depicts one of the lovers as being publicly humiliated to show that love means to him more than dignity. Within the context of the ideology of romantic comedies, the primary importance of the couple, who is usually heterosexual and white, is the main notion. There is also the implication of sex, and one very interesting fact – every romantic comedy ends when lovers get married or end up together so as not to show the hardships of marriage (McDonald 7-13). Romantic comedies exist since the time of Shakespeare and their popularity is growing. Even though they are placed at the lowest part of the quality scale of genre films and are filled with stereotypes of different kinds, they seem to bring pleasure, laugh, and comfort to the audience.

To display the results of the analysis of gender roles in romantic comedies, this thesis is divided into two major parts. The first part covers the theoretical background which is important for the analysis. It consists of representational and discourse theory, and discussion about narrative, genre, and gender. The analytical framework is also provided so that analysis is understood more clearly. The second part of the thesis consists of analysis of gender roles in romantic comedies. With the aim of presenting analysis more understandably, it is divided into four main spheres of gender roles.

2. Representational theory and Discourse Theory

Even though culture is characterised by literature, art, and other forms of entertainment, it is primarily marked with how meaning is produced and exchanged by the members of the same culture (Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices* 2). This indicates that members who are a part of the same culture have similar views, beliefs, and interpretations of the world. Hence, such cultural meanings form social activities and have results and reactions in the real world.

There are two approaches to the analysis of how meaning, representation, and culture collaborate – semiotic and discursive. The semiotic approach is the study of signs which indicates that such approach is concerned with how meaning and representation are generated by the language. On the other hand, the discursive approach is concerned with how representation influences the real world. It studies how knowledge produced by discourse is used by the culture to represent their reality (Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices* 6). Representation through language can be a powerful force when analysed from the discursive approach since members of a culture are highly influenced by discourses and consequently experience the world around them based on the available discourses. Therefore, this thesis will use the discursive approach in analysing romantic comedies to understand how they influence gender differences in real life.

People are those that give meaning to things, feelings, and objects. For some, a piece of wood is an object with which we make the fire and thus evoke feelings of warmth and comfort; others see piece of wood as a tool for making joinery which evokes different types of feelings, such as beauty and creativity. It is the way how culture, that is, people represent things that we then interpret, classify and analyse. The question that arises is where the meaning is produced? Hall answers that question by explaining the "circuit of culture" which indicates that meanings are produced in different places and circulated in different ways and cultures. Meaning is produced literary everywhere – in everyday conversations, in narrating stories and events, in setting the norms and rules of a culture. The main "channel" through which a culture expresses everything mentioned and itself is a language as it "operates as a representational system" (Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices* 1 - 3). Language is daily used by people to represent their thoughts and feelings, but also to understand the world around them. Hence, it can be argued that representation by a language is a primary and principal tool for producing meaning. Language is here not limited only to spoken and written words, but it indicates body gestures, clothes that speak the language of fashion, and notes that speak the language of music. It is argued that such symbols function as signs as their importance is visible in the meaning they signify. Saussure, according to Jonathan Culler, further divided sign into two elements. The first one is named signifier and it denotes the form of the sign. The second element is the signified as it marks the idea or concept triggered by the signifier (Culler 19). For instance, a word or a picture of a cup of coffee functions as a signifier and it correlates with the signified which in this case would be a mental representation of a cup filled with a mixture of coffee, water, and milk. Or, the word teacher mostly signifies that this is a job performed by

woman. Representation is one of the principal elements in this thesis as gender roles will be analysed based on this theoretical framework.

2.1. Representing the "difference"

As it has been already stated, representation through language can sometimes be a dangerous way of giving meanings to people and objects since it can highlight the notion of difference. Hall describes several theoretical accounts which give reason why difference exists in the first place. From the anthropological point of view, culture provides meanings to things by grouping them within the classificatory system. Example of mentioned can be recognized almost everywhere – there are certain types of food, clothes, and materials. But Hall emphasises concerns regarding what if someone or something is classified in a wrong category? As were white people classified as cultural people and black people as savages in the past. The parallel can be drawn within the context of gender as well. Men are, for instance, classified as people who do not express sad feelings, they are rather expressed by women. There is as well another approach to representing the difference which states that every group or culture interprets the notion of difference in their own way and can hence create unjust differences (Hall, *The Spectacle of the "Other"* 235 – 238). The concept of "difference" is highly important as it can sometimes result in a stereotypical way of representing certain subjects, for instance men and women, especially in popular culture. It is therefore of high significance in this thesis to understand and realize whether men and women do indeed end up in the wrong category.

Stereotypes can be explained in many ways. Theodor Adorno et al. view stereotypes as incorrect generalizations of a particular group (19) which results in prejudices about such group. James Hilton and Von Hippel take a sociological approach to define stereotypes by describing them as "mental representations of real difference between groups" (241). Hall believes that stereotypes diminish people's value to a few central characteristics (*The Spectacle of the "Other"* 257). What can be concluded from all mentioned definitions of stereotypes is that they are very dangerous since they result in prejudices and generalizations about certain groups. Such prejudices are represented through various means and can be embedded in people's minds. Consequently, people behave and treat stereotypical groups in a prejudicial way. Representation of stereotypes will be frequently used in this thesis to indicate how gender roles became conventionalized.

2.2 Discourse

With regard to presentation, the most important feature Sara Mills emphasises in her book *Discourse* is discourse. This "new critical idiom" can be explained in many ways. According to Oxford Learner's Dictionary, it represents "the use of language in speech or writing in order to produce meaning" or in simple terms "spoken and written discussion" as defined by Cambridge Dictionary. Due to its wide range of meanings and usages, it is of high importance to limit the explanation of the term discourse according to the field of work it is going to be used, but also on account of so many different definitions, it can be problematic to narrow down its meaning. Michel Foucault in his work *The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language* observes that sometimes he even has to add some new meanings to the term discourse: "treating it sometimes as the general domain of all statements, treating it sometimes as an individualizable group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements" (Foucault 80). The first part of his definition states that all spoken or written words have meaning and are therefore important in the real world. The second part relates to the idea that all utterances are adjusted and can be grouped according to their consistency. With regards to that, one can talk about the discourse of masculinity, the discourse of racism, the discourse of gender roles… Diane Macdonnell should also be mentioned as she adds the social role to the definition of discourse. According to her, discourse should be regarded as a group of utterances that are characterized by social context – they perform within such context and are defined by it (Macdonnell 20). Consequently, utterances contribute to the way social context exists and operates in the real world which would imply that utterances, that is discourse has a power force that is reflected in the real world. For that reason, analysis of romantic comedies will be focused on their discourse of gender roles.

2.2.1. Power relations

When discussing discourse as a notion that has effects in the real world, Foucault focuses on power, among truth and knowledge, as the main factor. Power is the principal characteristic of all kinds of social relations as it constructs specific types of behaviours and attitudes. Foucault argues that power relations are so dominant that they establish certain forms of subjectivity and behaviours instead of suppressing them. One cannot limit power relations as they exist in every sphere of our lives. Power relations can be seen as gender relations (Foucault 206). This implies that certain power is given to men and certain to women. For instance, it is reasonable for men to speak up in public or to be a politician, whereas for a women

such performances would be accounted as strange. Power relations is a significant concept when it comes to gender roles and will be therefore analysed in romantic comedies to realize whether such stereotypical notion can be found in romantic comedies and if it can be, whether it still exists nowadays.

Discourses are important when talking about the presentation because they construct modes that people experience in the world as well as their perception of their own identity. Within this context, Sara Mills emphasises the notion of disidentification and gendered subjects implying that subjects, that is people, do not need to identify themselves with culturally and socially accepted discourses which form their own identity, but instead there is a possibility of disidentification with the power relations (16). Such disidentification signifies other ways in which people can identify themselves, ways which are dissimilar and perhaps more liberating. The notion of disidentification will be analysed in this thesis in order to see whether men and women subject to the formed gender roles or disidentify from them. Foucault as well debates on this saying that discourses "systematically form the objects of which they speak" (49). This can be understood in a way that discourses produce and therefore influence certain types of behaviours, opinions, concepts, and contexts. Hence, men and women can define themselves as gendered subjects within a set of discourses of masculinity and femininity. For instance, if a man is a homosexual, then discourse of masculinity would imply that he likes to spent time in women's company, dresses in a specific way, talks with so-called "gay voice", and other similar stereotypical characteristics. Taking into consideration everything mentioned, it is safe to say that discourses indeed have effects on the ways how men and women behave, think and act in the real world. This notion is referred to as power relations.

2.2.2. Language of discourse

The language of discourse is regarded as highly influential within the context of power relations. Discourse theory states that language is the base for making people believe how they should act, think and behave in the real world. A good example of this provided by Mills (43) is how sexism is influenced by the language of discourse. This can be found in many job titles like fireman and policeman; in many idioms as in "to man up" which means that only men are strong and confident and that they should not show emotions of weakness; in many embedded beliefs like women should keep the house clean, cook and take care of the children while men are there to work and to provide financial support for the family. Such language can be dangerous since then people occupy their assigned position within the gendered system and live

in accordance with it. As it has already been mentioned, the discourse of romantic comedies will be analysed with a special focus on its language to realize whether the language of romantic comedies is stereotypical concerning gender roles.

Discourse theory debates over whether, in this example, sexism only marks the imposition of certain beliefs on people or it can be as well changed with the use of a different language. Foucault (100) believes that the language of discourse is a major element when it comes to producing and releasing power, but also when it comes to subverting and revealing it, leaving the opportunity for the power to be resisted. Not only does Foucault argue that subjects have the power to fight against such influential and forceful language of discourse, but Mills as well believes in disidentification.

