

For Better or For Worse: The First Kiss Effect on TV Ratings

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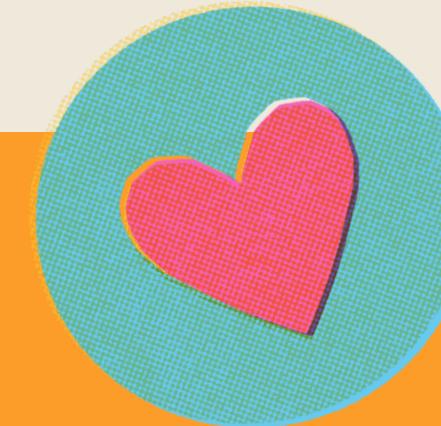
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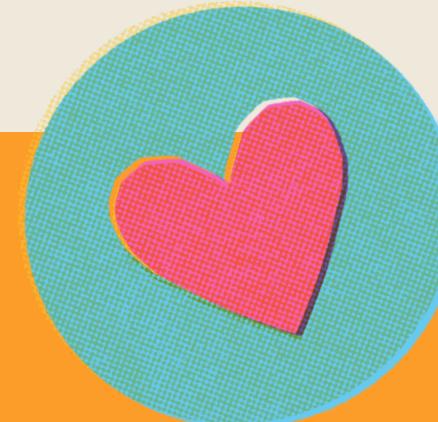
Overview

- 1. Pop Culture 101**
- 2. Methods**
- 3. Results**
- 4. Takeaways**

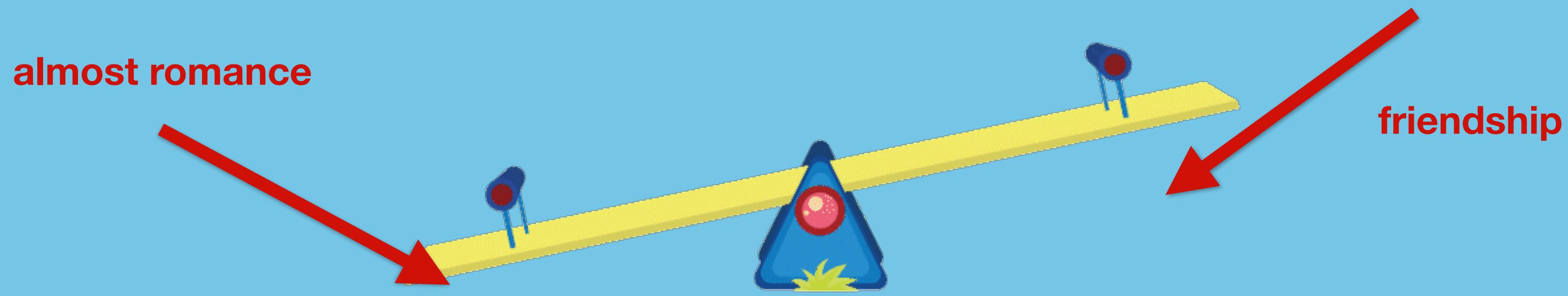


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Many television (TV) shows follow the “will they or won’t they” trope, where the dynamic between a pair of characters constantly shifts.



