

CHARLES UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
Institute of Sociological Studies

Bachelor's thesis

2024

Julie Kosová

CHARLES UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
Institute of Sociological Studies

Julie Kosová

**Love in the Heart of Prague: Exploring
Perceptions of Romantic Love among Prague's
Youth**

Bachelor's thesis

Year of defence: 2024

Author: Julie Kosová

Supervisor: Elisabeth Kovtiak, M.A.

Academic Year: 2023/2024

Bibliographic note

KOSOVÁ, Julie. *Love in the Heart of Prague: Exploring Perceptions of Romantic Love among Prague's Youth*. 39 pages. Bachelor's thesis. Charles University, Faculty of Social Sciences, Institute of Sociological Studies. Supervisor: Elisabeth Kovtiak, M.A.

Abstract

Romantic love in advertising often presents a consumerist depiction that may not align with the lived experience. This thesis aims to answer the question of how portrayals of love among the research participants correspond to Sternberg's theory of a love triangle in terms of intimacy, passion and commitment and how that differs between Czech locals and international people living in Czechia. The method of photo elicitation using advertisements is employed in focus groups to gather data that is further analysed through thematic analysis. It also considers the themes of gender stereotypes, diversity and commercialisation.

The findings show that participants referred to the three aforementioned pillars of love with commitment being the most important and passion the least. Furthermore, it was evident that gender stereotypes contributed to participants' perception of gender roles within a romantic relationship.

Abstrakt

Romantická láska v reklamě často představuje konzumeristický obraz, který nemusí být v souladu s prožívanou zkušeností. Cílem této práce je odpovědět na otázku, jak zobrazení lásky mezi účastníky výzkumu odpovídá Sternbergově teorii milostného trojúhelníku ve smyslu intimity, vášně a závazku a jak se liší mezi místními Čechy a cizinci žijícími v Česku. K získání dat, která jsou dále analyzována prostřednictvím tematické analýzy, je v ohniskových skupinách použita metoda elicitace fotografií pomocí reklam. Zohledňuje také témata genderových stereotypů, diverzity a komercializace.

Zjištění ukazují, že účastníci uváděli tři výše zmíněné pilíře lásky, přičemž nejdůležitější byl závazek a nejméně vášně. Dále bylo zřejmé, že genderové stereotypy přispívají k tomu, jak účastníci vnímají genderové role v rámci romantického vztahu.

Keywords

Romantic love, perceptions, Czechia, Sternberg's triangle of love, gender stereotypes, diversity, commercialisation

Klíčová slova

Romantická láska, vnímání, Česko, Sternbergův milostný trojúhelník, genderové stereotypy, diverzita, komercializace

Extent of thesis: 51 740 keystrokes

Declaration of authorship

1. The author hereby declares that he compiled this thesis independently, using only the listed resources and literature.
2. The author hereby declares that all the sources and literature used have been properly cited.
3. The author hereby declares that the thesis has not been used to obtain a different or the same degree.

Prague, 30th April

Julie Kosová



Handwritten signature of Julie Kosová in black ink, written in a cursive style. The signature is positioned above a horizontal line.

Acknowledgments

I want to extend my deepest thank you to my supervisor, Elisabeth, who has been so incredibly helpful throughout this whole journey. I would also like to thank Martin for keeping me accountable and offering his advice during our preparation class.

I would also like to thank my partner, Alex, and my family for their love and patience and for believing in me so fiercely even in times of struggle.

Institute of Sociological Studies
Bachelor's thesis proposal

1. Statement of the problem

In my Bachelor Thesis, I will focus on analysing the portrayal of love in advertising. I will do this through exploring its influence on perceptions of love, analysing gender roles in relationships depicted in advertisements, and examining the commercialization and commodification of love.

My aim is to compare the conventional idea of love against what we are shown on television. I expect these two will differ but might also influence one another. While researching the concept of love in advertising, I will also analyse gender roles portrayed in the advertisements that tend to exaggerate stereotypes. We are heavily influenced by advertisements. This could have a negative effect on our perception of love. Therefore, I also aim to tackle the topic of commercialisation of love, more specifically through Valentine's Day ads from the year of 2024. With that, two more concepts arise. Those are the exploitation and commodification of love that comes with recreating the ideals of love in order to sell goods or services.

2. Merit of studying the problem

Every day, we are exposed to countless marketing campaigns that we often do not even register them anymore. The advertisements we consume may alter our understanding of certain concepts. One such example is the portrayal of love in these advertisements or showing various aspects of romantic relationships. This problem should be investigated in order to provide more insight into what people consider as a form of pure love and how that differs from what we are shown by marketing campaigns. Furthermore, I will look at how the relationships in advertisements reinforce and challenge stereotypes that can contribute to a close minded mindset.

3. Literature review

1. The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love, and Eroticism in Modern Societies by Anthony Giddens
2. Zimand-Sheiner, D., & Roth-Cohen, O. (2016). Love is in the air: Love Relationships in Television Commercials. *New-York: Nova Science Publishers*, 107–127.
3. Scott, B. K., Cayleff, S. E., Donadey, A., & Lara, I. (2016). *Women in Culture: An Intersectional Anthology for Gender and Women's Studies*. Chapter 4.7: Beauty and the Beast of Advertising. John Wiley & Sons.
4. Barthel, D. (1989). *Putting On Appearances: Gender and Advertising*. Temple University Press.
5. Illouz, E. (1997). *Consuming the Romantic Utopia: Love and the Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*. Univ of California Press.

4. Research question(s)

1. How does the portrayal of love in advertising differ from conventional concepts of love?
2. What are the consequences of the commercialization and commodification of love in Valentine's Day advertising?
3. How do gender roles in relationships, as depicted in advertisements, reinforce or challenge stereotypes?

5. Method(s) of data production

This thesis aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the relationship between the concept of pure love and how that is used in various advertising campaigns by focusing on combining and analysing previous literature about the topic. Using mainly books, journals and online resources as well as looking at some actual campaigns, I aim to compile an array of opinions into an overview. Moreover, I will be able to employ empirical media research by analysing Valentine's Day advertising campaigns in the Czech Republic in 2024. I can further support this research by utilising newspaper articles about the topic of gender in advertising as the topic is gaining traction since many advertising campaigns facilitate stereotypes.