2.2.3. Discursive structures

Discourse theory and study is not only interested in analysing utterances but is also focused on structures of discourse. This type of analysis Foucault termed archaeology. Its main focus is on the support mechanisms of discourse, which are socio-cultural, and on the belief that statements are always part of the set of discursive structures which give statements their meanings in the real world (131). The importance of the discursive structures can be seen in the fact that everything people interpret, feel and experience in the real world is based on those structures. In essence, it is discourse and its structures that shape people's sense of reality. This also implies that discourse can exclude notions that consequently people do not feel as being real. An instance of this is the belief that cooking is reserved for the female part of the family, excluding men as possible subjects for cooking. Nonetheless, it can be difficult to think outside this exclusion as discourse and its structures are the main tools for interpreting reality. In the process of the interpretation of the real world, our experiences are classified according to the discursive structures that we have access to and consequently, those structures become normality for people (Mills 50-54). Even though discursive structures shape our perspective of the real world, people should try to look objectively at that perspective as sometimes it can show the distorted picture of how real-world functions. This thesis will analyse discursive structures found in romantic comedies in order to interpret whether it excludes some gender roles notions or not.

By analysing discursive structures, one can also realize how those structures change with time. The episteme is the term defined as the "set of discursive structures as a whole within which a culture thinks" (Mills 56). This definition implies that episteme consists of several

methodologies on which each culture bases its beliefs on about certain notions. For instance, during the Victorian era, there was a classification within the available set of epistemes for children of mixed parents. Mulatto is a child of a white father and negro mother, quintero is a child of a white father and cuarterona mother, zambo-chino is a child of a negro father and chino mother… For people who lived during the Victorian era, such classification was regarded as normal and natural. But when it's looked upon from today's perspective, it seems strange and completely inappropriate to classify people in this way. Such discontinuous progress of discursive structure is referred to as epistemic breaks (Mills 56-59). What is important to highlight is that epistemic breaks can indicate that specific culture progressed as it altered ways of understanding specific discursive structures which consequently caused the change of culture's perceptions of the real world. To indicate an epistemic break in the representation of gender roles in romantic comedies, this thesis will analyse romantic comedies from around 2010 and around 2020.

Mills examines another element of discourse structures – the circulation of discourses. If discourse is commented upon then it implies its circulation and that those discourses have some value on their own. Foucault argues that "commentary's role … is to say at last what was silently articulated 'beyond' the text" (58). This statement suggests that there is something more complex about what the discourse is indirectly indicating. This is connected with the fact that people's desire to say what they wish to say is limited by social norms. For instance, most western societies prohibited polygamy and severely punish those who practice it. If polygamy was socially accepted, perhaps some people would practice it or at least talk about it, desire or dream it. Circulation of discourses is important when discussing gender roles and thus will be examined in this thesis to conclude whether or not such circulation exists in romantic comedies.

3. Narrative and genre

Narrative and genre are the main characteristics of all forms of literature. They can be regarded as tools by which people can recreate and reorganize their world. Every narrative exchange includes the speaker/writer who narrates his/her events, feelings… and listener/reader who not only listens to the speaker but also reacts to the narration – whether he/she believes it, mocks it, agrees with it… Horace Newcomb argues that the main feature of the narrative is the arrangement of events in time. Every narrative should consist of the beginning, middle part, and ending (413 – 416). David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson agree with the Newcomb stating that "narrative is a chain of events in cause-effect relationship occurring in time and

space" (83). Narrative can trigger a lot of questions regarding its time, place, sequence of events… which only proves that narratives are constructs, arbitrarily produced by speaker/writer in order to appeal to the audience. There are two main products of the narrative. The first one, the story, is a narration in which the producer talks about the events in the order that they happened and includes everything about those events. The second one, plot, arranges events in an arbitrarily way and uses the story as a base for the collection of events so that the producer can construct the narrative the way he/she desires to (Newcomb, 416). This thesis will analyse the plot of romantic comedies to understand how narrative is used to indicate gender roles. Hence, further discussion will be about the plot.

Even though time and space are considered to be the most important features of the narrative, the topic of the narrative should also be given special attention. Most of the narratives are based on some kind of human experience and follow, more or less, the same pattern. The beginning of the narrative shows the "normal", or the balance, which is then disturbed by one or several events so the rest of the narrative is focused on restoring the balance and returning to the "normal". The enigma is represented which must be solved by the end of the narrative, leaving the audience to question how the balance will be restored. The responsibility to solve the represented enigma is left to the "goal-oriented hero" who is the central figure of the narrative. The chain of events and scenes must be logically constructed to follow the cause-effect relationship (Newcomb 418). It is for those events that the audience wants to participate in the narration, as it is allowed to guess what and how will happen within the limited perspective that the narrator offers to the audience.

The importance of narrative for this paper is the implications it has on the real world. One has to take into account all social, cultural, and traditional circumstances that influence the narration and the way the audience responds to it. Producers of the narration have to be especially careful how they will construct the narrative so as not to represent stereotypical signs. For instance, the goal-oriented hero is usually a white male, representing women and black people as incompetent to carry such an important figure in the narrative. Moreover, in most cases, only heterosexual love is represented, implicating that homosexuality is something to be ashamed of and therefore not presented in the narrative. Endings of narration usually depict marriage or falling in love, meaning that there is no room for sad endings. Marginalization of subordinate groups is as well represented in narrations (Newcomb 419 – 420). It is important to emphasize that such representations in the narratives are changing as the social events

happening in real-life force the narratives to change in order to not to be stereotypical, but rather open-minded representations of real life.

3.1. Genre

Depending on the topic of the conversation, the narrative might be classified into a particular genre. Newcomb describes genres as "traditional classifications of expressive culture originally grouped forms of presentation" (423). According to Christine Gledhill, genre category "refers to the way the individual fictions which belong to it can be grouped together in terms of similar plots, stereotypes, settings, themes, style, emotional affects and so on" (351). This implies that if viewers are acquainted with a specific genre category, they will have some expectations of what will be represented within that category. It can be said that those expectations are conventions of each genre which represent certain signifiers and signs, and/or their combination within a particular genre. Such generic conventions produce meanings in a way that firstly they produce certain signifiers, like character types, plots, settings…, and secondly, as Hall had argued, signifiers result in signified (Gledhill 356). For instance, if the setting was in a hair salon and the character type was the hairdresser, it would automatically signal to the audience that there would be a female hairdresser as it is the stereotypical representation of that particular occupation. Another convention of the genre is the narrative. Narratives are also classified into genres as there are certain narratives which have similar topics and character types (Newcomb 423).

Leo Braudy argues that even though genre films have been ignored by critics for many years, they should not be subordinated because they provide the audience with familiarity and predictability (105). Genre films are extremely influential forms of entertainment since they constantly return to the specific topics, but also to the same issues and events that are recognized as highly important regarding the social and cultural circumstances. The problematic side of genre films occurs when such films represent stereotypes of any type which are then reflected in everyday life. For instance, in western films, the constant subordination of black people contributes to the existence of racism; in romantic comedies, gender roles are established. Such notions represent immense critique, which is often established with the primary story and narration, that is, the plot. Genre films producers argue that even though the main characteristic of the genre is the similarity of narratives and other conventions, they tend to create differences as well. But they also state that all that is in their power is to produce newer versions of old issues to respect the conventions of the genre. Still, basic issues continue to exist which can be

investigated in many different variations of narrative within a genre (Newcomb 425). It can be concluded that genre films often need to present some stereotypical situation in order to produce a humorous effect or to follow conventions of the genre. Some would say that this is a double-sided sword situation since some viewers might praise genre films because of such prejudices and stereotypes, while others might despise them.

Within the context of romantic comedies, topics that intertwine are love stories between two people who live happily ever after. Billy Mernitt splits the narrative of the romantic comedies into three-act parts – Conflict, Crisis, Resolution, or how he renamed them – Meet, Lose, Get. In the first part, or more precisely in the "Meet" part, the protagonist meets his/her love interest and later realizes that this love interest is important to them to achieve the aim that they want to. The "Lose" part is characterized by some conflict that occurs between the protagonist and his/her love interest. The last "Get" part is usually reserved for a happy ending as the conflict is resolved and the protagonist, as the name says itself, gets his/her love interest. Mernitt goes even further to divide the narrative of romantic comedies into seven unavoidable parts. The first one is The Setup/Hook where audience is presented with the protagonist's life, troubles, and desires; The Meet/Inciting Incident is the second part in which the protagonist meets love interest, often presented in a humours way; afterwards it comes The Turning Point where protagonist's goal is clearly affirmed for which he/she needs the help of love interest; the beginning of the "Lose" part is The Midpoint/Raising the Stakes in which protagonist is usually involved in some kind of relationship with the antagonist that could jeopardize his/her relationship with love interest; fifth part Swivel: Second Turning Point marks the conflict between the protagonist and love interest where the protagonist often needs to choose between the goal or the love interest; The Dark Moment/Crisis is generally characterised by the public humiliation of protagonist or love interest in order to renew their romantic relationship; the last part Joyful Defeat/Resolution is about reconciliation between protagonist and love interest and usually marks the happy ending. Regarding the topics of the narrative of romantic comedies, Mernitt argues that many of them are hybrids, that is films that are cross-breeding with other genres. For instance, there are political, action-adventure, teen, drama, and many other types of romantic comedies (Mernitt 105-116). It can be seen that narrative of romantic comedies follows more or less the same pattern, but it does not have to be the case with the topics of romantic comedies.

Regarding character types in romantic comedies, the already mentioned protagonist and his/her love interest appear in every romantic comedy. Another recurrent type of character is

the best friend who is always ready to give a piece of advice or to plan some scheme. Sometimes a concerned family member appears who usually plays the role of the listener of the protagonist's problems and as well gives advice. The villain is present in every romantic comedy as well whose main mission is to complicate the protagonist's life regarding his/her love interest or established goal.

4. The concept of gender

When discussing the notion of gender, it is important to state that there are two concepts of gender. As explained by Fredrik Miegel and Thomas Johansson, the first one is biological gender and it denotes the gender one was born with – male and female. The second one is socially constructed gender which intensifies the notion of a biological gender creating another image of gender – the one that is socially constructed and is therefore distorted. Gender theory also states the notion of the power relationship between the genders which indicates that the male is the standard and hence the female is in a subordinate position to male (Miegel and Johansson 162). This suggests that features that we attribute as being female and male are socially constructed. They are represented in the popular culture through narrative and discourse within particular genres, and since they are constructed and therefore distorted images of gender, their representation is stereotypical.