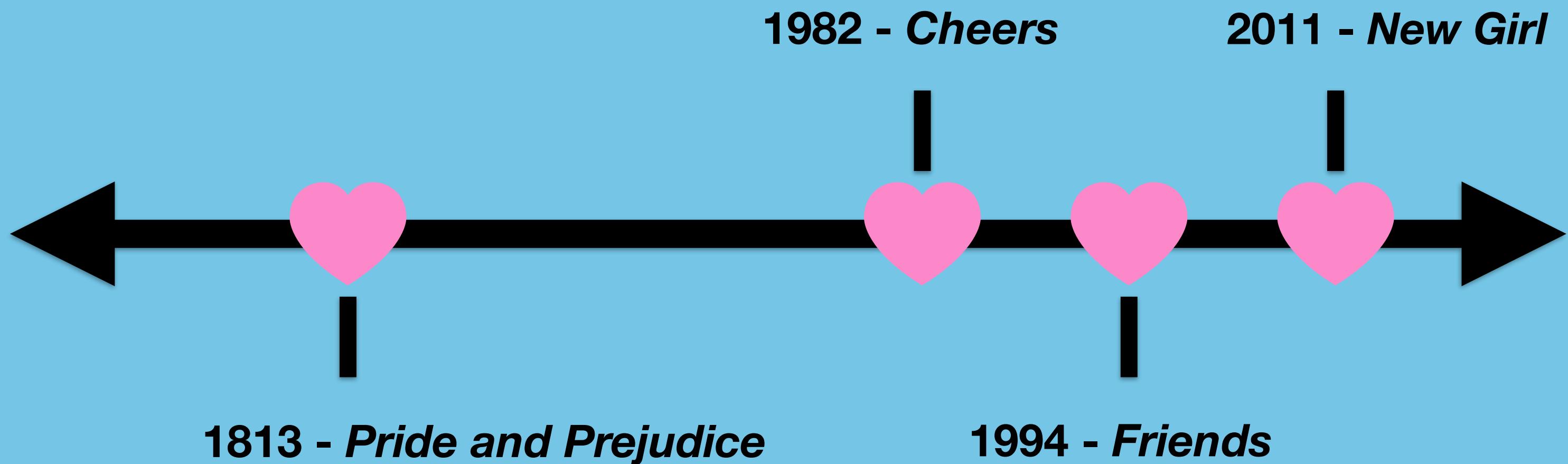
The couple demonstrates **romantic chemistry**, but their future is plagued by uncertainty and conflict.



???

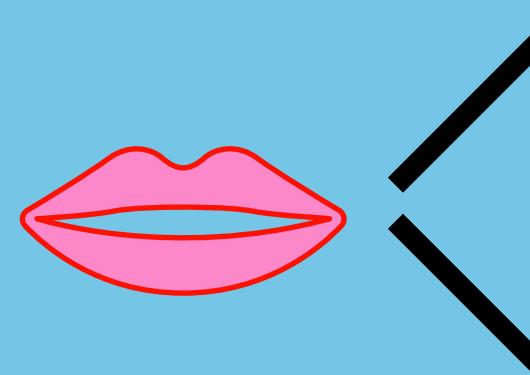


The concept isn't exactly new...



To delay or not to delay...

- Some people suspect producers **delay** the couple's first onscreen kiss for a few seasons to **create suspense** and keep viewers engaged.



the **Zeigarnik effect**¹ (viewers get bored and quit watching)

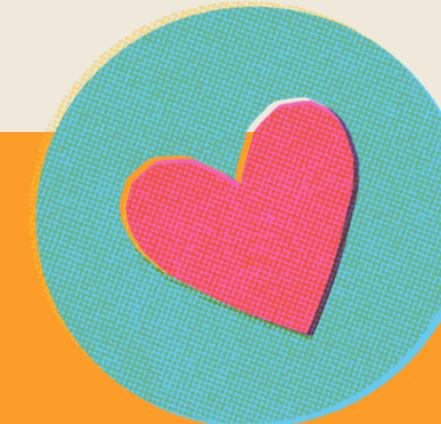
the “**Ashley effect**” (viewers get excited and binge the season)

- The milestone of the first kiss can change the plot trajectory, influence the number of viewers, and impact ratings!



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The Data

- Through publicly available rankings, the **20 most-cited “will they or won’t they” TV couples** were identified.
- Data about couple-show pairings were collected from the **Internet Movie Database (IMDb)** and **Wikipedia**.
- Variables of interest include the **timing** of the first kiss, the couples’ **internet popularity**, **length** of the show, year of **premiere**, and episode **ratings**.