6. Method(s) of data analysis

In my research, I will primarily be using content analysis. This analysis will be used to contextualise the literature around the topic of pure love, advertising and how these two relate. Next, I expect to be using discourse analysis to analyse the language used in advertisement campaigns. And lastly, I will use comparative analysis. This type of analysis will be used to compare text from ad campaigns against one another to determine whether there are any resemblance and/or differences. I can also compare advertising campaigns in the Czech Republic against those in other countries, such as the United States.

7. Ethical considerations

In conducting a research centred around analysing the depiction of romantic relationships in advertising, several ethical considerations should be taken into account. Firstly, I should adhere to ethical guidelines in content analysis, prioritising objectivity and minimising potential biases. Furthermore, building upon previous research requires appropriately crediting and acknowledging the work of other researchers to maintain academic integrity. Overall, conducting this research requires careful consideration of ethical principles to ensure the integrity, proper accreditation and societal impact of the study.

Table of Content

1. Introduction.....	9
2. Theoretical Framework.....	11
3. Literature Review.....	11
3.1 Romantic Love.....	11
3.2 Gender Stereotypes.....	14
3.3 Love in Advertising.....	15
4. Data and Methods.....	16
4.1 Research Objectives and Questions.....	16
4.2 Methodology.....	17
4.2.1 Focus groups with photo-elicitation.....	17
4.2.2 Description of Visuals.....	18
4.2.3 Sample and recruiting.....	21
4.3 Data Analysis.....	22
4.4 Limitations and Ethical Considerations.....	22
5. Research results.....	23
5.1 Perception of Commitment among Czech and international youth.....	23
5.2 Intimacy.....	25
5.3 Passion.....	25
5.4 Gender stereotypes and love.....	26
5.5 Manifestations of love: material and intangible.....	27
5.6 Commercialisation.....	28
5.7 The goal of love.....	29
6. Conclusion.....	30
7. References.....	33
Appendix: Advertisements.....	35

1. Introduction

Romantic love is a central theme in popular culture and an important part of many people's lives. Throughout history, love has been depicted and romanticised in various forms of media, including literature, art, movies, and advertising. These portrayals often shape our own understanding of love, influencing our perceptions of commitment, intimacy, and passion in romantic relationships (Sternberg, 1986). The portrayal of love in media and specifically in popular culture plays a significant role in shaping societal norms and expectations surrounding romantic relationships (Illouz, 1997). Love on screen often presents an idealised and romanticised notion of love, emphasising themes of passion, devotion, and happy endings and taking focus away from other important elements such as communication, sacrifice and respecting a partner's needs. These depictions not only reflect cultural values and ideals but also contribute to the construction of social norms and expectations regarding love and relationships (Illouz, 1997).

Apart from it, love is also a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that has captured the minds of sociologists. Illouz (1997) writes that in her opinion, romantic love and its practices in today's society have to be considered along with consumer capitalism. She further argues that romantic love has become an indispensable driving force of the American economic market (Illouz 1997).

The aim of this thesis is to make a contribution to the existing body of research in this field, while also acknowledging and highlighting the noteworthy studies that have already been undertaken. The thesis will provide a definition of romantic love as well as provide an overview of the current research carried out in this field. This will include a look at romantic love as a stand alone concept, diversity in media, gender stereotypes and love in advertising.

This thesis seeks to answer the question of what ideas do young people have about romantic love, as well as what are the key aspects of love that individuals prioritise. To do so, the study uses advertisements as they reflect societal ideas about love. By examining the discrepancies between idealised depictions and lived realities, the research aims to highlight how advertising shapes our notions of love and contributes to the construction of societal norms surrounding romantic relationships.

Firstly, I will provide a theoretical framework that will be used as a background for this study and a literature review on research carried out in the field. In this section, a definition of romantic love is given, main contributors to the field introduced as well as important concepts. More closely, the literature review addresses the idea of romantic love, diversity, gender stereotypes and finishes with a section about love in advertising.

The next part of this paper is dedicated to the methodology and the research conducted. Data was gathered through focus group interviews and photo elicitation of adverts featuring romantic love. The data was analysed through thematic analysis to identify the main themes. Then I will present the findings and link them to the literature to put them into the wider sociological context. And finally, I will conclude with a summary of the whole thesis.

2. Theoretical Framework

In social sciences, there are various definitions of what romantic love is. In order to define it for the purpose of this thesis, Sternberg's Triangular theory of love will be utilised in this study (Sternberg, 1986). He based his theory on three pillars of any relationship: intimacy, passion and commitment. Intimacy refers to how close and connected the couple is to each other. Passion speaks to desire that manifests into both physical and mental arousal. And lastly, commitment represents the devotion to stay in and maintain a relationship.

Based on which of these are present in a relationship, he classifies it as either liking, infatuation, empty love, companionate love, fatuous love, romantic love or consummate love. Each of these have at least two or more of the previously defined pillars. He puts consummate love at the centre as it has all three elements. That is the focus of this thesis. However, some of his opponents argue that that is what should be called romantic love. As this thesis includes focus groups of people unfamiliar with this theory and also aims to reach an audience of wider public, the term of romantic love or romantic relationship will be used.

3. Literature Review

In the past century, there has been an interest in the study of romantic love as a research field, resulting in quite diverse explorations. Even bigger interest was drawn to advertising and its influence on society (Illouz, 1997). However, these two topics were not studied thoroughly together as research on sex in advertising takes precedence over love, focusing on

deconstruction of sexual appeal, seduction and flirting in advertising, leaving the more intricate aspects of human relations, such as commitment or even friendship, out of scope.

This qualitative study aims to explore the perception of love using advertising campaigns to facilitate discussion during focus groups. In order to do that effectively, we must first understand the relationship between love and advertising itself within the wider sociological context.

3.1 Romantic Love

To further our understanding of love, let us look at the history of romantic love. In this thesis, the focus is on love as a part of a romantic relationship. Today, people consider love a base on which we aim to build a successful and long lasting relationship (Coontz, 2016). Some might even argue that it is the most important aspect of a relationship. But historically speaking, this is quite a novel idea. Relationships or rather marriages have been seen more as unions for convenience. Coontz (2016) in her essay “The Radical Idea Of Marrying For Love” writes that people with such a notion would have been considered insane, delusional and abnormal. That is not to say that people didn't want or intend to fall in love but love had no place in marriage. This social institution was seen as a means to have children and a family with a partner of similar background as well as for the purposes of maintaining a social status. And love was strictly for passion, play and sex.