4.1. Genre and gender

With regard to representing gender in popular culture, the problem lies in the fact that genders are represented according to their roles. A lot of criticism is given because of that as women and men are stereotypically represented, instead of being represented as rounded characters or real women and men. As consequence, those stereotypes became reality and people started to live in accordance with stereotypical rules represented in popular culture. Gender representation uses the signs "man" and "woman" to construct, rather than to reflect, the way man and woman define and identify themselves (Gledhill 346). Its cultural significance is highly influential but also depends on how they are represented in a particular genre and through a particular discourse and narrative.

As has been already stated, culture consists of mass or popular culture and high culture. High culture has always been given the dominant, more sophisticated, and elegant status than popular culture, including genre works, which was always regarded as inferior. Gledhill recognizes some of the characteristics of high culture to be thought, real problems, and rounded

characterisations, whereas features like romanticized stereotypes, pleasure, and soap opera characterize popular culture. What also characterises popular culture is their feminine audience, whereas the masculine part of the audience is reserved for the high culture (Gledhill 349). It can be noticed that division of culture into high and popular is controversial itself as it marks the fact that men should be part of the audience of the culture with high status, whereas simple and unsophisticated culture is determined for women.

4.2. Representation of gender in popular culture

Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin conducted research on how gender was represented in American popular culture throughout history and whether it has changed. They represented their research results in a book *American on Film. Representing Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality at the movies*. At the beginning of American cinema, women were represented in accordance with the Victorian portrayal of women. They were the perfect housewives whose main job was to take care of the children and house. Nonetheless, there was also the representation of women who did not behave in the right way, usually narrated as being explicitly sexualized, and because of that, they did not experience the happy ending. Such stereotypical representation let women believe that they should behave by following their roles since otherwise something bad is bound to happen to them. After the feminist movement, Benshoff and Griffin state that representations of women did change, but only slightly. Even though a woman was represented as independent and individual, contradictory to that she was still on a mission to find a husband. All the same, she still needs to behave appropriately or else she will be punished. Then the great depression came and changed the representation of gender roles in popular culture. As men could not keep their jobs anymore, and therefore were not financial providers for the family, they were started being represented as violent towards women. Such depiction sent a message to men how to be masculine and that violence is sometimes needed in order to keep the dominant status in the family (Benshoff and Griffin 208 – 251). From the research conducted by Benshoff and Griffin, it can be seen that the representation of women did change through popular culture regarding films, but it did not progress. If anything, it downgraded to an object that should accept violence only because it is coming from her husband.

Guy Kirby Letts identified five main stereotypes according to which women have been represented in popular culture: the Mother, the Whore, the Sex Object, the Victim, and the Hysteric (7). The Mother is portrayed as being nurturing and virginal; the Whore is an evil

woman who is punished for her bad deeds; the Sex Object, the most common stereotypical representation of women, is an attractive woman, representing male pleasure and desire; the Victim is represented as vulnerable and incapable of defending herself; the Hysteric portrays a woman who is unstable, illogical and "crazy", often because of PMS or Postpartum Depression (Kirby Letts 7-8). It can be seen that women were and still are represented stereotypically in popular culture. The fact that one can classify the representation of women goes in favour of it.

As for male stereotypes occurring in romantic comedies, Tsvetelina Vateva recognises the following. Firstly, men are simple which would indicate that they are not prone to overthinking, complications and problems. Secondly, they are represented as being primal in the sense that they cannot be trained. Regarding their love life, they are interested only in one-night stand and see females as sexual objects. Thus, men are not seeking a commitment (Vateva 17-20). Gerald James Pascue acknowledges several more stereotypes concerning male characters in romantic comedies: "avoidance of femininity, fear of homosexuals, self-reliance, aggression, achievement/ status, non-relation attitudes towards sex, and restrictive emotionality" (2).

Gender roles inequalities can also be noticed regarding the presentation of characters' goals and occupations. According to Martha M. Lauzen, Hollywood cinema represents 78% of male characters as having an identifiable job, in contrast with 61% of female characters. Male characters also prevail with 60% of them having a notable goal, whereas for female characters it is approximately 49% of them. Since narratives are goal-centred, characters need to set their goals (Lauzen 3). The majority of male characters' goals are work-related, while on the contrary female characters' goals are mostly personal. Jordan A. Scharaga argues that such personal goals are mainly about finding perfect love, and when female characters find their one true love, they tend to vanish from the screen (2).

Another major element in representing gender roles in Hollywood cinema is which roles are played by male, and which by female characters. The study conducted by Lauzen shows that only 22% of the protagonists in the Top 100 Films of 2015 were female characters, while for the male characters the percentage is as high as 52%. Moreover, female characters comprise 34% of major characters, whereas male characters 66%. The domination of male characters in Hollywood cinema can also be noticed with the fact that only 33% of female characters are speaking characters, in contrast with 67% of male characters. What is more, only 18% of female characters performed the role of the antagonist, contrary to 57% of male antagonists (Lauzen

2). It can be clearly seen that films project much more male characters than the female which only proves their dominance in Hollywood cinema.

5. Analytical framework

The following romantic comedies will be analysed by using a discursive approach and content analysis to observe how socially constructed gender is represented in them: *Couples Retreat* (2009), *How Do You Know* (2010), *Just Go with It* (2011), *Crazy, Stupid, Love* (2011), *How to Be Single* (2016), *To All the Boys I've Loved Before* (2018), *Second Act* (2018), *My Perfect Romance* (2018), *Long Shot* (2019), *Someone Great* (2019), *The Perfect Date* (2019), *Love, Guaranteed* (2020).

Listed films are chosen on account of them being the most-watched films. As it can be noticed, half of them were produced around 2010, and the other half around 2020 to analyse whether there has been progress and change in the representation of gender roles in romantic comedies. Therefore, selected films can be divided into two categories – older and newer representation of gender roles in films. Older category consists of the following films: *Couples Retreat, How Do You Know, Just Go with It,* and *Crazy, Stupid, Love.* The newer, or modern, category is comprised of the following films: *How to Be Single, To All the Boys I've Loved Before, Second Act, My Perfect Romance, Long Shot, Someone Great, The Perfect Date, Love, Guaranteed.*

Taking into consideration previous works and analysis done in this thesis, four basic types of gender stereotypes are recognized:

1. Occupations – even though the concept of gendered occupations is disappearing, there are still visible traces of traditional gender occupations. For instance, construction workers, pilots, taxi drivers, policemen, and other similar occupations, are traditional male occupations, whereas teachers, nurses, hairdressers, cooks, etc. are marked as female occupations.
2. Personality traits – socially constructed gender implies that women are allowed to be emotionally weak and show sadness, whereas men should be both, physically and emotionally strong.
3. Domestic behaviours – stereotypical representation of women is that she is in charge of taking care of the house and children, while men do the home repairs and are in charge of family finances.

4. Physical appearance – women are expected to be beautiful and thin with their makeup and hair done, whereas men should be muscular and tall.

The table below is the shortened and slightly changed display of feminine and masculine traits that England et al. (561) discussed in their research and that correspond to the purpose of this research. The table is also expanded with the feminine and masculine traits that were noticed in the analysis of this thesis.

Table 1

Feminine and masculine traits

Feminine traits	Masculine traits
Shows emotions	Unemotional
Asks for advice or help	Gives advice
Helpful, nurturing	Self-serving
Submissive, follower	Dominant, leader, independent
Wanting one true love	One-night stand

This paper will analyse romantic comedies concerning the mentioned feminine and masculine traits (see table 1). Therefore, listed traits should be explained to show their meaning.

Feminine traits

- Shows emotions – a person is showing both, positive and negative emotions;
- Asks for advice or help – a person who needs help;
- Helpful, nurturing – a person who helps or takes care of somebody;
- Submissive, follower – not a dominant person and therefore needs to follow somebody else;
- Wanting one true love – a person who desires long-lasting love over one-night stand.

Masculine traits

- Unemotional – a person who does not show any feelings or only positive ones;
- Gives advice – a person who advises other people, rather than asking for one;

- Self-serving – a person who is only interested in himself/herself and does everything in his/her favour;

- Dominant, leader, independent – a person who is superior and independent and therefore can act like a leader;

- One-night stand – a person who prefers one night stands than romantic relationships.

Aforementioned four basic gender stereotypes as well as feminine and masculine traits (see table 1) will be examined in the analysis of gender roles in romantic comedies. Various deconstructions of mentioned gender stereotypes will also be examined.

6. Gender roles in romantic comedies

6.1. Occupations

As has been already mentioned, gendered occupations are fading but can still be found, especially in American popular culture. Regarding romantic comedies, gendered occupations are quite visible and noticeable. Concerning jobs that women do in the analysed films, out of 35 jobs, even ten of them are teachers. After teaching, recurrent jobs are babysitters, lawyers, paralegals, and secretaries. There are also instances of women as journalists, office and assistant managers, realtors and marketers. What is more, women often perform a high-status job but are still working for men, like Zoe from *Second Act* who is a vice president of the prestigious company, but the owner is her father, and Emily from *Crazy, Stupid, Love* who is an accountant associate to the vice president. Not only that all of the mentioned occupations are stereotypically regarded as female, but even when women are performing jobs that are of high status, that are usually seen as male occupations, they are still submissive to men which clearly expresses power relations between genders. There are some exceptions to this notion when women are doing prestigious, respected, and leading jobs that are usually regarded as male. Probably the best example is Charlotte from the film *Long Shot* who is U.S. Secretary of State and later becomes the U.S. President; Ms. Robinson from *My Perfect Romance* is the owner of the Robinson Tech company; Maya from *Second Act* founds her own company, and Tamara from *Love, Guaranteed* is the owner of a huge and successful company. Disidentification of women from gendered occupations can be recognized in examples like Lisa from *How Do You Know* who is a professional baseball player and has a male but also female coach, Meg from *How to Be Single* is a doctor, and film *My Perfect Romance* displays woman marrying the couple.

