

**Lessons in Love: What Neotraditional Romantic Comedy Films (1988-2018) Reveal About
Confrontational Patterns**

AP Research

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Introduction

Beloved by audiences for a long time, romantic comedies have enjoyed popularity with audiences due to the ability of the genre to capture two of the most innate human desires: to love and to laugh. Indeed, in a 2016 article published in *Glamour*, Shanna Yehlen, a writer who earned her MFA in motion producing from the University of Miami, defines a romantic comedy as “a movie or play that deals with love in a light, humorous way”. A genre that is often associated with being a staple of happy couples on Valentine’s Day as well as a slumber party pastime, romantic comedies have evolved over the years but are an art form that is centuries old. Dating back to the Shakespearean era, *Much Ado About Nothing* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* are some of the genre’s most formative works. Ever since romantic comedies were first pioneered with these two plays, subsequent storylines have mirrored the pattern that Shakespeare laid out with his early pieces, for in the vast majority of romantic comedies, key plot points include the meeting of the two main characters, a conflict, and their eventual happy ever after ending. With that in mind, from the birthplace of the romantic comedy around 1600, it was not until over 300 years later that the romantic comedy emerged for the first time on the silver screen when silent films *Sherlock Jr.* and *Girl Shy* captivated audiences in 1924.

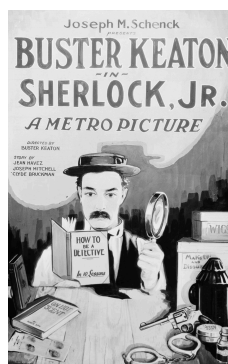


Figure 1. *Sherlock Jr.*: theatrical release poster (Designer unknown, April 21, 1924, Metro Pictures,

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherlock_Jr./media/File:Sherlock_jr_poster.jpg).

Evolution of the Genre

Though silent films can be credited to popularizing the genre, after four years passed, Yehlen furthers that the advent of “talkies,” films in which dialogue between characters was audible, brought the romantic comedy genre to even greater heights. In the era of sound films, romantic comedies started in the realm of the “comedies of manners,” which reflected post-Great Depression wealth disparities. Above all, the most notable example, *It Happened One Night* (1934), gave Americans hope that their happiness could transcend economic standing.



Figure 2. *It Happened One Night* theatrical release poster (Designer unknown, February 23, 1934, Columbia Pictures, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/It_Happened_One_Night#/media/File:It_happened-one-night-poster.jpg).

Soon after the peak of the comedy of manners, the screwball comedy added a unique twist to the current canon. Whereas the comedy of manners emphasized the romantic aspect of romantic comedies, the screwball comedy balanced the genre’s expectations with more comedic elements. The forefront of this sub-genre, Katharine Hepburn frequently played the leading lady, and as a result, challenged how women were portrayed in cinema. Evidently, Hepburn’s films were some of the first to bring women to the forefront of the plot as the main characters.

For approximately a ten-year hiatus, coinciding with the peak and aftermath of World War II, the development of a new sub-genre lagged as the growth of romantic comedies became stagnant. However, in the 1950s, Yehlen resumes the progress of the genre’s evolution by describing the sex comedy, which began to address the taboo topic of differences between men

and women. As women increasingly participated in the workforce, eminent sex comedies such as *Desk Set* (1957), starring Hepburn, and *Battle of the Sexes* (1960) explored how professional clashes between men and women could produce unexpected attraction.



Figure 3. Promotional image for *Desk Set* featuring Spencer Tracy alongside Katharine Hepburn (Photographer unknown, 1957, 20th Century Fox, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Desk_Set#/media/File:Tracy_Hepburn_Desk_Set.jpg).

Interestingly enough, sex comedies marked an important departure from previous sub-genres of the romantic comedy because at this point in history, researchers undertook the study of the discrete sexual lives of men and women. Most notably, Alfred Kinsey, an American sexologist, published *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* in 1948, which studied the hush-hush sexual activities of men, ranging from adultery to homosexuality. To delve into an unfamiliar realm, Kinsey later took it upon himself to bridge an “enormous gap between social attitudes and actual practices” and informed the public on his data regarding premarital sex and orgasmic experiences among women. Unsurprisingly, Kinsey’s second project drew much more backlash than the first, but nevertheless, represents a monumental step in acknowledging the sexual experiences of women in addition to men (Brown and Fee 2003, 896-897).