According to Perina (2020), this relatively new idea of marrying for love is thought to have started in the 18th century . This coincided with the rise of democracy and by extension personal freedom. Since then, choosing a partner has become increasingly more personal. The ways in which we choose a partner are extensive and can vary immensely based on our cultural upbringing and other factors. However, especially in the Western world, people have been putting less emphasis on social status, economic security and political background and more so on love and attraction.

The idea that partner preferences have been changing is supported by Buss et al. (2001). Their study on the subject spanned almost sixty years from 1939 to 1996 and data was gathered irregularly. Firstly, in 1936, then 1956 and then every ten years or so. There were 607 respondents who were American undergraduate students from three different universities: the

University of Texas at Austin; the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia; and the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor. Participants were asked to complete a mate selection survey. It focused on eighteen mate characteristics. Those being: “Good cook, housekeeper; a pleasing disposition; sociability similar; education background; refinement, neatness; good financial prospect; chastity; dependable character; emotional stability, maturity; desire for home, children; favourable social status; good looks; similar religious background; ambition, industriousness; similar political background; mutual attraction, love; good health; education, intelligence” (Buss et. al, 2001). Respondents were asked to rank these by the order of importance.

At the start of the study in 1939, the characteristic “mutual attraction, love” on average ranked 5th for women and 4th for men. This is relatively high but outranked by characteristics such as “dependable character” or “emotional stability”. However, in 1984/1985, both genders ranked it in 1st place and then again in 1996 showing an emerging pattern.

While this study offers an insight into the evolution of partner preferences, it may be critiqued for possible inconsistencies in methodology as it has been conducted by many researchers. However, it also highlighted regional differences in its findings which speaks to this research as well. That is, one’s cultural background impacts their values and therefore preferences and views on love and partnership.

Another influential sociologist in the sociology of love field is Anthony Giddens. The history of this field of research can be said to have started in the 20th century and Giddens can be considered very influential and to have set the groundwork for the sociology of love. In order to understand current theories and schools of thought, we must first understand the classical theories on which the newer ones have been built on.

Anthony Giddens is one of the largest contributors to the field with his books covering a wide range of topics. For the benefit of this thesis, we will focus on one of his later works which is “The Transformation of Intimacy, Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies” from 1992. The book has several main takeaways. One of which are the ideas of a pure relationship and confluent love. The interconnection between confluent love and the pure relationship lies in their shared emphasis on individual agency, choice, and personal satisfaction in relationships. Confluent love serves as the broader concept, emphasising the individualised

nature of modern love, while the pure relationship is a specific manifestation of this broader trend. In a pure relationship, individuals exercise their agency to create a relationship based on mutual consent, emotional fulfilment, and adaptability.

Both concepts reflect the contemporary shift away from externally imposed norms and expectations toward relationships that are self-determined, flexible, and centred on the happiness and satisfaction of the individuals involved. The fluidity and autonomy inherent in both confluent love and the pure relationship highlight the transformative nature of intimacy in modern societies.

3.2 Gender Stereotypes

While gender stereotypes are considered to be purely negative by some, they may help us shape our own ideas about gender roles within a romantic relationship. They may serve as a point of reference and may open up a discussion between partners about what role each one wants to fulfil.

In order to elaborate on the topic of gender stereotypes, let us establish a proper definition. In their article on changing gender stereotypes, Priyashantha et al. (2021, p. 120) define them as “a society’s beliefs about the appropriate roles for men and women regarding the division of paid work, homework and childcare”. This includes personality traits as well. Men are often expected to be decisive, intellectual and assertive. Whereas women are expected to be nurturing, warm and kind.

When it comes to their portrayal in advertising, we often see certain tropes repeated over and over. Consumers come to anticipate them and that is why companies utilise them so often. A frequent and overarching stereotype in advertising showing a couple is a depiction of the man as a provider and the woman as the caretaker or receiver (Kniazian, 2014). One might think that since the stereotypes are so established and obvious, why does it become an issue?

The Advertising Standards Authority in the United Kingdom have also pondered this question. In 2017, they published a report highlighting the potential harm these types of advertisements may cause (Parker and Smillie, 2017).

“Gender stereotypes have the potential to cause harm by inviting assumptions about adults and children that might negatively restrict how they see themselves and how others see them. These assumptions can lead to unequal gender outcomes in public and private aspects of people’s lives; outcomes, which are increasingly acknowledged to be detrimental to individuals, the economy and society in general.” (Parker and Smillie, 2017, p. 5)

It emphasised six main categories of concern: roles; characteristics; mocking people for not conforming to stereotype; sexualisation; objectification and body image.

Following its publication, the UK has finalised a ban of certain types of adverts. For example, advertisements can no longer depict a person failing at a task because of their gender or a man being shamed for carrying out a typically female role such as changing a diaper. However, BBC stresses that the ban does not tackle all gender stereotypes but rather focuses on “specific harms” (BBC, 2019). However, the harmful effects were not explained in great detail so it is speculative whether they actually negatively impact people's perception of gender roles in a romantic relationship.

3.3 Love in Advertising

Eva Illouz has greatly contributed to the understanding of love and its relation to society and consumerism. Drawing on Eva Illouz's insights from "Consuming the Romantic Utopia: Love and the Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism (1997), this thesis explores the perception and portrayal of love in advertising through the lens of consumer capitalism and romantic ideals . Illouz's analysis of the commodification of love within capitalist societies serves as a theoretical framework for understanding how advertising shapes and influences individuals' expectations and experiences of romantic relationships. Illouz (1997) writes about how romance and consumption have been progressively merging since the start of the 20th century which marked the start of large scale promotion of commodity filled romance.

By examining how advertising constructs romantic narratives, this study seeks to uncover the ways in which consumer culture intersects with notions of love, gender stereotypes, and emotional fulfilment. Furthermore, how this manifests differently in a culturally local group to the Czech republic and a group of culturally diverse participants currently residing there. Additionally, Illouz's empirical illustration of emotional labour and the gendered dynamics of

romantic relationships provides a framework for analysing the power dynamics and gender representations embedded within romantic advertising imagery.