As for male occupations, stereotypical representations can also be noticed. Most of them are psychologists, businessmen, policemen, bodyguards, owners/CEOs of the company, doctors/working in the medical area, coaches, and bartenders. As Robin from *How to Be Single* tells Alice who has just started to work for the law firm "Welcome to the law firm of some guy, some other guy, and some Jewish guy." (00:07:35-00:07:38). There are also examples of men working in insurance, as brokers, professional athletes, U.S. Presidents, journalists and writers. Once more, most of the mentioned occupations are regarded as being male. Disidentification of such gendered occupations is visible in analysed romantic comedies as well. Salvador from *Couples Retreat* is a yoga instructor, there is one instance of a male hairdresser, George from *How to Be Single* works in a library, and Ken from the same film works as a receptionist. Even Meg, Ken's girlfriend was surprised to hear this since she asked him "So, what's the male version of a receptionist?", Ken replies "A receptionist." (00:55:59-00:56:02). Language of discourse is immensely strong in this stated situation since it implies that the fact that a man is performing the job of receptionist requires wonderment and even questioning what is his job title then.

6.2. Personality traits

The following male and female personality traits are analysed in romantic comedies, referred to as gender personality characteristics: showing emotions, asking/giving advice, nurturing/self-serving, submissive/dominant, wanting one true love/one-night stand.

6.2.1. Showing emotions

Socially constructed gender implies that one of the feminine traits is to show emotions, whereas such trait is not common for men. Analysis of romantic comedies regarding this notion is generally confirmed since women show much more emotions than men, but there are exceptions to it as well. Overall, 15 women cried in analysed romantic comedies in regard to only 5 men. Women mostly show emotions like anger, scared of being hurt, unnecessary dramatizing like screaming and yelling, apologizing, suffering because of love, desiring love, and crying. Another female recurrent emotion is being dreamy. It can be about planning your wedding since you were just a little girl as Ronnie says to her husband Dave in *Couples Retreat*: "Maybe it's a girl thing. When you're a little girl, you dream about your wedding and your honeymoon." (00:17:33-:00:17:42). A lot of women were showing that they are scared of being hurt, mostly because their ex-boyfriends left and hurt them. As Lara Jean from *To All the Boys I've Loved Before* says: "Cause the more people that you let into your life, the more that can

just walk right out." (00:47:36-00:47:40). Furthermore, women are much more romantic than men. Instances of this notion can be seen in the film *The Perfect Date* where Celia redecorates the restaurant to make it look more romantic for her love interest Brooks, or when Ronnie was persuading Dave in *Couples Retreat* to go to see the waterfall: "Honey, the waterfall sounds amazing. A little romance." (00:27:36-00:27-39). The notion that it is normal for women to be screaming can be seen in the film *To All the Boys I've Loved Before* when Lara Jean was screaming in her room and her younger sister says "Women!" (01:16:03). Moreover, the whole concept of the film *Someone Great* highlights the fact that women are generally more emotional than men since it only displays Jenny's side of the breakup – her mourning, crying, and regret for the failed relationship, whereas Nate's perspective and feelings are not shown at all. The plot of the film revolves around Jenny, with whom her long-term boyfriend Nate broke up. Film displays how Jenny is getting over Nate with the help of her best girlfriends.

As for men expressing their emotions, the most repeated emotion was showing love to women by kissing them first. All in all, nine men kissed women first, in regard to only two women. Additionally, the majority of men were the first ones who said to women that they love them. In analysed romantic comedies, men usually show emotions of anger, immorality, jealousy, regret, consolation, coldness, and apologizing. Generally, men prefer not to deal with the outburst of emotions as it can be seen in the film *How Do You Know* when Lisa tells Matty, her boyfriend at the time, "If in the middle of the night I start crying or shaking or acting enormously upset, I don't want you to ask what's wrong. I want you to just ignore it. Is that okay with you?" and he replies "Actually that's my preference." (00:36:46-00:36:59). The same film projects the idea that showing emotions is a feminine trait as Lisa's coach says "Just because we field women athletes doesn't mean we get girlie when someone's time is up." (00:02:50-00:02:54) when they were deciding whether or not Lisa should stay in the team. A mentioned stereotype is highlighted once again with the language of discourse "to get girlie" which Lisa's coach used to indicate that women are the emotional ones. On some occasions, when men are trying to show their gentler side or to be romantic, their male friends make fun of them or they feel disappointed in themselves, as is Matty in *How Do You Know* since Lisa needs to tell him that it is fine and perfectly all right to be tender and romantic. Perhaps the most obvious male emotion is the need to defend and/ or at least try to protect women. Even nine men behaved protectively towards the women, usually that being a father to daughter as in the film *To All the Boys I've Loved Before* when Lara Jean's father told her "No drinking. No drugs. No hands." (00:40:30-00:40:33) when she was getting ready for a party. Perception of

men as being shallow and unable to feel anything was highlighted by Susan in the film *Love, Guaranteed* when she told her client Nick "Okay, do you have a heart or just an empty space where you keep your car keys?" (00:16:59-00:17:01). Susan told him that because Nick was suing the company Love, Guaranteed for not fulfilling their promise that by the 1000th date their clients will find their perfect match. What is more, men are usually represented as being incapable of dealing with sadness and anger calmly and peacefully. Instances of this are visible in the film *Couples Retreat* where women reconcile after an argument by peacefully talking, whereas men were fighting, yelling, and insulting; in the film *How Do You Know* where Matty breaks the lamp out of anger for Lisa leaving him.

The concept of power relations is evident in this part of the analysis as it gives power to men to be emotionless, and is therefore not expected from them to deal with the emotions of other people. This role is rather given to women, who do not have the power to be uncaring and unfeeling. Nevertheless, disidentification of such power relations is also noticed in the analysis. The best example is certainly Fred and Charlotte from *Long Shot*. Fred is a passionate journalist who cries, panics, yells, and is afraid for his life when they were attacked, whereas Charlotte is the one that is being strong and calming during the attack. Charlotte is the protagonist of the film who is running to become the first female U.S. President. She used to babysit Fred, and after the two of them accidentally met again, she hired Fred to work for her by writing her speeches. In the end, the two of them fall in love with each other. Furthermore, Maya from *Second Act* is not a typical woman as she does not want to start a family or have children because of which her boyfriend Trey breaks up with her. In fact, when Maya was younger, she had to leave her baby due to financial circumstances. But once she started to work for a major cosmetic company, she reconciled with her long-lost daughter Zoe whose father owns the company. Lisa, from *How Do You Know,* shares the same opinion with Maya about children and believes that women are pretending when they are talking about love in a utopian style.

On the other hand, both older and newer romantic comedies represent a lot of emotional men. Devlin's husband from *Just Go with It* is always so gentle towards her, showing her his feelings, kissing her, and saying beautiful things to her. In the end, it turns out that he is homosexual, and other characters from the film conclude that his homosexuality must be the reason for his openness and tenderness. Mills' discussion about the circulation of discourses can be applied in this situation. The film was produced in 2011 when heterosexuality was the only type of love that was socially acceptable. Everything other than that was mocked and filled with stereotypes like the ones in the mentioned situation from the film. Nowadays, there are not

so many prejudices and stereotypes regarding homosexuals as the majority of people accepted and practice homosexuality. Several of the newer, or modern films, display the homosexuality of the minor characters without it being mocked, inappropriately commented upon, or stereotyped. The same types of feelings that Devlin's boyfriend expresses, Blair's boyfriend is showing to her as well in the film *Someone Great.* Moreover, Gideon from the film *Love, Guaranteed* panics when his wife is going into labour whereas she is acting calmly. The same hysterical male behaviour can be seen in the film *Couples Retreat* when Dave started to act madly and senselessly when he thought that he was under shark attack, even though he was not.

6.2.2. Asking/giving advice

As for asking for or giving advice, it is generally established that women are usually in a need of advice, whereas men do not need one, they rather give advice to other people. Even though analysis of romantic comedies concludes that more women ask for advice or help than men, men also need some advising. Typically, women ask women for advice, and men ask men. There were some instances when women needed advice from men and vice versa. An interesting fact that was observed by analysing romantic comedies is that women tend to advise men without them asking for one to a much greater extent than men do. There are also some cases when men and women are giving pieces of advice to each other simultaneously, like Lara Jean and Peter in the film *To All the Boys I've Loved Before*, and Alice and Tom in *How to Be Single.*

Asking for advice is prescribed as a female trait since they are represented as being submissive and incapable of being leaders. On the other hand, men are stereotypically shown as they are not in a need of advice since they are independent and do not need anybody's help. Nonetheless, this analysis showed that both women and men asked for advice that scatters the before mentioned established stereotypes. The fact that women advise men even though they did not ask for one displays women's nurturing side, which once again is another stereotypical female trait.