Returning to Yehlen’s comprehensive history, Kinsey’s research and the distribution of the first *Playboy* in 1953 brought forth the sex comedy. Building off of the sex comedy, Kinsey’s insights into the sexual habits of women and men alike, and especially women, prompted a more

cynical turn of the genre with the rise of the radical romantic comedy in the 1970s. On account of the openness of the sex comedy, the sexual interactions of men and women were now more freely discussed; however, unlike the sex comedy, the radical comedy took a much more cynical approach to love, guiding viewers to think about romance and relationships in a profound manner—did love exist at all? Departing from the stipulation of the genre highlighted above that a happy ending must be reached, it is important to note that this was not true of the radical romantic comedy. Specifically, in *Annie Hall* (1977), romantic love was no longer perceived as a cure-all for solving problems with one's happiness.

Ultimately, the evolution of the genre, from the Shakespearean era, to silent films, to the comedy of manners, to the screwball comedy, to the sex comedy, and finally, to the radical romantic comedy, culminated in the genre that audiences know and love today: the neotraditional romantic comedy. A clear contrast from the radical romantic comedy, in neotraditional romantic comedies, Yehlen emphasizes that both sides make an effort to make the relationship work. Corroborating Yehlen's timeline, Asmelash, a writer at CNN for the past seven years, highlights *When Harry Met Sally...* (1989) as the paramount example of a neotraditional romantic comedy (2021). Regardless of the sub-genre, both writers concur that romantic comedies mirror the general sentiments of how societies feel about love.

Sociological and Psychological Influences

Despite the longstanding popularity of romantic comedies, Feeney, a contributing writer for *Cinéaste*, an American quarterly film periodical, ponders whether the romantic comedy as a genre is dying due to audience's changing preferences for franchises and blockbusters but instead surmises that the romantic comedy is adapting to "changes in the sociocultural environment," the reason that romantic comedies are able to reach viewers to this day. Feeney speculates that

romantic comedies will survive in spite of the dominance of films with larger budgets because viewers turn to stories about how couples work through trials and tribulations to find social order amidst chaos (2022, 14-19).

Already, it is clear that the evolution of romantic comedies is intertwined with historical phenomena, but beyond entertainment value, romantic comedies provide insight into psychological mechanisms for coping with stress. Through the four-pronged fight, flight, freeze, and fawn response, Guy-Evans explains in her peer-reviewed article that these responses make up the brain's immediate reactions to stressful situations. The most direct response, fight, involves facing the conflict, whereas flight, a more passive option, involves refusing to deal with the conflict at hand. Additionally, freezing poses even greater challenges, for with this choice, the person who is being confronted becomes so encumbered with stress that they are unable to act. Lastly, fawning is the most mediative response, opting to work to resolve the conflict with the other person. Since neotraditional romantic comedies by definition involve conflict, it is through these responses that characters show viewers how to deal with confrontation (2025).

In terms of how people have handled conflict over generations, a sociological commentary by Camp, a former associate editor for the *Reason Foundation* with degrees in philosophy and English literature from the University of Virginia, points out generational differences concerning how Generation Z handles conflict compared to previous generations. Camp reports that in 2024, 50% of people aged 18-34 reported having been in a situationship, a pseudo-romantic relationship with loosely defined boundaries of communication and commitment; in the same year, 50% of Generation Z reported having ghosted someone before. Since both of these behaviors suggest less willingness to engage in direct in one's conflict with

one's partner and pursue normative relationships, Camp generalizes what she describes as a “pervasive culture of risk aversion” as a trend among the current generation (2024).

Combining the observations of Feeney and Camp, whether there has been a decline in the popularity of the romantic comedy genre is difficult to gauge in light of the transformational power streaming services have had on how viewers interact with cinema, but it is interesting to note that the changing viewer preferences that Feeney perceives coincides with Generation Z being the target audience for modern romantic comedy films.

Literature Review

The tension in romantic comedies is built over an obstacle keeping two characters apart, typically a miscommunication. Though plot points are often dramatized to attract audiences, Finkel, a professor at the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University, postulates that romantic comedies seek to find the line between taking appropriate risks and going too far. Incorporating the example of Heath Ledger's character serenading his counterpart, Julia Stiles, in *10 Things I Hate About You* (1999), while everyday relationships may not involve an attempt to repair a relationship through the lyrics of Frankie Valli, learning compromise and how to put oneself out there are key takeaways. Outside of risk-taking, Finkel emphasizes the educational potential of romantic comedies concerning disagreement, trust, and vulnerability; overall, Finkel's message is that human beings will ultimately communicate imperfectly, but romantic comedies can reach viewers and provide healthy strategies for conflict resolution (2024).