Another pertinent study to this thesis has been carried out by Zimand-Sheiner and Roth-Cohen (2016). Their research posed the questions of how often love relationships are featured in television advertisements and what type of love relationships are being depicted. The data was collected in 2014 in Israel. Two Israeli television channels were monitored for the span of one year. Advertisements were then analysed only if they “tell a story or invite the audience to construct a story using the raw materials provided by the advertisement” (Zimand-Sheiner and Roth-Cohen, 2016).

The findings showed that only about 2.5% of adverts were narrative and displayed a plot about a couple's relationship (Zimand-Sheiner and Roth-Cohen, 2016). The authors highlight that this frequency is very low. Furthermore, they ponder why that is the case. One suggestion is that they commodify love by substituting the intimate couple's relationship with brand-consumer relationship. However, it is important to note that their findings could be specific to Israel and might vastly differ in another country.

Moreover, their results were categorised into types of love relationships using Sternberg's Triangular theory of love mentioned earlier in the theoretical framework (Sternberg, 1986). Their findings show that no advertisements at all showed consummate love. Most common were advertisements that were portraying infatuated love with romantic love in the second place. Generally, passion was the pillar most represented in their data.

Moving away from this study, love in advertising has been researched for its appeal to the consumer. Phillip Kotler describes something he calls the “romance appeal” (Kotler, 2003). It is a marketing strategy that seeks to evoke feelings of love, passion, and desire in consumers to promote products or brands. Kotler (2003) emphasises that romance appeal is particularly effective in advertising products or services associated with personal relationships, luxury, beauty, and self-indulgence. Furthermore, Kotler suggests that romance appeal can be used strategically to differentiate a brand from competitors and create a unique and memorable impression in consumers' minds. By aligning with the consumers' emotions and desires, brands can forge deep emotional connections with their target audience, leading to increased brand loyalty and sales.

4. Data and Methods

4.1 Research Objectives and Questions

In order to successfully conduct this research, its objectives must be stated clearly through research questions. This thesis seeks to explore the perceptions of love among Prague-based youth and aims to answer the following research objectives and questions:

- To explore the perceptions of romantic love among Prague's youth.
 - a) What are the perceptions of romantic love among the Prague's youth?
 - b) How do perceptions of romantic love among the research participants correspond to Sternberg's triangle of love?
 - c) What do young people consider as 'the goal' of romantic love?
- To identify manifestations of romantic love.
 - a) What are the ways of demonstrating love to the partner and the society?
 - b) How are physical objects utilised in demonstrating romantic love?
- To explore the role of gender stereotypes in the ideas about romantic love.
- To study the ideas about commercialisation of love among Prague's youth.
- To find out how the above mentioned aspects are perceived by a sample of Czech locals and a sample of international people with a current residence in the Czech republic.

4.2 Methodology

To explore the aforementioned research questions, the study employed photo-elicited focus groups and thematic analysis of its transcriptions.

4.2.1 Focus groups with photo-elicitation

The focus groups were centred around visual elicitation. This specific research method asks that participants bring in visual prompts on a certain topic. John Collier Junior could be credited with the invention of this approach (Mannay, 2016). He largely advocated for the use of photo voice and photo elicitation. According to him, visuals are just as important as words and enable us to glimpse the culture that produced them.

In this case, participants were asked to bring in an advert showing romantic love. During the interview, each participant was asked to present what they brought in, why and its source. Afterwards, the whole group discussed aspects of the advertisement with the help of questions

from the interviewer in the form of some prepared questions as well as improvised ones to help gather as much information as possible.

This method was preferable to for example in-depth interviews. The use of adverts was intentional as respondents had to consider their views prior to the focus group because they had to search for an accurate representation of love that they identify with. Furthermore, during the interview itself, the visual prompts allowed discussion to flow more freely than with a strict interview guide.

4.2.2 Description of Visuals

In this section, I would like to present these images and discuss them separately, as further in the analysis the priority was given to the discussions of love as a concept, rather than discussion of visual elements on these images.

4.2.2.1 Images from international young adults living in Prague

Starting off with Figure 1. It is an advert provided by a participant from South Korea. It advertises a Czech jewellery brand Rýdl. More specifically, this advertisement aims to sell marriage rings and the brand is trying to attract its customers by having a limited 10% sale. Timewise, it relates to Valentine's day which was less than a month prior.

At the centre of the picture, there are three rings which can be considered symbolic to marriage and commitment. The background is blurred which further accentuates the focus. A woman is holding them as can be identified by her painted finger nail. Her face is deliberately not shown. The reason could be the wish for the consumer to substitute it with a picture of their loved one themselves rather than choosing a representative model.

The background consists of varying shades of blue. Blue colour is typically associated with comfort and safety. In this case, it also brings about a royal or luxurious mood. That is further promoted by the chosen font for the brand name. It manages to look modern while adding to the feel of luxury. The other font, on the other hand, is simple yet modern which is possibly another way the brand wants to portray themselves.

Moving on to another advert in Figure 2 brought in by a participant from Saudi Arabia. It is an advert from a competing jewellery company, Pandora. Generally speaking, Pandora presents

themselves as a more youthful and a very approachable brand. While the previous advert focused on commitment, this advert's focus lies more on the connection. This is evident from the serious eye contact between the two models and also physical touch. The woman is tenderly holding him by the cheek, jaw and neck and they also connect at the foreheads. The tops of their heads align in height which signifies a balanced dynamic. Their connection is evident. The purpose of this advertisement is to make the consumer believe that they too can achieve this level of connection and love by buying Pandora's products.

A prominent element of the advert is the colour scheme made only by greyscale. While this further contributes to the simplicity and tenderness in the picture, it makes it more challenging for the target audience to imagine what the jewellery pieces look like in real life, especially because they are also partially obstructed by the slogan of "Be love". Despite this, the advert feels effective in portraying love to the audience. That concludes the adverts submitted by people from outside the Czech republic and now let us look at one submitted by a Czech local.

4.2.2.2 Images from local young adults living in Prague

Figure 3 shows a Valentine's day advertisement from Coca Cola. This brand is famous for its advertising focusing on diverse groups of people and emulating a feeling of fun. However, the focus of this particular one is on Valentine's day. Therefore it feels more intimate.