6.2.3. Nurturing/self-serving

One of the habitual and innate female personality characteristics is to be helpful and nurturing, while on the contrary men are considered to be self-serving and selfish. Principally, romantic comedies represent women as being more nurturing than men, but it is not a rule. For example, Susan, the main character from the film *Love, Guaranteed* works as a pro-bono lawyer

for "little people" which shows her nurturing side. The most recurrent type of help by a woman was a girlfriend to a girlfriend and a mother to a son. Women also tend to help their loved ones, as did Lucy from *How to Be Single* who made her current boyfriend a sandwich for a train ride that lasts 45 minutes, and Celia from *The Perfect Date* who set up the interview with the principal of Yale for Brooks. Namely, Brooks' wish is to get into Yale, but for that he needs to be financially stable. Since he had trouble with money, Brooks together with his best friend Murph launched an application where Brooks can be "rented" to be plus-one for all types of occasions. Furthermore, Annie, George's secretary from the film *How Do You Know* helps George to find a new apartment since he lost his old one because he was being targeted for corporate malfeasance, cooks his lunch and brings flowers even though George told her that she does not have to do all of this. None of the women in analysed romantic comedies show signs of being self-servant and selfish, whereas men do. Dave, from *Couples Retreat* put his own needs and wishes as being more important than his wife's who only wanted to go to see the waterfall; Wes, from *My Perfect Romance* wants for the dating application to succeed only because of the profit, contrary to Vivian's original reason for making the application which is for people to find their perfect soulmates. *My Perfect Romance* revolves around Wes Robinson, the new CEO of the company Robinson Tech, and Vivian Blair, the employee of the mentioned company. Vivian works there as a program developer and becomes noticed by Wes when she develops the dating application My Perfect Match because of which the company's profit increased. Moreover, Murph from *The Perfect Date* said for his best friend Brooks that he is "A selfish prick and that you only think about yourself." (00:59:36-00:59:41). Disidentification of men regarding them only being self-servant was also noticed when analysing romantic comedies. Nick from *Love, Guaranteed* confirms this statement as he wanted to donate all the money earned in a lawsuit to the children hospital; when Alice from *How To Be Single* accidentally drops her towel, her boyfriend at the time Josh gives her his even though it means that he will be naked in front of everyone in a dorm; Tom, the bartender who in the end develops strong feelings for Lucy, from the same film pretends to be Lucy's boyfriend so that she would not embarrass herself in front of a high-school friend that is getting married; Brooks from *The Perfect Date* takes care of Celia when she hurt her ankle. There are also instances of men and women helping each other when they have mutual benefit from it like Brooks and Celia from *The Perfect Date*, and Lara Jean and Peter from *To All the Boys I've Loved Before* who pretended to be together.

6.2.4. Submissive/dominant

Popular culture usually represents men as being dominant, independent, and capable of being a leader, whereas women are shown on the contrary – as being followers and submissive to men. Regarding romantic comedies, mentioned traits are partially confirmed. Lara Jean from *To All the Boys I've Loved Before* is the perfect example of the mentioned claim. Throughout the whole film, she was very passive – she writes letters to boys that she loves instead of telling them; she cannot eat alone, that is without her best friend in the school cafeteria, but instead goes to have lunch in the library; she would only go to the skiing with the school if her best friend comes; when Josh, the former boyfriend of her sister and Lara Jean's former love interest, read her letter, he wanted to talk with her and instead of facing him, Lara Jean again acts passively to the extent that she jumps out of the window. Women's submissiveness is also obvious in the film *Couples Retreat.* Generally, men are talking much more than women in the mentioned film, even when they are all together in the couples therapy resort Eden, and on a few occasions, Ronnie looks at Dave before she starts talking which seems as if she is looking for his approval. The dependence of women on men is regularly represented as the majority of women are miserable and sad that they do not have a boyfriend. An instance of this is Vivian's colleague from the film *My Perfect Romance* who says that her being single "Is just a big fat … reminder of my lonely, pathetic life … I want to meet a man. A good man." (00:05:40-00:05:54). What is more, the fact that men indeed want to be the dominant ones is highlighted by Charlotte from *Long Shot* as her love life was fading since "Guys don't really want to date women who are more powerful than them." (00:55:53-00:55:57).

Frequently, women needed the help of men to achieve something. For example, Lisa from *How Do You Know* needs a man to tell her which direction she should go; Susan from *Love, Guaranteed* could not get her little nephew to go to bed even though she knows him his whole life, but Nick who knows him for an hour resolved the situation in just one minute; everybody in the school start to notice Lara Jean from *To All the Boys I've Loved Before* when she began her relationship with Peter, the most popular guy in the school; Alice from *How to Be Single* experiences difficulties when she breaks up with her boyfriend as she says "I'm not ready to be alone. I'm not. I don't know how to reset my router. I don't even know where it is. I don't even really know what, exactly, it does." (00:26:15-00:26:27); her inability to be independent is also represented when her ex-boyfriend comes to her apartment to return her things and fixes subtitles on TV since Alice was watching it in the Spanish language. As it can

be noticed, Lara Jean and Alice depended on men throughout the whole film. Only when they got to experience single life and its hardships, they become independent.

The concept of power relations is quite visible in the mentioned examples as women are stereotypically not given the power to be generally dominant and independent, and have high self-esteem when they are single. Only when they find a boyfriend or are in the men's company, their self-esteem starts to grow.

The film *Long Shot* directly represents how men are the leading ones in the most respectful and prestigious jobs, like being a president. When Charlotte's colleague Katherine was showing Charlotte the statistics of how much the public likes her, she says "Now keep in mind that these are numbers for a female candidate. If you were a man, you'd be in the 192nd percentile … 'Cause men are (showing with her hand that men are higher on the scale)." (00:09:50-00:10:03). What is more, her ability to be a U.S. President was questioned all the time in the film by the media only on account of her being a woman. When Charlotte managed to save the soldier, a journalist asked "Are women mentally unfit to hold the presidency?" (01:26:43-01:26:46). Furthermore, when she succeeded in becoming the first female U.S. President, a female journalist expressed her surprise and admiration by saying "What a momentous day. Our first female president. I never thought I see it." when another male journalist adds "Well, I mean, a lot of people are gonna say this is a historic moment for women everywhere. But do we really want her finger on the button when it's that time of the month?" (01:54:31-01:54:42). Once again, Charlotte's ability to be capable of being U.S. President was questioned on account of her gender since women are not given the power to be dominant and successful leaders.

Disidentification from such masculine and feminine roles is recognizable as well. In the film *Second Act* men are quite underrepresented as Zoe and Maya are the central story of the narrative. When the whole company went kayaking as a team-building exercise, not only that Maya and Zoe were the only women, but they were the leaders and in control of each kayak. At one point, all men in the kayak protested that they are not in the mood for kayaking so Zoe tells them "Suck it up, ladies." (00:38:39-00:38:41) so as to motivate them, but also to show them that complaining and whining is, stereotypically, reserved for women. Language of discourse is powerfully used in this situation since all men obeyed Zoe's order to continue with kayaking and stop complaining only based on her comparison of men with women. And no men wants to be compared with ladies. Moreover, Vivian from the film *My Perfect Romance*

also stands up for herself and shows that she rejects to be submissive to her boss Wes. This notion is visible when he interrupts her while she was speaking, but Vivian then interrupts him and finishes her sentence. Vivian is also represented as being in charge of the dating application as Wes is begging her to come with him on the tv show in order to promote the application since Vivian knows everything about it, and Wes would only be "pretty face", as he puts it. Women's independency is represented in the film *The Perfect Date* when Brooks opens the door for Celia and she says to him "Ow, that's cute, but I can open my own doors." (00:09:43-00:09:45), and in the film *Someone Great* when Jenny tells her boyfriend "I am a grown-ass woman, all right? I don't need you." (00:46:09-00:46:11). Charlotte from the film *Long Shot* is another example of disidentification of women as being submissive to men as she is the tougher and dominant one in her relationship with Fred. This does not bother him as he is happy to take her last name and also so proud to be the First Mister. One more example of a submissive and incompetent man is Devlin's boyfriend in the film *Just Go with It* who was represented as being incapable during the coconut contest since they lost the contest because of him.

As for the dominance in a marriage, women start to take control and be dominant. An instance of this can be noticed when Cal's friend from *Crazy, Stupid, Love* says to him that they can no longer be friends as he and his wife Emily were getting a divorce since his wife "Said we had to choose between you and Emily. I chose you. But she said no." (00:16:16-00:16:30); when Danny's first wife from *Just Go with It* says to her friends "Danny doesn't say not to me. Believe me, I have him well-trained." (00:01:28-00:01:31), and when Brooks tells his father from the film *The Perfect Date* "I haven't seen this look on your face since mom let you buy a motorcycle." (00:21:36-00:21:39).

It can be concluded from all the mentioned examples, except for the film *Couples Retreat,* that the direction of power changed and is given to women concerning their dominance. Analysis shows that men mainly lost it since women were mostly opposing to them and taking control from them. It is also proven with this analysis that men need to listen to their wives, ask for their permission, and they are even trained by their wives regarding their behaviour.

6.2.5. Wanting one true love/one-night stand

Generally, women are represented as always wanting one true love, desiring their soulmate, and dreaming about a perfect wedding and honeymoon since they were little. On the other hand, men are usually displayed as being womanizers, desiring only one-night stand, and wanting marriage once they fall in love with somebody. Nevertheless, it is expected from men

to be gentlemen all the time. Even though only four out of twelve analysed romantic comedies represent men as being womanizers and wanting one night stand, it is still a large number when compared to only one out of twelve films that represents women as wanting one-night stand. Jacob, from *Crazy, Stupid, Love* is a perfect example of the mentioned stereotype. He even has rules on how to seduce women and they work every single time. After getting a divorce from Emily, Cal started to go out to a bar where he met Jacob. When Cal tells him that he has only slept with one woman, Jacob is astonished and quickly turns Cal into being a womanizer who after a short time seduces a woman with only two words – "sexy and cute". Film *Just Go with It* represents Danny as a man who does not want to get attached to a woman because he was hurt by his ex-girlfriend, so he seduces women by telling them that he is unhappily married and again, this story works every time. Matty is represented in the same way in the film *How Do You Know*. His bathroom is filled with new toothbrushes and has a special wardrobe with pink tracksuits in S and XS size so that his dates do not have to wear the same clothes from the last night. The most prepared for one-night stands is definitely Tom from *How to Be Single.* So as "hangover chicks", as Tom calls women for one night stand, would not want to stay in the morning in Tom's place, his fridge is empty – no food to make breakfast, no water for the hangover, and he even shut off the water supply. He does not believe in love as he says "Sex? It's the best way to find out what you want. Think about it, the whole love thing, the whole 'I just want a guy to notice when I'm cold' … it means he's faking it because he knows that's what you want to hear." (00:21:24-00:21:59). Only after he fell in love with Alice, Tom deletes all contacts in his mobile phone of "hangover chicks", turns on the water supply and fills his fridge. Stereotypical perspective of men of a long-lasting relationship is visible in the film *How Do You Know* when one of Matty's team players says "I'm in love with somebody when I wear a condom with the other girls" (00:47:43-00:47:47). With this degrading statement, he is saying that he intends to cheat on his girlfriend, even though he is in love with her.