Love (EDA) at First Sight

Distribution of Show Premieres

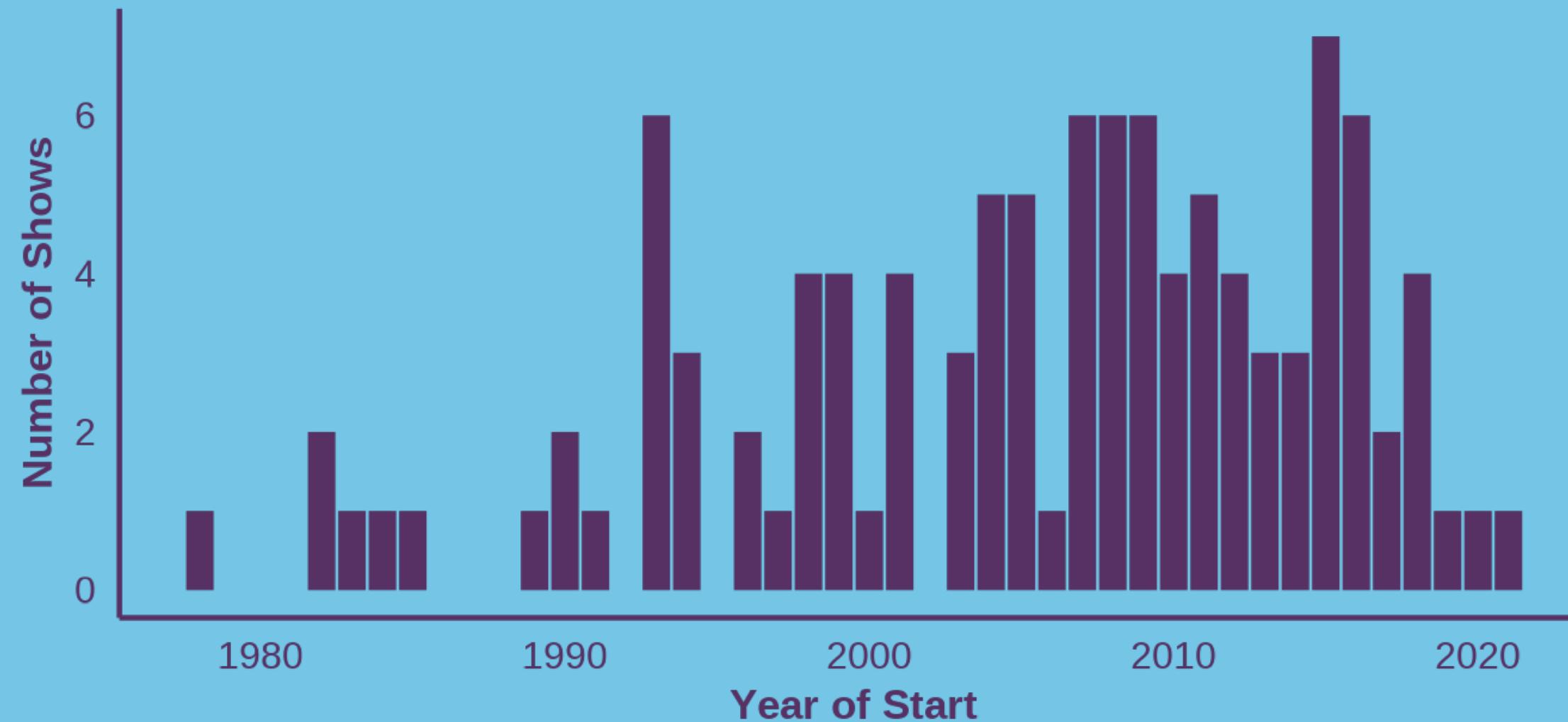


Figure: Couples popular on the internet in 2023 span **over 40 years'** worth of TV!



Love (EDA) at First Sight

Distribution of Kiss Times
(Top 20 Couples)