Figure 4. Heath Ledger serenades Julia Stiles in *10 Things I Hate About You* (Article by Angelica Burlaza, December 21, 2022, Collider Magazine, <https://static0.colliderimages.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/10-Things-I-Hate-About-You.jpg?q=50&fit=crop&w=825&dpr=1.5>).

Adding to the conversation on Finkel's research by delving deeply into the psychological processes behind how viewers interact with cinema, Decoster and Vansieleghem utilize two frameworks in *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, a peer-reviewed philosophy journal. The method most commonly used in research concerning the intersection of psychology and cinema, the Cartesian framework, proposes that viewer's past experiences are synthesized with the ideas that are conveyed in a film. When evaluating viewer interactions through this framework, there are two categories of viewers: active, critical viewers and passive, consumerist viewers. This dichotomy between approaches determines what viewers will get out of the media they consume. While the Cartesian framework describes the active processes in which viewers' knowledge, self-perceptions, and values interact with films, the Deleuzian framework makes the key distinction that films actually set ideas in motion. In fact, Decoster and Vansieleghem go so far as to explain that films with a widespread reach are able to instigate political and social phenomena. Through careful consideration, Decoster and Vansieleghem underscore the validity of the Deleuzian framework as a method of analysis, suggesting that under the assumptions of this framework, the social interactions of characters in neotraditional romantic comedies have the potential to influence viewers on how to work through their own social interactions (2014,

792-804). In summary, drawing connections between the research of these two papers provides valuable insights regarding the educational potential of neotraditional romantic comedy films, so pull out the popcorn as this paper further explores romantic comedies' pedagogical purpose.

Gap and Relevance

Much of the current literature surrounding the interdisciplinary nature of cinematic and humanities research discusses the manner in which viewers are influenced by media, and the Finkel observational study described above notes how romantic comedies can improve professional communication. Nevertheless, there has never been a study conducted on whether neotraditional romantic comedy films reveal any changes in generational communication patterns; the purpose of this paper is to bridge that gap. Even more important, this paper aims to inform the general public on how to employ healthy communication styles if current generations are consuming media that heavily portrays unhealthy communication styles.

Hypothesis

This paper's study hypothesized that the latter half of films selected for this research will portray a dominantly avoidant communication, while the other films will portray a different style that does not fall under the avoidant category. This is because Camp's aforementioned article provides observational anecdotes and statistical evidence of increasingly avoidant communication patterns among Generation Z compared to previous generations, but since Camp does not provide data of the mechanisms through which earlier generations communicated, this study does not surmise a dominant style for the first half of films. Thus, films released in later years can be predicted to feature less direct strategies for resolving conflict than those released in earlier years.

Methodology

This study's methodology was derived from a model developed by Thomas, a professor emeritus at the Naval Postgraduate School, and Kilmann, the CEO of Kilmann Diagnostics, as an instrument for assessing workplace conflict. Though, like the suggestions present in Finkel's research, this instrument was designed for professional communication, this study's intention to apply it to a film content analysis is a source of the gap in current understanding.