In the picture, there are two people sharing a private moment sitting on the beach and watching either the sunset or sunrise. From their proximity, one can guess that they are a couple and are in love. One of them is also holding red balloons which shape loosely resembles a heart. Next we can look at the font used in this advertisement. It resembles handwriting, one such like from a handwritten Valentine's day card. It appears more personalised and does not at all feel corporate despite Coca cola being such a major brand.

Following that, a participant has brought in an Instagram advert of a small local company called Wearnillo. This advertisement shows two people with the woman hugging the man from behind around the shoulders. Immediately, the consumer identifies them as a couple in love. The focus is certainly on connection, in this case it is both physical and mental. Similarly to the Pandora advert, this is shown through physical touch and eye contact.

It is a special Valentine's day promotion. That is evident from the heart in the background. It is soft and helps to keep the focus on the models in the centre of the picture. Looking at the font, it is very romantic and again could be potentially trying to look like handwriting. This time cursive as that is quite common in Czech republic and it is a local brand.

The last advert is also from Instagram. This time from a brand called Digital Memories. They sell personalised cassettes on which the customer can record a personalised message for their loved one. Their advert showcases the product and a happy couple in the background. From the writing, we are meant to believe that the couple are celebrating their first anniversary. Furthermore, we can see that they are on a date in some park or a meadow.

It is difficult to discern who was gifted this product in this case but it can be assumed that the woman has received the flowers from her partner. Flowers are often used to symbolise romantic love in adverts. Their white colour could suggest some kind of innocence but could also be explained by the fact that white colour does not distract the eye from the product which remains the focus of the picture. The colours of the cassette are baby pink and baby blue. While this colour scheme is often associated with the trans flag, this choice is more likely meant to signify the traditional colours associated with the two main genders. Blue for boys and pink for girls. The colours chosen almost look juvenile but could be said to have a nostalgic feel which leads onto the next point.

Both the colours of the product and the product itself have a sort of nostalgic appeal to them. Obviously cassettes are now considered a dead medium and some may feel the longing for the times where they were regularly used. The past is often thought of as “the simpler times” or “the easier times” and that could be translated here as well. The sense of the retro aesthetic is seen in the hue of the photo and the outfits the models are wearing. Both are wearing denim clothes which are often associated with the 80s or 90s. Furthermore, people might crave the nostalgia of owning physical copies. The digital world does not have any hard copies and people miss the physical mementos such as photo albums or products like these.

4.2.3 Sample and recruiting

The focus groups participants for this project were recruited via snowball method. They were mainly recruited through word of mouth. To participate in the project, they had to fulfil the requirement of current residency in the Czech republic. One focus group consisted of

internationals living in the Czech republic and was made up of different nationalities, including Norway, South Korea and Saudi Arabia and the other group included locals. The focus of the research was on young adults. For the purpose of this thesis, that is to be understood as thirty years of age or younger but no younger than eighteen. However, the majority of participants were around twenty-two years old.

The recruitment and the focus groups were carried out in a period from the 20th of February to 15th of March 2024. Nine people were recruited but in the end, only six participants participated in the project. They were separated into two groups. Each group consisted of three participants. Moreover, both focus groups had taken place in person to encourage a more fruitful discussion and to create ease between the participants and were carried out in English as even the Czech locals reported a high level of English proficiency. Occasionally, use of Czech language has occurred when discussing local brands and the wording in their adverts. Both sessions were recorded and transcribed by hand by the author.

4.3 Data Analysis

Before analysis could be carried out, both interviews have been transcribed from an audio file into a text form. In order to prevent any mistakes during this process, it was done manually by the author. This also allowed full immersion and familiarity with the data.

Rifa'I identifies three main elements to consider while performing a successful analysis. The first one is the object of the advertisement, then there is the context of it and lastly, the text (Rifa'I, 2010). While this may be used as a guideline, there are no concrete guidelines or set procedures. That can provide much freedom and serve to uncover interesting findings but it is important to note that it is also a limitation to this type of analysis. Furthermore, it creates difficulties when trying to compare with or replicate a previous research paper.

The second part of the analysis makes use of the transcripts of the focus groups which will be analysed using thematic analysis. This analysis is carried out using a coding software called Atlas.ti. For this data analysis, a bottom up approach is used. Meaning that, the texts are read over, interpreted and then codes are inductively selected.

4.4 Limitations and Ethical Considerations

Firstly, the snowball method of participant recruitment can be considered problematic. This method can recruit people with similar socioeconomic background and that can lead to a biased sample. Therefore the findings of this thesis should not be applied to a wider population.

While focus groups serve as a valuable platform for stimulating discussion in sociological research, they may paradoxically impede it under certain circumstances. This dynamic was observed by the author during an interaction with the group of international participants. Given their varied cultural backgrounds, divergent viewpoints occasionally emerged, resulting in moments of subtle tension or disagreement. It became apparent that such emotional undercurrents could impact the participants' willingness to engage fully in the discussion and articulate their thoughts effectively.

As this study was carried out as a Bachelor thesis, it might be considered to have a limited sample size. This was mainly due to time constraints. However, this study made use of qualitative data which offer a deep and rich understanding of the topic and therefore the sample size was deemed appropriate by the researcher for the purpose of this study.

Prior to the focus groups, all participants have been informed about the general details, the background and the purpose of the project. Their consent for participation and being recorded has been obtained verbally.

5. Research results

Sternberg (1986) who deconstructs love into three categories. Those are commitment, intimacy and passion. This part of the thesis addresses how the research participants talk about those constituent parts of love and what value they assign to each one.

5.1 Perception of Commitment among Czech and international youth

Starting off with the theme of commitment, there are three subcodes under it. The first one is simply named “commitment”. Then, there are “effort” and “sacrifice”. Amongst the research participants, commitment was universally acknowledged to be a substantial part of love. There

were discussions and mentions of marriage and having children together as obvious and natural milestones of a relationship. Participant D with a Muslim background from Saudi Arabia said this about her view on commitment: “Yeah, the end goal is definitely marriage. And actually, in my culture that's the start of the relationship and not just the end. Definitely marriage is a milestone for people.”

However, commitment is not only about marriage. It is about the dedication one gives to their partner. Participant S mentioned this: “I think in Korea, the person who earns more money, the other one will stay at home. Like a stay at home dad or mom.” This statement informs us about their view on commitment through sacrifice and compromise in a relationship that can trump societal norms and expectations.