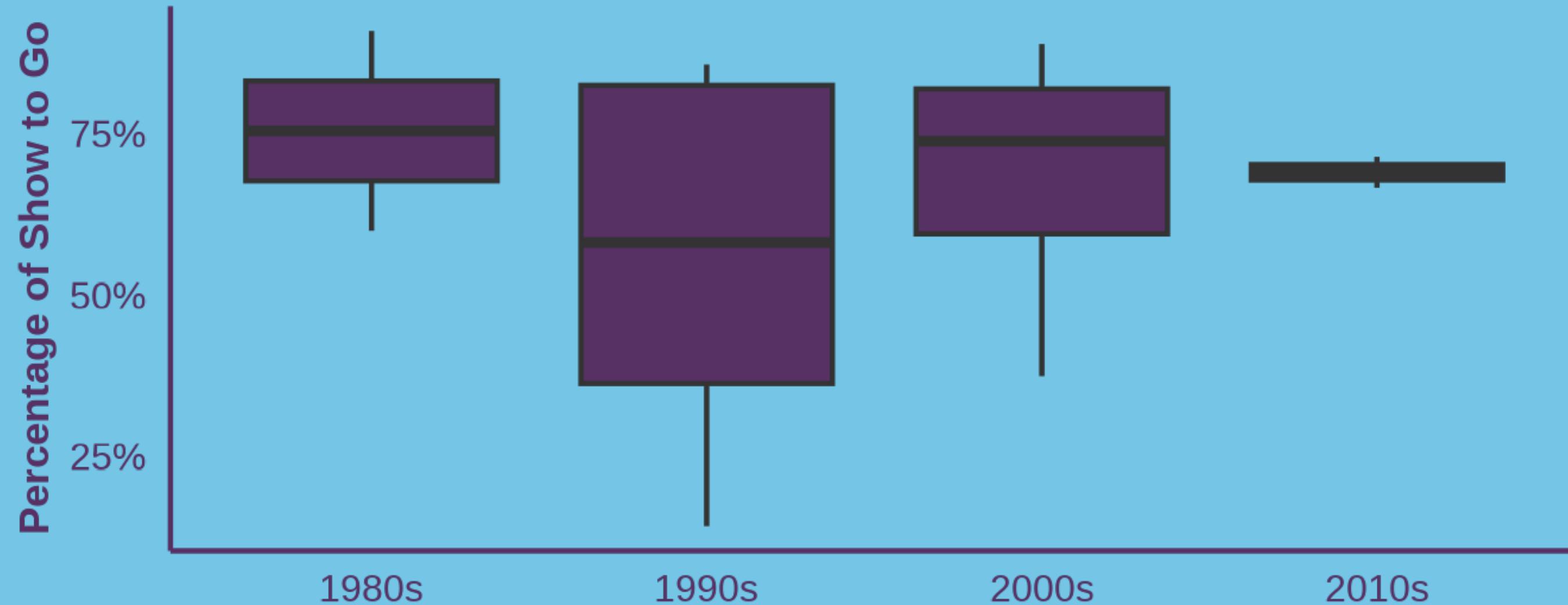


Figure: Except in the 1990s, the median first kisses of the **top 20 couples** happened within the **first third** of the show.



Analysis

- An **interrupted time series** (ITS) model² is used to examine the impact of a couple's **first kiss** (the interruption) on a show's **per-episode rating**.
- The model quantifies the **altered trajectories** of the ratings **after** vs. **before** the first kiss.
- Models were fit at **show-specific** (for 2 case studies) and **overall** (all 20 couples) levels.
- **Newey-West** standard errors were used to generate confidence intervals.

$$\widehat{\text{Rating}} = \hat{\beta}_0 + \hat{\beta}_1(\text{Episode}) + \hat{\beta}_2(\text{After Kiss}) + \hat{\beta}_3(\text{Episode} \times \text{After Kiss})$$



A Quick Note on Interpretation

- To address whether the episode ratings **change immediately** following the first kiss, we look at $\hat{\beta}_2$.
- To address how quickly ratings **return to pre-kiss levels** (if ever), we look at $\hat{\beta}_3$.

immediate change
after first kiss

$$\widehat{\text{Rating}} = \hat{\beta}_0 + \hat{\beta}_1(\text{Episode}) + \hat{\beta}_2(\text{After Kiss}) + \hat{\beta}_3(\text{Episode} \times \text{After Kiss})$$