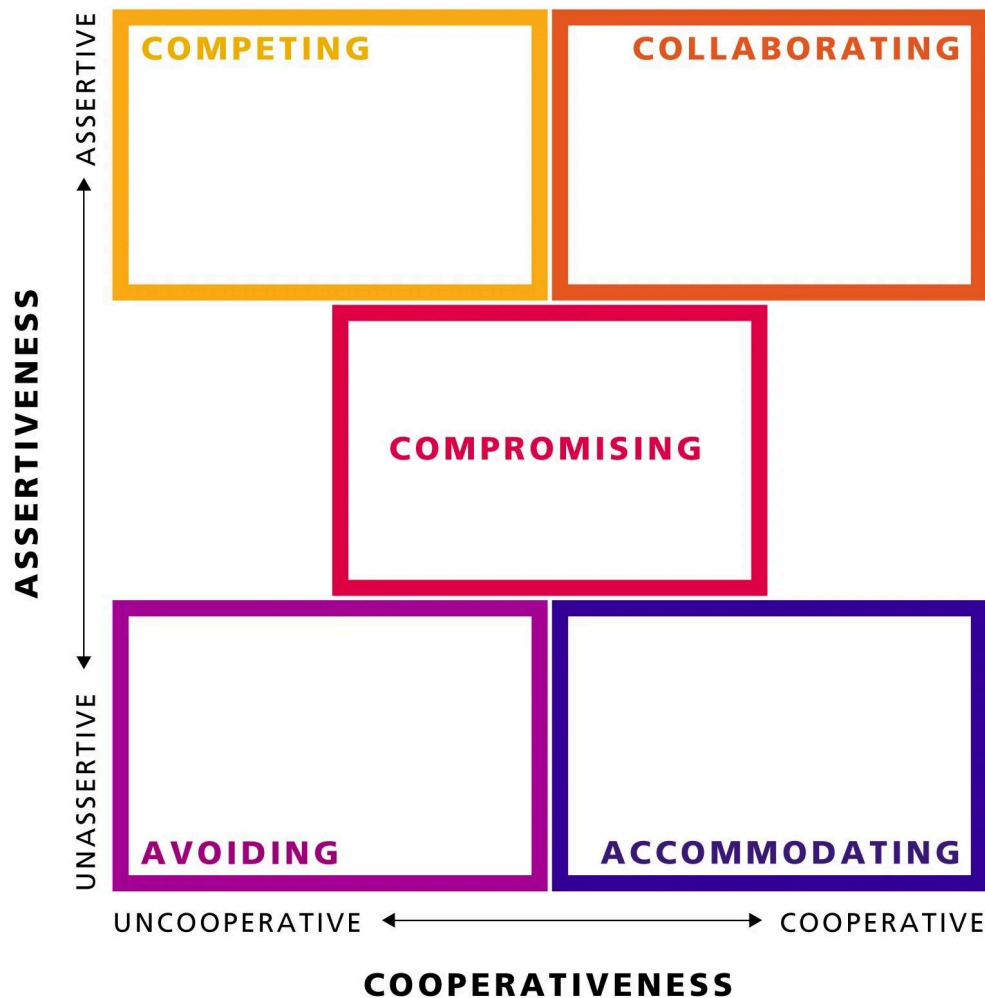


Figure 5. Original model of the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument from the TKI Profile and Interpretive Report (Model by Kenneth W. Thomas and Ralph H. Kilmann, May 1, 2008, CPP, Inc., https://scl.cornell.edu/sub/sites/scl/files/downloads/basic_page/TKI_Sample_Report.pdf).

The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument breaks confrontation down into five styles: avoiding, accommodating, competing, collaborating, and compromising. In the original

report, Thomas and Kilmann map these five styles on the model shown above, measuring each style on a scale of cooperativeness and a scale of assertiveness. First, the avoiding style is both uncooperative and unassertiveness; the individual does not adequately address the needs of either person. The accommodating style is cooperative but not assertive, for the individual prioritizes another's needs above their own. The competing style is the complete opposite—assertive but not cooperative—for the individual prioritize's their needs above the needs of the other person. The collaborating style is both cooperative and assertive, in which the individual endeavors to find a solution that is satisfactory to both people. Finally, the compromising style falls in the middle on both the cooperativeness and assertiveness scales, revolving around finding middle ground and trying to mediate the conflict with the other person (2008).

For this study, the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument is an appropriate model of analysis because it has already been used in another study by Parfilova and Karimova, researchers at Kazan State University, to analyze conflict behavior in adolescents. In their study, not only did Parfilova and Karimova use the five categories present in the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument to assess which styles adolescents most commonly used to work through confrontation, but they also found that 48.6% of adolescents had either “low” or “very low” conflict resolution skills. Therefore, this model can further help the romantic comedies selected for this study reach adolescents.

For all intents and purposes in this paper, the term “conflict” (used synonymously with “confrontation”) shall be defined as “the extreme point of tension, the lack of agreement between two or more parties that are represented by certain individuals or groups,” and the term “resolution” shall be defined as “to eliminate the conflict situation and to settle a dispute,” in accordance with the definitions put forth by Parfilova and Karimova (2018, 1433-1441).

Regarding film selection, a film study by Wilk equated box office performance with cultural significance, so this study used the IMDb list of highest-grossing romantic comedies for film selection (2024, 13-22). As the benchmark neotraditional romantic comedy, Asmelash's article pinpointed *When Harry Met Sally...* (1989) as the leading film of the sub-genre, which is why this film was the first to be selected for this study. From there, the IMDb list was used as this study's main reference and listed *Coming to America* (1988) as the highest grossing romantic comedy of the 1980s. Though both films selected were released toward the end of the decade, the Asmelash CNN article marks the start of the neotraditional era toward the end of the 1980s, so these two films were the most suitable to comprise the starting point of those selected for this study. To ensure even coverage over the next three decades, which were divided into thirds, one film was selected from each third. Before proceeding to this stage of selection, two criteria were established: films must contain a major conflict between the two main characters in order to be considered neotraditional, and films must have at least a 40% Rotten Tomatoes score. The rationale behind the second criterion comes from a peer-reviewed journal article by Allman and Medeiros relating that people are influenced by scores on Rotten Tomatoes when deciding what movies to watch, meaning that movies with a low score (defined as <40% critic approval rating) likely don't garner the same cultural significance as films with higher ratings (2020). With these criteria in mind, the next six films added to this study were *Pretty Woman* (1990), *While You Were Sleeping* (1995), *Runaway Bride* (1999), *What Women Want* (2000), *Hitch* (2005), *The Proposal* (2009), *Think Like a Man* (2012), *Trainwreck* (2015), and *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018). Returning once again to the aforementioned CNN article, Asmelash underscores the declining popularity of romantic comedies in the box office and their subsequent resurgence on streaming platforms (2021). To account for the streaming era, *To All the Boys I've Loved Before* (2018), is