Furthermore, a number of the Czech participants highlighted the scale of it. Meaning that, commitment is not something to be achieved but rather continuously worked at throughout the entire length of the relationship. Participant A offered their opinion on this:

“To add onto your point, I feel like for me, personally, it's like a team player. Someone you want on your team. Someone who will support you through whichever things that you will do yourself. And someone in your corner, like you said. But also give you some pushback and give her own opinion on whatever is going on in your life.” (Participant A)

In one of the focus groups, the discussion steered towards the sense of duty as a way to show commitment to your partner. The topic was discussed in relation to Valentine's day expectations. There was a consensus that each partner has certain expectations that need to be fulfilled on this particular holiday by their significant other, but it could also be applied more generally. Participant A described what they feel about this holiday.

“But yeah, I definitely agree also that both men and women have their duties, like during Valentine's Day. Duties in the form of a man buys a flower which shows that he is affectionate to a woman.” (Participant A)

Interestingly, the example of gift giving on Valentine's day or more specifically the gifting of flowers, was also mentioned by the other group. Their discussion highlighted how these standards are set by cultural norms and how alien they can seem to foreigners. However,

adhering to these norms without completely understanding them or agreeing with them can be a sign of devotion and commitment. Below, participant H shared his cultural shock upon finding out about this custom:

“Especially this flower giving feeling it's like mandatory here. My flatmate from Moldova, she asked me this Valentine's are you bringing her some flowers. And I said no I didn't have time to do it today. And she was like what are you doing, H? Just go to Lidl and get her a couple, that's better than nothing. And I'm like what do you mean? I'm already taking her for a date and I thought that was enough.” (Participant H)

5.2 Intimacy

The next large category was intimacy. Under this category were two codes “intimacy” and “respect of needs”. Intimacy was mentioned in relation to the adverts. Meaning that the companies successfully utilised marketing tactics to translate into this value. Despite talking about models, research participant D describes her impression while looking at an advert in Figure 2.

“So that could be truly understanding each other, accepting each other and it feels like they're looking into each other's souls a bit. Like they look like they are in love and to me, I've always really loved this kind of lovey dovey romantic dates and cute things, like the more traditional love that you see in movies.” (Participant D)

Moreover, the participants discussed this topic in a number of ways. Some highlighted the power of strong communication. Some highlighted the simplicity of being with somebody and just enjoying the moment and smiling. And others hinted at intimacy while discussing what their ideal partner meant to them. They compared it to having a best friend forever by your side.

5.3 Passion

The last category of codes as inspired by Sternberg was passion. There were two codes under this category “sexual component” and “physical touch”. Arguably, physical touch could also be considered a part of intimacy but for the purpose of this analysis, it was coded under passion.

Unsurprisingly, out of the last three categories this one has the least amount of codes. Passion is hard to portray well in advertising without oversexualising it. The parts of the interview that were coded under this category mostly consisted of light touch between the models or eye contact that could be interpreted to mean something more. The adverts where this was prominent were Figure 2, Figure 4 and Figure 5.

While in Sternberg's Triangle of love theory he gives all three components equal value, passion does appear to be the most private one. Despite it having only eight codes, compared to intimacy with eleven and commitment with sixteen, it does not mean that the sample values it less. It is likely that they did not feel comfortable sharing that part of their view on love. There was one participant who hinted at sex during Valentine's day. Despite not having said it explicitly, they implied it by talking about women buying lingerie to surprise their partner. They said "Because he bought her the flowers, the chocolates and the dinner. So she should just buy this pretty lingerie and look gorgeous." (Participant M).

5.4 Gender stereotypes and love

Romantic love is to a great extent linked to gender relations and therefore is tied to gender stereotypes. Gender stereotypes reflect our expectations about gender roles inside and outside a relationship. It is then up to the partners to consider what is helpful to them and what is not as well as communicate through it.

It was clear that all participants were aware of gender stereotypes in the advertising as well as in real life. Cultural background was very important here. Participants could more or less agree on the present stereotypes but their upbringing and their culture determined how much they questioned these stereotypes. In relation to advertising, they agreed that men were still expected to fulfil the traditional role of the provider while women were the caregivers and receivers. The nuances may differ to each person but the main idea stayed the same. What differed vastly were the attitudes. This was very prominent in the international focus group. Two participants seemed to position themselves at opposite sides of the spectrum. One was from Norway- participant H and the other from Saudi Arabia- participant D. The last participant in the group kept quiet or found themselves somewhere in the middle.

For example, participant D voiced concerns about gifting their boyfriend a more expensive present than they previously received. They speak about not wanting the partner to feel insecure or inferior. On the other hand, participant H shares that in Norway there is a high emphasis on gender equality. That is evident, for instance, on Valentine's day where women do not expect to receive flower bouquets and a couple is more likely to go out on a date together and split the check. Below participant D elaborates on her feelings on this and replies to a question from participant H.

“I feel like that's the baseline. It's even like twenty or ten crowns. It doesn't matter. I know that my boyfriend doesn't like that I splurge on him. He's like listen I do this for you. So it's kind of like... I like to give him gifts but I also understand that he doesn't like to get them all the time. You know what I mean?”(Participant D)

“Absolutely. How would you feel if you earned way more than your boyfriend did? Or how do you think that would make him feel?” (Participant H)

“Oh he would not like that. He would be supportive to me. It's not like he would tell me to quit my job because that is irrational. But he would definitely be like this cannot stay like this. It's just his ego. But I also kind of like it. Why not? We should kind of be similar or he should be more than me. Because we also have to consider pregnancy and like helping with the kids. Because I know that being a mother and being home is really important to the development of the child as well. So I don't think he would be comfortable ever... You know I will expose my cousins. I know that they make more money than their husbands and I felt some weird things sometimes at that point between like discussions. There is like this insecurity that the men have. And when the man is insecure, that's like... Then he does really strange things. I realise you should never compete with your man. They need to feel somewhat dominant over or towards you. You can take it how you like but I think it's totally normal. That's how we are.” (Participant D)

5.5 Manifestations of love: material and intangible

Next, it became evident that research participants agreed that people in love are supposed to give gifts to each other and to indicate with physical objects that they belong to each other. There were mentions of goods and other things that indicate love to the partner. Goods focused more on materialistic things whereas indicators of love were more focused on gestures and such. While describing romantic love, participants often mentioned specific things that they

would want a partner to do or gift them. The obvious example of a good were previously mentioned flowers. Indicators of love mentioned things like travelling, showing off an engagement ring or wearing matching attire as a couple. Both of these codes signified some intention to relay private romantic love to the world. This wish can be driven by the want to share it or in order to display social status. For example, participant D shared that their boyfriend cannot currently afford to buy them flowers but since he's studying to become a doctor, they are counting on that changing in the future.