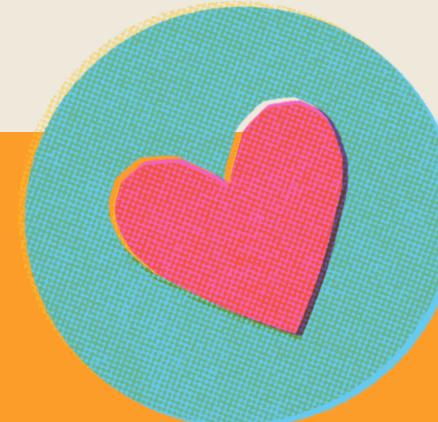
episode-on-episode change
before the first kiss

difference in episode-on-
episode change after first kiss

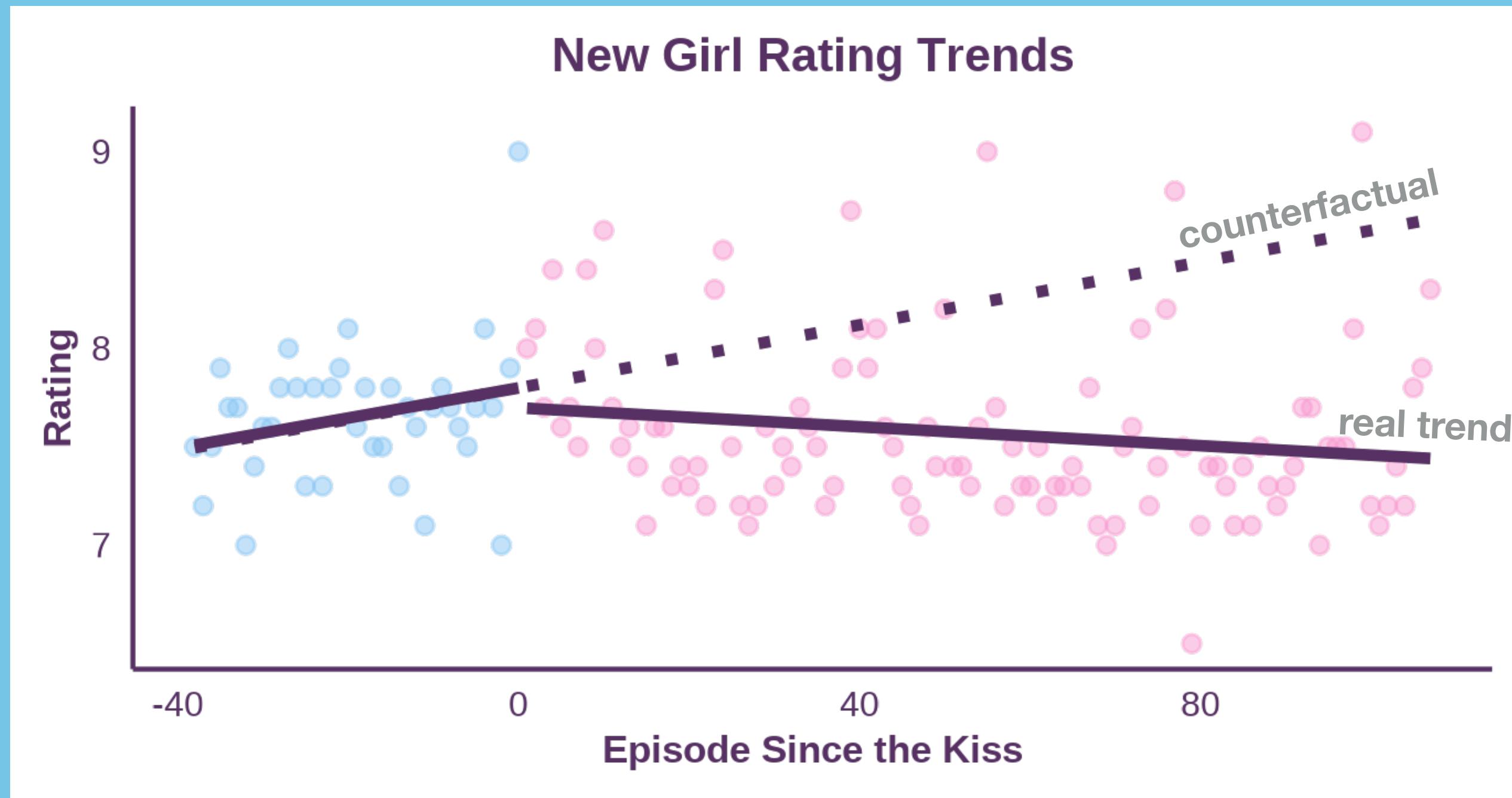


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Case Study 1: Nick and Jess from *New Girl*