the most critically acclaimed romantic comedy to be exclusively released on streaming platforms, attaining a 96% Rotten Tomatoes rating, so this film has likely been culturally significant to younger generations, the reason it is the last to round out this study.

Film	Streaming Service	Cost
<i>Coming to America</i>	Pluto TV	\$0
<i>When Harry Met Sally...</i>	Paramount Plus	\$0
<i>Pretty Woman</i>	Disney Plus	\$0
<i>While You Were Sleeping</i>	Disney Plus	\$0
<i>Runaway Bride</i>	Paramount Plus	\$0
<i>What Women Want</i>	Paramount Plus	\$0
<i>Hitch</i>	Tubi	\$0
<i>The Proposal</i>	Disney Plus	\$0
<i>Think Like a Man</i>	Amazon Prime	\$0
<i>Trainwreck</i>	Apple TV	\$3.99
<i>Crazy Rich Asians</i>	Netflix	\$0
<i>To All the Boys I've Loved Before</i>	Netflix	\$0

Figure 6. Table summarizing the streaming services used and budget for this film study.

All in all, considering the perspectives of both Wilk's paper, as well as the paper of Allman and Medeiros, the methodology of this content analysis was informed to balance both box office performance and Rotten Tomatoes rating. Ultimately this paper's methodology aimed to ensure that all films selected over the period 1988-2018 would have been recognized by as great of a number of viewers within the target audience as possible, garnering lasting cultural significance.

Data Collection

Each film was watched once to stay within the time constraints of this study. When the film featured a confrontational scene between the two main characters, the film was paused,

timestamps were recorded, and notes were transcribed into a notebook on the following: a summary of the scene, the style employed, and an explanation of why that style matched with the interactions between the two characters in the scene. If necessary to understand the confrontation style present, the scene was rewatched.



Figure 7. Meg Ryan and Billy Crystal enact the famous diner scene from *When Harry Met Sally...* (Video credit of Yura Dashevsky, Katz's Delicatessen - in 'When Harry Met Sally', July 22, 2007, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F-bsf2x-aeE>).

Throughout the data collection process, the inconsistency of multiple storylines presented a challenge in six of the films. In *While You Were Sleeping*, the protagonist, Lucy, has a romantic interest in brothers Jack and Peter Callaghan. Although she eventually ends up with Jack, her romantic interest in Peter qualified him as a love interest for the purposes of data collection, so her interactions with both were analyzed. In *What Women Want*, the protagonist, Nick Marshall, pursues relationships with multiple women before ending up with Darcy Maguire; in *Trainwreck*, the protagonist, Amy, pursues relationships with multiple men before ending up with Dr. Aaron Connors; in *To All the Boys I've Loved Before*, the protagonist, Lara Jean Covey, writes love letters to multiple past crushes before ending up with Peter Kavinsky. Therefore, the same rationale used for *While You Were Sleeping* was used for these three films when choosing to analyze the interactions between the protagonists and all of his/her love interests.

Presenting a different challenge, the plot of *Hitch* centers around two couples, Alex Hitchens and Sara Melas and Albert Brennaman and Allegra Cole. In *Hitch*, Alex Hitchens's objective is to match Albert Brennaman and Allegra Cole, placing Albert within the role of a pseudo-protagonist; for this reason, the interactions within each pair were analyzed. Similarly the plot of *Think Like a Man* centers around four couples, so all four relationships were analyzed.

Over the course of this stage, deciding which style a scene fell under proved to be a challenge, for some scenes featured escalation from one confrontation style to another. To simplify data collection, the final style employed before the scene was finished was the only style to be recorded.

After initial data collection was complete, the number of times each confrontation style was present in each film was recorded in a table, and the results are summarized below.