For many people it is important to show others that they are experiencing romantic love. They are eager to demonstrate their love not only to their partner but also to the outside world and not just to the partner. Participant H said this about the tradition of buying engagement rings: "This is a nice thing and not a dark thing to hide inside. Like broadcasting kind of commitment. If you're going to buy these rings, it's because you want people to look at and wear it outside, these things." Since a lot of our ideas about love are shaped or at least influenced by the media, it makes sense that participants reported wanting to abide by these societal rules and show their love. Furthermore, people tend to seek out romantic love that is portrayed by influencers.

5.6 Commercialisation

That presents the next theme which is commercialisation. What is important to remember is that. According to the research participants, advertisements are not trying to accurately portray real life by any means. They show an idealised version that is trying to sell us a product or a service. Research participants discussed this as well during the focus groups. They spoke about being aware of it but not being able to resist it. Some said they were trying but others said they more or less embraced it as they find it impossible to be immune to advertising's effects. Illouz called advertising companies "economic and cultural tastemakers" which speaks true here (Illouz, 1997). Below is what participant T said about the commercialisation of love.

"I think love is like commercialised a lot because a standard date is going to the cinema or going to a restaurant or going bowling instead of taking a walk or like having dinner at home, cooking. It is very commercialised and aimed at you spending money and if you don't spend money, it wasn't a real date. Nothing major." (Participant T)

This relates to what Eva Illouz has said about romantic love in advertising as well. In her book, she spoke about how when advertising first started to utilise the appeal of romantic

relationships, they focused heavily on selling luxury. Below is what she wrote in her book about this.

“Almost invariably, and regardless of whether the product advertised is shampoo, soap, face creams, perfume, or clothes, these ads feature a couple in close embrace, the man wearing a tuxedo, the woman an evening gown and pearls, clothing that then as now represented luxury and glamour. In the very few cases in which the couple is not in evening dress, the man and the woman are still shown wearing elegant apparel” (Illouz, 1997)

While she described the early twentieth century it is still relevant and similar to what participant T has said. But they are aware that it is what makes companies profit and it works on its consumers. Therefore it creates a positive feedback loop where companies produce these adverts and consumers keep responding to them. Participant T had more to say about this.

“Like, we talked about the commercialisation. It is annoying. I think that love is the best thing we have and it's been so ruined... Yeah exploited by capitalism. So I think it's not an issue of people but an issue of design and the design is capitalism. So I don't want to end on an economic note but since we're in a world where anything is possible for companies and there are no borders to what we can say...” (Participant T)

5.7 The goal of love

Love is not merely an emotion but rather a process that informs life decisions and has some sort of a goal – at least the participants of the study mentioned several times goals of relationships and love, i.e. the achievements, milestones, etc. Participants D and S both spoke about the importance of marriage and having children. They see it as concrete and obvious goals to stride towards in a romantic relationship.

During the conversation about marriage, these participants did acknowledge that perhaps they consider it a goal not because of their own values and convictions but because of societal norms. That is not to say that they were trying to resist them but just that they were aware of it. Participant S also acknowledged that the goal of love can look very different to different people and can be influenced by a variety of factors. Here participant D shares their take on this subject.

“...there are a lot of couples who would just love to not get married and travel the world. But there is this mutual consensus between the two parties. That this is what we wanna do. Of course I am talking about monogamous relationships which is a whole other thing. But I mean for us, me and my boyfriend, we started talking like let's start dating and we both knew that because we're Muslim that we wanna get married.” (Participant D)

Czech participants, on the other hand, highlighted the importance of connection, communication and trust in a relationship and valued that higher than a specific milestone. Participant T also said this about the idea of there even being an end goal.

“ My idea is that there isn't an end goal because if there is an end goal, then the relationship would be stagnant. Then you're stagnant and then it rots. So I think the whole end goal is the whole journey of life. So the end goal should be you wanting to spend the rest of your life with that person because I think we are not in the same place as we were ten years ago and we're not in the same place we are going to be in ten years time. So it is about wanting to go through all the years that we have remaining with the other person.” (Participant T)

Moving on to another topic that was coded for were images of love. This code was used when participants were describing what love looked like to them. Either they described what they personally liked love to look like or they described elements of marketing strategies that they thought represented love. Here participant D says what they think love to be.

“I've always really loved this kind of lovey dovey romantic dates and cute things, like the more traditional love that you see in movies. That is something that I really like. Like he is kind of a prince and she his princess, something like that.” (Participant D)

Alternatively, here is what the same participant said about love in an advertisement.

“I just really like the intimacy between the two people in the photo. There were different photos of like homosexual couples, photos of the guy like holding the woman from behind and everything. And I just felt like this one is the most resonating for me because they look like they are in tune with each other. And for me, what represents romantic love is like intimacy. It's what makes it different from friendship love.” (Participant D)

6. Conclusion

This research study set out to determine how young people perceive love and how that corresponds to Sternberg's triangle of love. Secondly, it also compared these findings between a group of Czech locals and a group of culturally diverse participants currently residing in the Czech republic.

Sternberg's theory of the triangle of love was utilised in order to thematically analyse the data. The theory works with three components of a relationship- commitment, intimacy and passion. Therefore the codes were separated into these categories as well. Out of these, participants mentioned commitment the most and passion the least. They considered it the backbone of a successful romantic relationship. However, since advertisements were used to facilitate discussion the finding could also be explained by the fact that participants were influenced by what they saw in front of them. And commitment is generally easier and more appropriate to display than passion in an advertising campaign.

These findings suggest that participants overall valued commitment the highest. While commitment may take on different forms, the promise of it in a relationship was important. Participants generally agreed that they saw a partner as somebody to share their lives with and having somebody rooting for them. Intimacy was also found to be important. Again, it looked different to everybody but it was something that the participants sensed from the adverts and identified with. Intimacy was displayed through gestures such as eye contact which suggest connection rather than have a sexual subtext. That might be one of the reasons why passion, as the last element of Sternberg's theory, was mentioned the least. It could also be explained by the participants' hesitancy to discuss any sexual elements and the conversation naturally steered more towards commitment and intimacy.