Contrastingly, only one woman is represented as wanting one-night stand, and not true love. It is Rebel from the film *How to Be Single* who is with different men every night and more often than not, she cannot even remember if they slept together because she was so drunk. Her opinion of men is that they are shallow and only want one night stand, as she says to Alice "You don't buy the drinks. Boys buy the drinks. It's kind of like sexual currency that they use, so they're not actually paying you to hook up." (00:12:22-00:12:26). The majority of other women in analysed films are dreaming about meeting a perfect man, feeling lonely and depressed because they are single, and even sleep with a male doll, like Meg from *How to Be Single.*

Once again, power relations are evident regarding the notion that women want one true love and men one-night stand. The majority of men in analysed films have the power to sleep with somebody for one night, whereas this power is only given to one woman.

As it has already been said, it is expected from men to be gentlemen. The majority of men in analysed romantic comedies are acting like gentlemen, most often that being opening the doors, giving a ride home, and paying the bill after dinner. The last notion is perhaps the most obvious sign of being a gentleman as it is highlighted by a lot of characters in romantic comedies. Nick, from *Love, Guaranteed* says "I was a perfect gentleman to them. I took these women on classy dates … and I paid every time.", after which Susan says to him "All right, I'm impressed." (00:16:37-00:16:53). Vivian from the film *My Perfect Romance* also expects a man to pay for the dinner as she says "The waiter's over there. You should probably grab the bill. You know, be a gentleman?" (00:38:36-00:38:40). The most romantic gentleman of them all is Ken from *How to Be Single* who brings hot chocolate to Meg when she is working, buys and brings a plastic Christmas tree to her front door after she said that the traditional Christmas tree is not practical, buys her gifts for Valentine day, and performers other similar romantic gestures. Most of the women like and cherish when a man is being a gentleman, except for Celia from *The Perfect Date* who hates when Brooks opens a door for her or when he wants to walk her to the front door. What is more, men sometimes believe that being a gentleman is all that it takes for women to fall in love with them. An instance of this is Brooks' belief in the film *The Perfect Date* when he was asked what type of character will he be selling to his dates and he says "Whatever she wants me to be, which I'm pretty sure is what every other girls wants me to be. Some knight in shining armour, some Prince Charming to open the doors for her and compliment her hair." (00:07:19-00:07:27). Jacob from the film *Crazy, Stupid, Love* does not have a better opinion on this topic since he says "The war between the sexes is over, and we won, okay? We won the second women started doing pole dancing exercise. But even though we won, they still deserve our respect. You know, we make them feel beautiful, actually listen to their problems, open the door for them." (00:38:38-00:38:52). Such notion is degrading for women since they are represented as wanting the same things from every man and nothing more or else.

Although men are represented as being womanizers, and women as wanting a long-lasting romantic relationships, analysis of romantic comedies showed that women are the ones that cheated on their boyfriends/husbands much more than men did. If truth be told, four women had an affair and not a single man. The fact is that majority of the character's fathers left their

wives for somebody else, but the mentioning and/or act of cheating was done only by women. Surprisingly, women's perception is that men cheat on their loved ones, as Vivian's colleague from *My Perfect Romance* says to her friend who was complaining about being single: "You need to grab some hot bull by the horns and just hold on for dear life and hope that he's not secretly married." (00:06:09-00:06:15). What is more, women tend to believe that sleeping with somebody is not a significant and meaningful act of love for men. This can be noticed when Lara Jean from *To All the Boys I've Loved Before* says to Peter after the rest of the school found out that they were kissing in the hot tube when they were on a skiing trip with the school: "Physical stuff might not be a big deal to you, but to me, it is.', then Peter asks 'Who says it's not a big deal?", "Says every single guy in the bus, clapping and praising you like God, and you're just eating it up.", Lara Jean replies (01:13:53-01:14:04). It can be seen that Lara Jean not only thinks of Peter that way but the rest of the boys in the school act in the same way. This situation confirms the established stereotype about men being womanizers, that is that they sleep with somebody merely out of enjoyment, and not because of the feelings they have towards the woman. Other men, or boys from the school in this specific situation, seem to support such notion since they all clapped Peter for making out with Lara Jean.

6.3. Domestic behaviours

Another gender roles sphere states that it is socially expected that women are in charge of cleaning the house, cooking, taking care of the children, and doing the laundry, while men are in charge of finances, mowing the lawn, taking care of the car, doing house repairs, and play sports. This research did not show these statements to be true as altogether four women were preparing a meal, but also four men; there is an instance of an uncleaned room belonging to a man, but also of an uncleaned room belonging to a woman. It is roughly the same in other areas of domestic behaviours – both men and women were taking care of the children, in charge of finances, and adorning their gardens and backyards. There are some exceptions to it, as is the typical representation of gender roles concerning domestic behaviours in the film *Couples Retreat* when Ronnie tells their therapist "Dave is dealing with his new launch of his video game, Guitar Hero … and, um, I am dealing with the renovations." (00:39:30-00:39:40). The two of them have been fighting the whole film about renovations, that is about tiles for the new kitchen as Dave did not want to participate in choosing them. On the other hand, Cal from the film *Crazy, Stupid, Love* even secretly returned to his previous home after divorce to take care of flowers and to water the yard during the night. Perhaps the most obvious disidentification of such gender roles is Ken, from *How to Be Single* since he says to Meg who asked him in

disbelief whether he will take care of the baby: "Did I just win a lottery? Yes, I want to stay home and take care of the baby." (01:13:41-01:13:44).

Even though this analysis shows that men and women are becoming equal regarding mentioned domestic behaviours, stereotypes are still very much alive. Vivian's sister Michelle from *Love, Guaranteed* tells to Vivian that "Gideon's teaching Oliver to make pizza." (00:03:29-00:03:31) in a surprised manner as it is believed that cooking is reserved for women; Michelle also says to Vivian that if their father was to be present in their lives, he would say "Michelle has somehow managed to be an amazing wife and fabulous teacher" (00:22:10-00:22:14) as these two things are the only things for a father to be proud of his daughter; the same thing occurred in film *Couples Retreat* when therapist asks Joey and Lucy what they like the most about each other and Joey says "She's a great mum" (00:40:33-00:40:36); Emily from *Crazy, Stupid, Love* calls Cal to ask him how to turn on the heating even though she knows how, but just to make him feel needed and special as home repairs are men's thing; Katherine's son from *Just Go with It* does not know how to swim as his father left them so there was nobody to teach him due to the fact that this role belongs to men.

It is often represented and therefore believed in the society that women are bad at sports. Even though Lisa from *How Do You Know* is a perfect example that refutes that claim, there are a lot of examples that only support it. Moreover, when Maya from *Second Act* tells her boyfriend "Keep my eye on the ball" he replies in amazement "Did you just sporta-metaphor me?" (00:02:24-00:02:29) in a sense that women are unable to use sports' metaphors.

What is more, men are represented as being much handier with cars and therefore better drivers than women. Lara Jean from *To All the Boys I've Loved Before* is shown as being a terrible driver. Because of that she and her little sister need to go to school by a bus which annoys the younger sister so she tells her "Can you please man up and start driving?" (00:35:26-00:35:28). The expression "to man up" implies that somebody needs to be more courageous and/or stronger in order to endure a difficult situation. With such usage of language of discourse, gender stereotypes regarding women's submissiveness and inability to be brave are confirmed. Generally, men are more shown as driving cars in analysed romantic comedies, whereas women are usually driven or take public transport.

6.4. Physical appearance

Stereotypical representation of the last gender role sphere is that women should be thin, beautiful, young, and dress nice, whereas men should be tall, and muscular. Analysis of romantic comedies shows that such gender representation applies only to women as the majority of them were young and beautiful, whereas only a couple of men were represented perfectly. All of the men, except for the yoga instructor, in the film *Couples Retreat* were short, not good looking, and even fat; Cal from the film *Crazy, Stupid, Love* is represented in the same way, plus the fact that he is wearing snickers and suit in a restaurant; in the film *Long Shot* Fred is also short and not skinny; Danny from *Just Go with It* is short too and definitely not muscular, but expects from his girlfriends to be beautiful. The physical appearance and sexuality of his current girlfriend are overemphasized and he wants Katherine, who was pretending to be his ex-wife so that Danny can keep his current girlfriend, "To look like a plastic surgeon's wife. I want to create illusion I had a hot first wife." (00:22:10-00:22:16). At the beginning of the film, Katherine was represented as a mother who did not dress attractive, but once Danny saw her in tight-fitting dresses and a swimming suit, he fell in love with her. Such behaviour evidently shows that for Danny physical look is much more important than person's traits as he and Katherine have been working together for years. The same notion that women need to be attractive and beautiful to find a husband is highlighted in the film *My Perfect Romance* when one of Vivian's dates tells her "You're watching you figure? Vivee, now that we've found each other, you can totally let yourself go. A bit. It's perfectly natural." (00:38:00-00:38:07). The importance of women's physical appearance is also emphasized in the film *Long Shot* when two journalists say for Charlotte "And honestly, looking hotter than usual. Now, people are gonna say that's sexist, but she's just hot! … You know, when we talk about women in this way, it is because we respect them so much and we start with their body." (00:04:44-00:04:56). Such talk about women is degrading as it reduces women only to the way they look. In the mentioned examples, discursive structures excluded the notion that men should be handsome, tall, and muscular. Such notion is only applicable to women.