Film	Av.	Ac.	Com.	Col.	Comp.	Total
<i>Coming to America</i>	6	1	2	3	1	13
<i>When Harry Met Sally...</i>	11	5	9	3	4	32
<i>Pretty Woman</i>	3	5	2	1	3	14
<i>While You Were Sleeping</i>	9	3	0	1	5	18
<i>Runaway Bride</i>	10	2	8	5	2	27
<i>What Women Want</i>	2	4	3	8	1	18
<i>Hitch</i>	6	2	4	5	1	18
<i>The Proposal</i>	6	15	10	4	2	37
<i>Think Like a Man</i>	36	6	6	11	1	60
<i>Trainwreck</i>	13	4	8	6	0	31
<i>Crazy Rich Asians</i>	5	5	1	2	2	15
<i>To All the Boys I've Loved Before</i>	10	5	3	3	4	25

Figure 8. Table summarizing the counts of each style of confrontation. Abbreviations are used (Av. = avoiding, Ac. = accommodating, Com. = competing, Col. = collaborating, Com. = compromising, Total = total counts of all styles for each film).

Data Analysis

To test for statistical significance, a chi square test for homogeneity was conducted to compare differences between the counts for each confrontation style in the first half of films (1988-2000) and in the second half of films (2005-2018). In this case, since there are two distinct populations, a chi square test for homogeneity better suited this study than a chi square test for independence or a chi square test for goodness of fit.

Films 1988-2000		Films 2005-2018	
Style	Count	Style	Count
Avoidant	41	Avoidant	76
Accommodating	20	Accommodating	37
Competing	24	Competing	32
Collaborating	21	Collaborating	31
Compromising	16	Compromising	10

Figure 9. Tables summarizing the data used to run the chi square test for homogeneity.

Before running the test, three conditions had to be met: random sampling was used, each cell had an expected count of at least 5, and observations were independent of one another. To meet the first condition, while random sampling was not used, this would have been extremely difficult because a database of all romantic comedies meeting the criteria established in the methodology section of this paper would have had to have been compiled, which was not possible with time and available resources. However, by ensuring an even spread of films across each part of each decade, the random condition was met. Additionally, the count of the totals of each style across the first six films and the last six films was expected to exceed five for each, so

this condition was met. Finally, the six films in the first half can be assumed to be less than 10% of all romantic comedies released from 1988-2000, and the six films in the last half can also be assumed to be less than 10% of all romantic comedies released from 2005-2018, so observations between the two groups are independent.

To form two hypothesis, the null hypothesis of this study was that the year in which the film was released would be independent of the dominant confrontation style, whereas the alternative hypothesis of this study was that the year in which the film was released would not be independent of the dominant confrontation style.

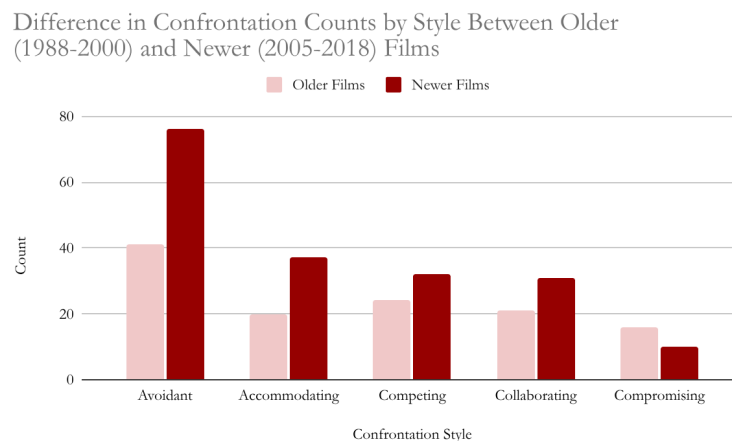


Figure 10. Chart comparing the difference in confrontation counts by style between older (1988-2000) and newer (2005-2018) neotraditional romantic comedies.

This hypothesis test compared the proportions of each style within the total counts of all confrontation styles for each grouping. Because there were more total counts of confrontation for films 2005-2018 than for films 1988-2000, this distinction helped ensure that the test was determining whether there was a difference in proportions, not total counts.

To perform the calculations for this hypothesis test, [Stapplet.com](https://stapplet.com), an online data and statistical analysis platform, was used. Data was inputted based on the numbers displayed in Figure 9. For the analysis, Stapplet produced summary statistics, expected counts, and

contributions for each group. The summary statistics and contributions for each group are summarized in the two figures below.

χ^2	P-value	df
6.994	0.1362	4

Figure 11. Table listing the chi square value, p-value, and degrees of freedom (Produced by [Stapplet.com](https://www.stapplet.com/)).