Another theme that presented itself was the commercialisation of love. The research participants shared that they are influenced by the portrayals of love in popular culture and media including advertising. There were discussions of feeling a sense of duty toward their partner in terms of gifting. More specifically, this was heavily discussed in relation to the custom of gifting flowers during Valentine's day.

While gifting a partner a materialistic object was considered by the participants to be an act of love, they mentioned other gestures to consider just as endearing. For example, participant S shared that in South Korea it is common for couples in love to wear matching outfits. Other examples included wearing and showing off an engagement ring which also succeeds at broadcasting romantic love to other people.

Gender stereotypes presented as a large theme during both focus groups. Participants often used it as a point of reference when comparing their own views to societal expectations. They discussed what stereotypes they agree with and which ones they do not. Many times it seemed that gender stereotypes provided them a clear idea of gender roles within their own relationship. Participants employed them more as suggestions rather than guidelines. While they were aware that gender roles suggested by stereotypes would not work for everyone, they generally agreed that they could be beneficial in some instances.

Lastly, it is imperative to address the differences observed between the two cultural groups. Generally, both focus groups had relatively similar ideas about love. The point of difference that stood out was in relation to Sternberg's triangle of love. While discussing commitment, the culturally diverse group spoke more clearly about traditional milestones such as marriage and having children together. Czech people steered the conversation more towards themes of connection. They stressed the importance of understanding and support between the partners.

Despite its limitations, this thesis has provided valuable insight into the perceptions and manifestations of romantic love among Prague's youth. Through exploring various dimensions, this study has shed light on the complex interplay of factors that shape individuals' perceptions of romantic love. Moving forward, it is essential to continue exploring these themes to promote a more nuanced understanding of love and its role in shaping interpersonal relationships and societal norms.

7. References

- BBC (2019). 'Harmful' gender stereotypes in adverts banned. *BBC*. ['Harmful' gender stereotypes in adverts banned \(bbc.com\)](https://www.bbc.com/news/health-51444444), accessed 2/4/2024
- Bloom, L. a. C. (2020). A Brief History of Marriage, From the Stone Age to the New Age. *Psychology Today*. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/blog/stronger-the-broken-places/202012/brief-history-marriage-the-stone-age-the-new-age>, accessed 24/2/2024, accessed 26/2/2024
- Buss, D. M., Shackelford, T. K., Kirkpatrick, L. A., & Larsen, R. J. (2001). A half century of Mate Preferences: the cultural Evolution of values. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 63(2), 491–503. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2001.00491.x>
- Coontz, S. (2016). The Radical Idea of Marrying for Love. *The Sun Magazine*. Issue 489. <https://thesunmagazine.org/issues/489/the-radical-idea-of-marrying-for-love>, accessed 24/2/2024
- Illouz, E. (1997). Consuming the romantic utopia: Love and the cultural contradictions of capitalism. London, England: University of California Press.
- Kaltzada, P. (2018). *Why diversity in media matters - Coppieters Foundation*. Coppieters. <https://ideasforeurope.eu/news/diversity-and-media/>, accessed 30/3/2024
- Kniazian, A. (2014). Gender Stereotypes in Advertising. *Armenian FoliaAnglistika*.10(1-2 (12)):82-87
- Kotler, P. (2003). *Marketing Management*. London, UK: Prentice Hall.
- London School of Economics and Political Science. (n.d.). *Tony Giddens*. <https://www.lse.ac.uk/sociology/people/tony-giddens>, accessed 28/2/2024
- Mannay, D. (2016). *Visual, Narrative and Creative Research Methods: Application, reflection and ethics*. <http://orca.cf.ac.uk/65673/>, accessed 20/3/2024
- Parker, G. and Smillie, E. (2017) *Depictions, Perceptions and Harm A report on gender stereotypes in advertising*. ASA.
- Priyashantha, K. G., De Alwis, A. C., & Welmilla, I. (2021). Three perspectives on changing gender stereotypes. *FIIB Business Review*, 12(2), 120–131. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23197145211049604>
- Rifa'i, B. (2010). *A semiotic analysis on coca cola's commercial advertisements*, A Thesis. *State Islamic University*.
- Sternberg, R.J. (1986). A triangular theory of love. *Psychological Review*, 93, 119-135

Zimand-Sheiner, D. and Roth-Cohen, O. (2016). "Love is in the air: Love relationships in television commercials". In *Television and Romance – Studies, Observations and Interpretations*, edited by A. Hetsroni, 107-127. New-York: *Nova Science Publishers*

Appendix: Advertisements

The advertisement is a vertical post on a dark background. At the top left, there is a circular profile picture with the name 'Rýdl' and the text 'rydl_sperky Sponsored'. To the right of this is a three-dot menu icon. The main image shows a close-up of a hand wearing three diamond rings. The text 'Rýdl' is centered in a white serif font. Below the image, the text '10% SLEVA' is in large white bold letters, followed by 'NA SNUBNÍ PRSTENY' and '4. 3. - 10. 3.' in smaller white bold letters. At the bottom of the image area is a dark blue bar with the text 'Shop Now' and a white right-pointing arrow. Below this bar are icons for heart, comment, share, and bookmark. The text '21 likes' is below the icons, followed by the caption 'rydl_sperky Slevu 10 % na všechny naše snubní prsteny můžete využít od 4. do 10.3. na našich... more' and 'See Translation'.

rydl_sperky Sponsored

Rýdl

10% SLEVA
NA SNUBNÍ PRSTENY
4. 3. - 10. 3.

Shop Now >

21 likes

rydl_sperky Slevu 10 % na všechny naše snubní prsteny můžete využít od 4. do 10.3. na našich... more
See Translation

Figure 1. Shows an advert for Rýdl Šperky, a jewellery brand



Figure 2. Shows an advert for Pandora, a jewellery brand

Figure 3. shows an advert for Coca Cola



Valentine's day *gift guide*



*matching t-shirts for you
and your second half*

Figure 4. shows an advert for Wearmillo, a clothing brand



Figure 5. shows an advert for Digital memories, a company selling personalised cassettes