Coefficient

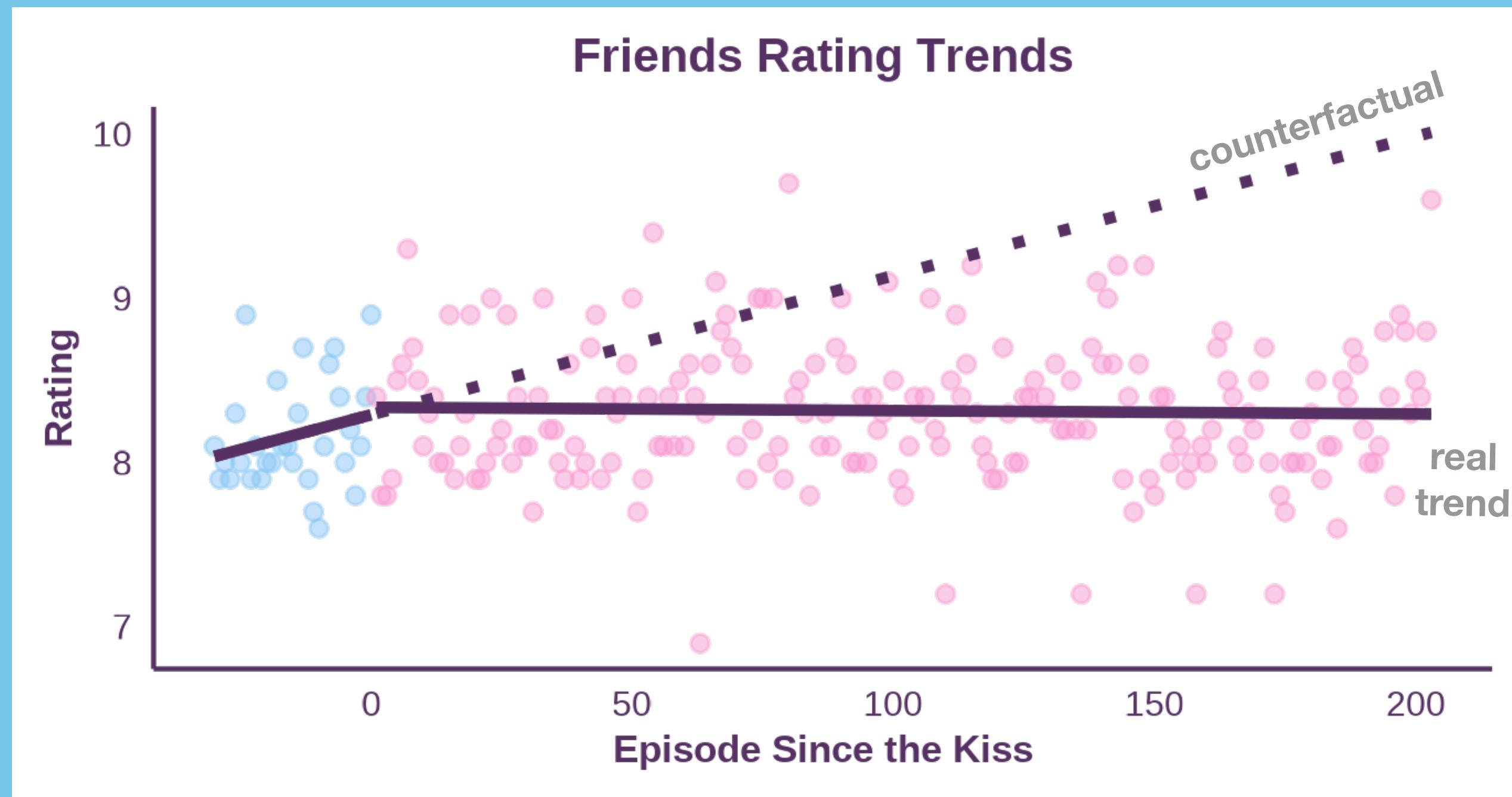
$\hat{\beta}_0$	(7.591, 8.007)
$\hat{\beta}_1$	(0.000, 0.016)
$\hat{\beta}_2$	(-0.338, 0.136)
$\hat{\beta}_3$	(-0.020, 0.000)

95% CI

Figure: Although the plot looks dramatic, 95% CIs show little difference if any at all.