Confrontation Counts	Year Grouping of Films		
		Films 1988-2000	Films 2005-2018
	Avoiding	0.616	0.404
	Accommodating	0.294	0.193
	Competing	0.149	0.098
	Collaborating	0.008	0.005
	Compromising	3.156	2.07

Figure 12. Table listing the individual contributions (deviations from expected values) for each grouping (Produced by [Stapplet.com](https://www.stapplet.com/)).

When performing a chi square test for homogeneity, a small chi square value usually indicates that statistically significant results were not produced. However, to confirm this, the p-value is analyzed. In statistics, a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ is used. A p-value less than 0.05 means that statistically significant results were produced, while a p-value greater than 0.05 means that statistically significant results were not produced. Since the p-value obtained for this study was 0.1362, that means that assuming the null hypothesis is true, there is a 13.62% chance of obtaining results as extreme or more extreme than those produced purely by chance. Because the p-value obtained for this study (0.1362) is less than the significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$), the null hypothesis cannot be rejected. Therefore, there is not convincing evidence that for all categories, the year in which the film was released was not independent of the dominant confrontation style.

Essentially, there is no evidence that the year in which the film was released influenced the confrontation styles conveyed.

In terms of individual groups, the only category in which expected counts deviated minimally from actual counts was the collaborating category because the contributions for both categories were relatively small (0.008 for films released 1988-2000 and 0.005 for films released 2005-2018). That means that the difference in expected counts versus actual counts regarding how often the collaborating style was portrayed between the two groupings of films was relatively small and did not have a significant influence on the overall chi square value. Nevertheless, the avoiding category showed the highest contributions (0.616 for films released 1988-2000 and 0.404 for films released 2005-2018) and, therefore, had the greatest influence on the overall chi square value. Overall, since the avoiding category was the primary focus of this study and had the greatest influence on the chi square value, this even further emphasizes that there is no evidence in favor of this study's initial hypothesis that films in the latter half of films (2005-2018) would show more of the avoiding style than the first half of films (1988-2000).

Discussion

The results of this study do not support the hypothesis that there would be an association of the confrontational styles portrayed and the years in which the films were released. Comparing the proportions that the avoiding style made up in total confrontation counts in the segmented bar graph shown below, it is shown that the avoiding style made up 33.6% of all confrontational counts in films released between 1988-2000 and made up 40.9% of all confrontational counts in films released between 2005-2018. Even though the avoiding style did make up a greater proportion of the total styles for the latter half of films, the difference in proportions was not enough to achieve statistically significant results and definitively prove that

there was an association between the year in which a film was released and the percentage of its confrontation scenes that employed the avoiding style.