Physical appearance is also very important to some women, not only men. In *Love, Guaranteed* one of Nick's dates says when she was looking at the menu that she does not "Do sugar, vinegar, dairy, gluten, seeds, or nightshades." (00:25:26-00:25:30); in the same film the owner of the huge company Tamara Taylor is represented as "The lifestyle guru who tells women to eat nothing but soaked almonds." (00:13:58-00:14:01); Shelby, Brooks' date in the film *The Perfect Date* describes to Brooks how "It only took three stylists, two hairdressers, one makeup artist, bio slimming active wrap, two hours of pilates, and like 12 pounds of

moisturizer to look this way" to get ready for the date, whereas Brooks says "Wow. I took a shower." (01:03:31-01:03:39). The same notion applies to Lucy from *How to Be Single* who goes crazy from all the pressure to look nice and attractive so she says to children to whom she was reading stories "And all the money she spent on make-up and blow-outs and the heels. The heels! Walking around on these. And I'm not supposed to have any hair here (showing her whole body). No hair here, but tons of it here (showing her head and starting to take off her hair extensions). And Spanx! Girls. Never wear Spanx. Because the endgame is to take them off, anyway (starting to cut the Spanx with scissors)." (00:52:57-00:53:28). Lucy described the stereotypes of how women should look in a great way and she is a perfect example that when women act and look naturally have more chances of being liked by somebody else since George immediately approached Lucy after her outburst and says that it "was kind of awesome". The two of them married at the end of the film.

Disidentification of women from such a stereotypical way they should be looking is present as well. Jenny from *Someone Great* is not skinny, has cellulite, does not do make-up, and dresses casually; Maya's friend from *Second Act* is beautiful, does her make-up, but shows by unbuttoning her trousers after eating too much that she is still a human being and does not need to be perfect; also the majority of other Maya's friends are overweight; Robin from *How to Be Single* is overweight as well, but takes care of her hair and make-up and dresses nicely; Celia from the film *The Perfect Date* is thin and beautiful, but has her own style of dressing and does not care about the latest trends – for example, she went on a school dance wearing Dr. Martens and a leather jacket.

6.5. Kirby Letts' female stereotypes & Gerald James Pascue's male stereotypes

Kirby Letts' identification of five main stereotypes based on which females are represented in popular culture can be noticed in romantic comedies as well. The concept of the Mother is already analysed in the previous section about nurturing/self-serving where it has been argued that a lot of female characters in romantic comedies show their nurturing side. Representation of a female who is punished for her bad doings, or the Whore, is not present in the analysed romantic comedies. A lot of women did something wrong or bad, but for everybody, there was a happy ending. As it has been argued in section 8.4. regarding physical appearance, the majority of women are beautiful and attractive. Overtly sexualized representation of women can be seen in the film *Just Go with It* with the Palmer and later with Katherine, with every woman in the film *Couples Retreat*, and with Charlotte in *Long Shot*. A

vulnerable woman, or the Victim, is also portrayed in romantic comedies. Most of them feel that way in regards to being single, like Alice from *How to Be Single,* Lara Jean from *To All the Boys I've Loved Before,* and Jenny from *Someone Great.* Representation of women as being crazy and illogical, or as being the Hysteric, can also be noticed in romantic comedies. Devlin from *Just Go with It* is one example of it as she goes crazy when she and her boyfriend do not with the coconut contest; Alice from *How to Be Single* with her outburst regarding woman's physical appearance; Lisa from *How Do You Know* with her indecisiveness about which man to choose; Annie from the same film was being illogical when she wanted to tell George certain information about the company which she was legally not supposed to tell; Peter's jealous ex-girlfriend from the film *To All the Boys I've Loved Before* who wanted to break up Peter and Lara Jean.

In the same way, Letts identified five main female stereotypes, Pascue recognized seven main male stereotypes in popular culture. The first one, avoidance of femininity implies that men are generally avoiding to do, behave, or act in a way that would associate them with being or having female characteristics. Such stereotype showed not to be true with this analysis since it indicates that men perform domestic jobs which are stereotypically regarded as being female, are in a need of advice, listen to their wives instead of being the dominant ones in marriage, and even show hysterical emotions, like yelling and panicking. There are only two exceptions to this stereotype. The first one is that majority of men in analysed romantic comedies did not show other types of emotions and that some of them prefer one-night stand to long-lasting love. This correlates with Pascue's two more male stereotypes, that being non-relation attitudes towards sex and restrictive emotionality. Moreover, Pascue also identified self-reliance to be one of the stereotypes associated with men. All of the leading male characters were self-reliant, and only few of the minor male characters were represented as not being self-confident. The rest of the male stereotypes noted by Pascue could not be found in this analysis. There was no instance of male aggression, fear of homosexuality, and obsession with their status/achievement.

7. Real-life social changes regarding gender roles

The cultural and social situation in America is improving regarding gender roles. There are more and more movements and protests about gender equality every year, mostly being about women's rights. Perhaps the most famous movement is the #MeToo movement which originates from 2006 when Tarana Burke was sexually assaulted. It became virally popular in

2017 when film producer Harvey Weinstein was accused of sexual abuse. The purpose of this movement is to fight against sexual abuse and harassment. Hong Luo and Laurina Zhang conducted research to see the magnitude of the impact of the #MeToo movement on the film industry. Among other variables, one of them was the producers who were in some kind of connection with Weinstein and those who were not. The results of the study are astounding since, after #MeToo movement, producers associated with Weinstein hired 40% more female writers than before, but there has not been such an increase with producers who are not associated with Weinstein. What is more, this study showed that after the #MeToo movement more women were employed to work on films that are stereotypically male-dominated, like action films, and less of them worked on female-dominated films, like romance and comedy. The impact of the #MeToo movement is also seen in the fact that the majority of the producers associated with Weinstein directed films that did not represent gender stereotypes (Luo, Hong, and Zhang, Laurina). #MeToo movement also inspired eighty-two female star actresses to protests against the low number of films, all together them being 82, directed by women at the festival's Palme d'Or competitions in contrast with even 1,645 films directed by men.

In order to emphasize the positive shift regarding gender equity, *GEARING- Roles* (Coordination and Support Action project which unites academics and professionals to exchange ideas and possible solutions to create gender equality in professional careers) and lists all the important moments that occurred between 2010 and 2020 which highlighted gender equality: Christina Koch and Jessica Meir were the first woman to walk on the moon in 2019; many young women started to be a part of politics and to fight for their goals, like Greta Thunberg who was selected as a "Person of the Year" by *Time* magazine, Malala Yousafzai was awarded a Nobel Peace Prize in 2014, Emma Gonzalez became influential after speaking about gun firing at her school in Florida, and many others; marches have been organised to promote women's rights all around the world, like the one in Poland where it was protested against the governments' proposal to prohibit abortion, or the famous one from 2017, which occurs every year from then, when the protest was organised as a reaction to the selection of U.S. President Donald Trump, and many others; The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence was founded (Roles, Gearing).

Gender equality protests and movements are often influenced by popular culture. Perhaps the best-known example of this is Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* where

protestors are dressed in red uniforms with white protectors on their heads as a symbol of women's submissive, and their necessary obedience.

As it can be noticed, gender equality movements and protests are focused only on promoting women's rights. Even though there is a number of movements fighting for men's rights, like MensGroup, the focus is still on the women's rights and liberty. There is even a men's rights activism which is presented as an anti-feminist movement since they believe that men are the ones that are discriminated against in society.

Changes and progress regarding gender equality are observable through mentioned real-life examples. Such events influence popular culture, or in this case romantic comedies, in a way that films start to reflect and integrate them. An epistemic break can be noticed in this analysis of gender roles in romantic comedies meaning that romantic comedies started to gradually leave gender stereotypes behind and focus on producing plots and narratives without gender discrimination and prejudices.

8. Conclusion

This analysis showed which gender roles are the most common in romantic comedies – the four main analysed spheres - and that there are differences between male and female characters. Gendered occupations are recurrent patterns in romantic comedies as most of the women are teachers or babysitters, and even when they have a high-status job, they are still inferior to men. Men are also performing jobs that are regarded as being male, like bodyguards, doctors, and coaches. Nevertheless, the research showed that there are also cases of disidentification where borders of gendered occupations are shattered. Progress in the representation of gender roles regarding occupations can be seen as every analysed film from the older category displays gendered occupations, whereas such notion is rare in newer films. The notion that it is normal for women to show emotions, but not for men is also shown with this research. Women showed much more emotions than men, usually that being crying, romantic, and dreamy. Men were showing love by kissing women first, but that is kind of socially expected from them, as it is them being protective and reacting to certain things violently. There are instances of disidentification from this personality trait as well where men were crying and panicking, and where women were buying guns and not wanting the perfect wedding and family. Gender roles can also be noticed regarding women as being nurturing and helpful. It is not that every woman showed signs of supportiveness and nurture, but none of them were self-servant, as some men were. Again, this concept only applies to several men,

since some of them were not boastful and self-absorbed, just on contrary. Furthermore, gender roles are also visible with regards to men being womanizers and women wanting one true love. Most of the men are represented as typical guys who not only sleep with different women every other night but have prepared their apartments for the next morning. On the other hand, all women except for one are desiring one true love and desperately want to find a man. A surprising fact discovered with this research is that even though men are represented as womanizers, women cheat more often than men, but have an opinion that cheating is only done by men. The notion that most of the men were true gentlemen in analysed romantic comedies corresponds with a socially accepted norm that they should indeed be ones. Furthermore, this research showed that Kirby Letts' identification of five main female stereotypes is also present. There is only no instance of the Whore, but the remaining four stereotypes are present with several examples. On the other hand, of Pascue's seven identified male stereotypes, only three of them could be noticed during analysing romantic comedies: self-reliance, non-relation attitudes towards sex, and restrictive emotionality.