Case Study 2: Ross and Rachel from *Friends*



Coefficient

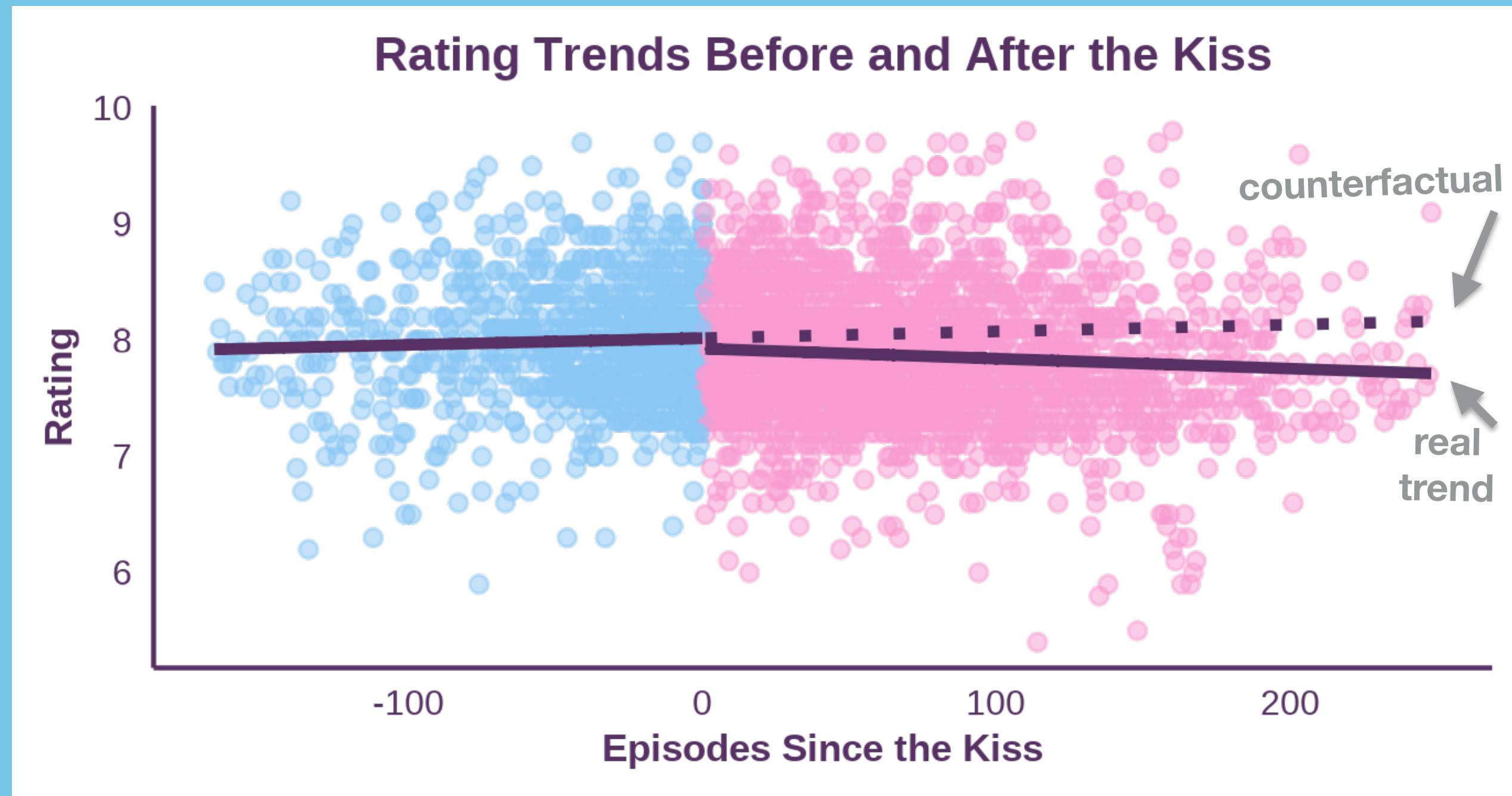
$\hat{\beta}_0$	(7.941, 8.643)
$\hat{\beta}_1$	(-0.008, 0.024)
$\hat{\beta}_2$	(-0.327, 0.417)
$\hat{\beta}_3$	(-0.025, 0.007)

95% CI

Figure: Again, a dramatic plot, but all of the change coefficients have zero in their CIs.