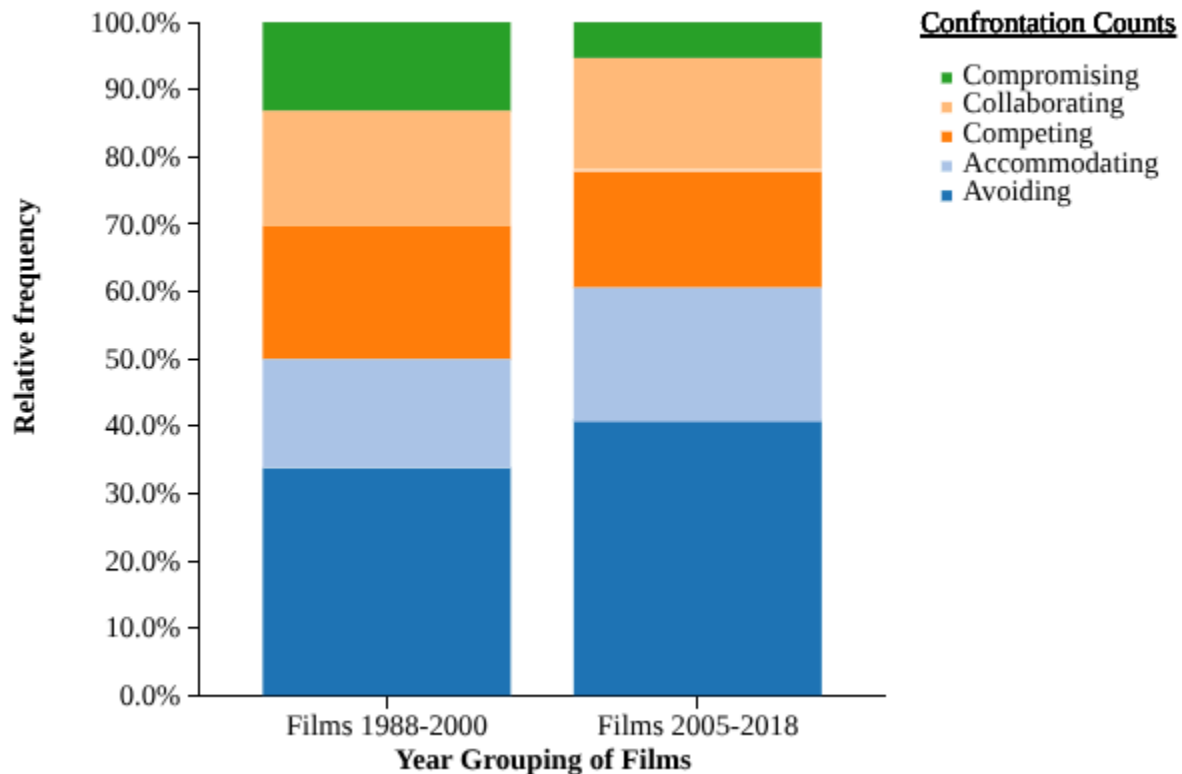


Figure 13. Segmented bar graph showing the differences in proportions in confrontation styles between each grouping (Produced by [Stapplet.com](https://www.stapplet.com)).

Limitations

The most major limitation impacting this study was time. Ideally, under different time constraints, this study would have incorporated more films, and a larger sample size would have produced more accurate and precise results. However, taking notes on each confrontational scene proved to be time consuming, for some films featured many confrontational scenes. To further improve accuracy, films could have been rewatched multiple times to ensure that the assessment of confrontational styles was as accurate as possible.

Moreover, since this study was a content analysis, subjective bias could have played a role into the final results that were produced. Specifically, the compromising and collaborating styles are extremely similar, so at times, differentiating between them was difficult. Additionally, for this study, some films, such as *When Harry Met Sally...* and *To All the Boys I've Loved Before*, had previously been watched, while others, such as *What Women Want* and *Trainwreck* were completely unfamiliar, which could have skewed the results obtained from these films. To mitigate this in the future, multiple researchers could be used. That way, the assessment of one individual would not be the sole perspective potentially influencing the results of the study.

Also, diversity in terms of race, sexual orientation, etc. has steadily improved within the romantic comedy genre. Nevertheless, in her paper, Feeney mentions diversity as presenting a challenge to the evolution of the romantic comedy genre (2022). For this study, the plots of all films were centered around heterosexual couples, and the only films with racial diversity between and/or among the couples were *Hitch*, *Think Like a Man*, *Crazy Rich Asians*, and *To All the Boys I've Loved Before*. As a result, films featuring a predominantly heterosexual white cast may not have reached minority audiences and vice versa. Therefore, limited representations in terms of diversity could have influenced the reach that the films in this study had on viewers.

Finally, releases later than 2018 were unable to be incorporated into this study because either they had not performed as well in the box office as earlier releases, or their incorporation into this study was hindered by challenges presented by the streaming era. In summary, all of these limitations could have affected the final results of this study.

Implications and Conclusion

Overall, the results of this study may contradict the claims by Camp that were used to contextualize this paper, suggesting that Generation Z is not as risk averse as many modern

sociologic thinkers have proposed. If that is the case, Generation Z may indeed communicate in ways that mirror those of prior generations. In a 2024 article for Forbes, a premier business magazine, Elting asseverated that Generation Z's lack of communication skills may make them less hireable than previous generations. However, if this study generalizes that newer romantic comedy films do not show patterns of increasing avoidance compared to older romantic comedy films, this may suggest that the communication patterns of Generation Z are very similar compared to previous generations. In that case, a 2023 article for MIT's Sloan Management Review, a publication for one of the most prestigious business schools in the United States, suggests that Generation Z may be just as well prepared to tackle the communication challenges of the modern American workplace compared to previous generations (Laker).

In terms of the genre itself, many have speculated that the romantic comedy is dying. However, if the romantic comedy is able to evolve to meet viewer preferences, then not only will it be able to adapt to the streaming landscape, but it will also be able to continue to reach younger audiences and play a role in shaping how they deal with confrontation in their own lives (Feeney 2022).

Future Research

Ultimately, future studies can conduct research on the manners in which romantic comedies can influence communication beyond confrontation, exploring other areas such as gossip, familial relationships, friendships, etc. Additionally, it would be interesting to explore whether there is a connection between generational communication and hireability, potentially conducting a comparative analysis of the different eras of neotraditional romantic comedy films.

Above all, it is important to remember that viewers are influenced by the media they consume, so it is important to remain cognizant of how the current media shapes adolescents.

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