Regarding the gender stereotype that women are always in a need of advice, whereas men are not showed not to be true with this analysis. Although women needed advice to a greater extent than men, there were also a lot of men who asked for it. Moreover, this research failed to prove the socially constructed concept that women are submissive to men who are always dominant and capable of being leaders. In spite of the fact that there are some instances of the mentioned claim, there are more examples of dominant, capable, and successful women. They are equal, or even more dominant than men in marriage, fighting for themselves, and newer romantic comedies even represent women as being more successful in business than men. Prejudices and stereotypes still exist and are obvious to notice, but progress in the representation of women as being the dominant ones is evident. Such representation can be regarded as a response to recent social and political changes and because of that it was more than welcomed. Moreover, the idea around domestic behaviours in relation to gender roles is refuted. Both men and women take part in cooking, cleaning, and taking care of the children. Stereotypes regarding this manner still exist, but only by words, and not by deeds. Prejudices like women are bad at sports are only represented verbally, and there is one example of a woman as a terrible driver. Regarding physical appearance, gender roles are applied only to women. Most of them look perfect, whereas men do not. Despite that fact, most men want and desire for their girlfriends to be perfect and attractive. Some women take care of their looks as well to the extent that their diet is restricted to only a few ingredients. But, newer analysed films depict

women as being beautiful, but not perfect. They have cellulite, they are a little bit curvy, and do not do their make-up, but still, they are beautiful by looking naturally.

It can be concluded from the represented gender roles in romantic comedies that such representation indeed influences society and its perspective and behaviour towards gender roles. There are a lot of gender roles signifiers used in romantic comedies which produce the signified, that is the concept triggered by signifiers. Signified can be seen in all the chapters used in this thesis as gender roles can be divided into several spheres based on occupations, personality traits, domestic behaviour, and physical appearance. As it has been already mentioned, every culture gives meaning to things in several different ways. One of them is to group things together within the classificatory system. The problem occurs if somebody or something ends up in the wrong category, as is the case with gender roles. Women ended up in the category that they are gentle, nurturing, and mild human beings and therefore are not performing physically demanding jobs, and are not considered as being able to be dominant or leader since they are sensitive, emotional, and empathetic. Men, on the other hand, belong to a category of strong, determined, and intelligent human beings. Therefore, difficult physical and intelligent jobs should be performed by them, and they are not to show any type of sad emotions. Some would say that such division is completely unnecessary as it produces stereotypes and accordingly has real consequences in society.

The concept of discourse is also very important when analysing gender roles. It is argued that all words have meaning because of which they are important as they have consequences in the real life. Throughout the part of the representation of gender roles in this thesis, one can see how much words can influence people's lives and feelings and create a particular perspective towards someone or something. The biggest concept with which it is done is power relations between man and woman. Such concept is behind all gender stereotypes as it gives particular power to men, and particular to women. It gives power to men that only they should do the speaking when women are with them, as was the case in the film *Couples Retreat;* it gives power to them that they should not look perfect, but women should as was highlighted in the majority of the analysed films; it gives power to men that they should not be nurturing, but rather self-serving which is once more visible in almost every analysed film. One of the most influential tools within the notion of power relations is the language of discourse. Not only that gender roles are emphasized with job titles like policeman, and fireman, but also with expressions like "to get girlie" found in the film *How Do You Know*, "suck it up, ladies" from *Second Act,* and "can you man up" from the film *To All the Boys I've Loved Before.* Discursive

structures also play an important role as they shape people's sense of reality. The problem is that such structures can exclude notions. For instance, this research proved that romantic comedies represent that showing emotion is mostly reserved for women, whereas men are excluded from it.

On the bright side, this research also showed that there are examples of disidentification in every analysed sphere. Not only one or two instances of it, but countless of them which indicates that people are well aware of gender roles stereotypes and have the desire to fight them. As it has been already discussed, older analysed films represent much more gender roles stereotypes in relation to newer films. It can be even argued that in those films disidentification is substantially more represented than gender roles stereotypes. This implies that there has been an epistemic break or discontinuous progress of discursive structures as they changed. It is also important to highlight that this specific epistemic break does not only signify a change in the representation of gender roles, but also positive progress as gender roles stereotypes are being slowly deleted. Even more important is the fact that disidentification cannot be found only in romantic comedies, that is in fiction, but in real life as well. There has been major progress regarding gender equality within the last ten years all around the world. First women stepped on the moon, young women are emboldened to speak up and fight for their beliefs, prestigious awards are given to women, and protests fighting for gender equality are organized with great responsiveness. The impact of such movements and noteworthy events can be seen in the film industry as well. The most recent movement #MeToo influenced the film industry to hire more women, to distribute their jobs equally, and to produce films with fewer gender roles stereotypes.

Benshoff and Griffin's data from their research based on gender roles in popular culture do not correspond with the results of this analysis. The notion of the perfect housewife could not be found in analysed romantic comedies, not either men's violence towards women. The only result that matches in both research is the concept of the individual and independent woman, who is yet still unsatisfied with her life because she cannot find a husband. Research done by Lauzen mainly correlates with the findings from this analysis. Male characters have an identifiable job and notable goal to a greater extent than female characters do. For men, notable goal mostly refers to business success, while for women it denotes the desire to find a husband. It is worth mentioning and emphasizing the fact that Lauzen's research proved that majority of characters, that being protagonists, major characters, speaking characters, and antagonists are male. This research proved just on the contrary. Male characters are prevailing in three older,

and two newer films, while in the rest of the films, that being one older, and six newer films, female characters are dominating. Progress regarding gender equality can be seen in this fact, which is probably a result of mentioned real-life social and cultural changes and events.

As for the narrative, romantic comedies follow all the necessary conventions. There is the beginning of the narrative, or the Conflict, which introduces the audience to the characters and the main plot; during the Crisis, the plot has advanced and there is some kind of fight between the main characters; the Resolution part is usually happy as the main characters resolved all the problems. The importance of narrative can be seen in all mentioned stereotypical representations of gender roles. Marginalization of women also appears, but mostly in older analysed films. Since romantic comedies are genre films, there is a recurrence of the same topics and characters, which is also confirmed with this research. In every analysed film, the topic was either looking for love or reinforcement of one. The main characters were always men and women, indicating only heterosexual love, but it needs to be mentioned that there were some instances of homosexual love of minor characters as well. Moreover, conventions characteristic of romantic comedies can also be noticed. There was crying, public humiliation, menus, and beautiful outfits. Additionally, some of the analysed romantic comedies are hybrids. For instance, *Long Shot* is a political romantic comedy, *Someone Great* is a drama romantic comedy, *To All the Boys I've Loved Before*, and *The Perfect Date* are teen romantic comedies.

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9. Gender roles in romantic comedies: Summary and key words

It can be said that popular culture and real life world are interdependable as they influence each other. Popular culture effects everyday lives with its representation of certain matters, whereas real-life events can be so powerful as to guide what popular culture will represent. The most concerning thought about popular culture is the fact that it can represent people, culture and concepts in stereotypical and prejudicial way. It is therefore of high importance to analyse which stereotypes are the most recurrent ones in order to if not prevent them, then at least reduce their recurrence or to make people aware that they do not have to behave in accordance with different roles that are being continuously displayed in popular culture. This thesis chose to analyse gender roles that are appearing in romantic comedies. Its main aim is to observe, analyse and explore gender roles in romantic comedies. Research is based on two main theoretical frameworks – representational and discourse theory. Analysis is done based on total of twelve romantic comedies. Half of them, declared as older romantic comedies, were produced around 2010, whereas the other half, referred to as newer romantic comedies, were produced around 2020. Such division was made in order to see if there has been any progress or change in representation of gender roles during these ten years. Regarding gender roles, they are divided into four spheres that were recognized as the most recurrent ones in the representation of gender roles in romantic comedies – occupations, personality traits, domestic behaviours, and physical appearance. Personality traits are further divided into gender personality characteristics – being emotional, asking for help/giving advice, being nurturing/self-serving, dominance/submissiveness, and perspective towards love. Analysis of gender roles in popular culture of other writers and academics is also given, as well as its comparison with the results of analysis done in this thesis.

Key words: gender roles, romantic comedies, stereotypical representation, popular culture, discourse

10. Rodne uloge u romantičnim komedijama: Sažetak i ključne riječi

Može se reći da su popularna kultura i stvarni svijet međusobno ovisni budući da reflektiraju jedni druge. Popularna kultura s njezinom reprezentacijom određenih stvari utječe na svakodnevni život, dok događaji iz stvarnog života mogu biti toliko snažni da vode što će popularna kultura reprezentirati. Najzabrinjavajuća misao o popularnoj kulturi je ta da ona može reprezentirati ljude, kulture i koncepte na stereotipičan način pun predrasuda. Iz toga je razloga od iznimne značajnosti analizirati koji se stereotipi najviše pojavljuju da bi ih ako ne

spriječili, onda bar smanjili njihovo pojavljivanje ili pak osvijestili ljude da ne se moraju ponašati u skladu s različitim ulogama koje popularna kultura kontinuirano prikazuje. U ovom se radu analiziraju rodne uloge koje se pojavljuju u romantičnim komedijama. Glavni je cilj promatrati, analizirati i istraživati rodne uloge u romantičnim komedijama, dok se istraživanje temelji na dva glavna teorijska okvira – teorija reprezentacije i diskursa. Analiza je napravljena na ukupno dvanaest romantičnih komedija. Početak prikazivanja polovice navedenih filmova, u radu navedeni kao stariji filmovi, je bilo oko 2010. godine, dok je početak prikazivanje ostalih filmova, u radu referirani kao noviji filmovi, bilo oko 2020. godine. Takva je podjela napravljena kako bi se uvidjelo postoji li napredak ili promjene u reprezentaciji rodnih uloga u tih deset godina. Što se tiče rodnih uloga, one su podijeljene u četiri sfere koje su bile prepoznate kao najučestalije u reprezentaciji rodnih uloga u romantičnim komedijama – zanimanja, osobine ličnosti, kućno ponašanje i fizički izgled. Osobine ličnosti su dalje podijeljene u rodne lične karakteristike – emocionalnost, traženje/davanje savjeta, biti njegujući/sebičan, dominantnost/submisivnost te odnos prema ljubavi. Analiza rodnih uloga u popularnoj kulturi drugih autora i znanstvenika također čini dio ovog rada, kao i komparacija njihovih rezultata istraživanja s ishodima ove analize.

Ključne riječi: rodne uloge, romantične komedije, stereotipična reprezentacija, popularna kultura, diskurs