Overall Model: 20 Most-Cited Couples



Coefficient

$\hat{\beta}_0$	(7.920, 8.116)
$\hat{\beta}_1$	(-0.001, 0.003)
$\hat{\beta}_2$	(-0.225, 0.045)
$\hat{\beta}_3$	(-0.003, 0.001)

95% CI

Figure: Even after zooming out, we can't exclude the possibility of an effect in either direction.



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Producers, take note!

- The **top 20** most-cited couples go back as far as the **1980s**. If the producers do it right, people still talk about their work **40 years later!**
- Although the point estimates look **dramatic**, we **can't** make a strong **argument** either for the Zeigarnik effect or the “Ashley effect” at **either** the show-specific level or the overall level.
- If Hollywood wants to keep their **ratings high** and viewers interested, they may want to consider either standing strong and **delaying these moments** to the end of the show or **introducing another dramatic storyline** to the plot. So much for love, right?



References

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1. Hammadi, A., & Qureishi, F. (2013). Relationship between the Zeigarnik Effect and Consumer Attention in Advertisement. *World Journal of Social Sciences*, 3(4), 131–143.
 2. Lopez Bernal, J., Cummins, S., & Gasparrini, A. (2016). Interrupted time series regression for the evaluation of Public Health Interventions: A tutorial. *International Journal of Epidemiology*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ije/dyw098>
 3. Wikipedia (data source)
 4. Internet Movie Database (data source)
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Acknowledgements



Dr. Sarah Lotspeich



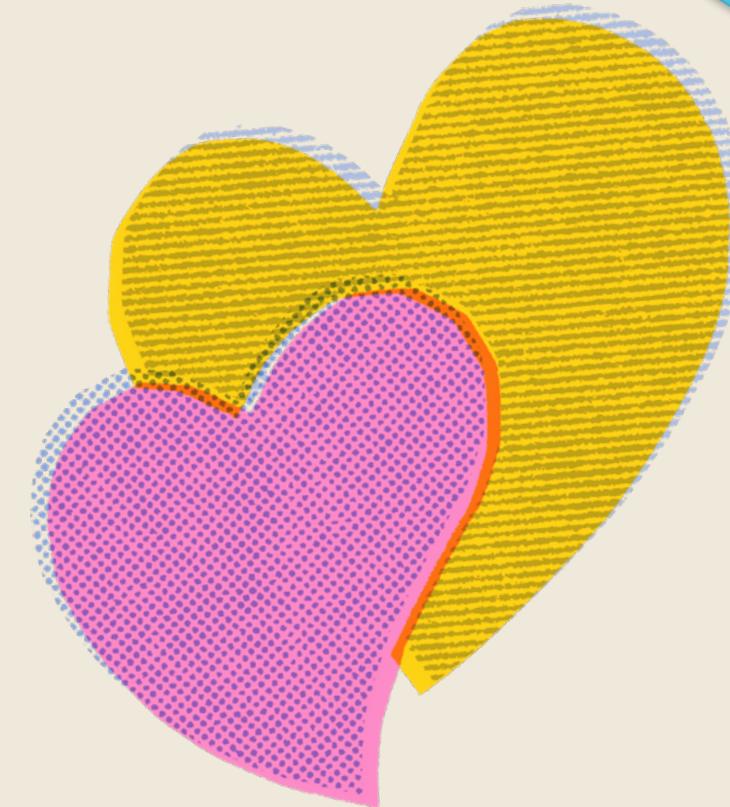
**Dr. Lucy D'Agostino
McGowan**





ASHLEY PLUG THE
DOI

you!



For a blog post version of this talk, see my website!

ashleymullan.github.io

