Gender Stereotypes in the Sitcom Friends:

Content Analysis

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A Content Analysis

Introduction

One research method is to perform a content analysis on the subject in which the researcher wishes to expand knowledge. This study over gender stereotypes is a content analysis. A content analysis is a way to understand text and image in numbers, and is a quantitative research method. “In the context of communication research, content analysis is a quantitative, systematic, and objective technique for describing the manifest content of communications,” said Treadwell (2014). In this study, gender stereotypes are content analyzed in the sitcom, *Friends*.

It is important to study these stereotypes because of the relationship between gender stereotypes in media, specifically television, and gender stereotypes within society. The show, *Friends*, is a good sample for a study of gender stereotypes in media because it focuses on the interaction between the three female characters and the three male characters. It depicts the way twenty year olds wanted to be acting and living during that time. The plot of sitcoms redefines the idea of a normal, typical life of an American. It is also an interesting study because it allows for a broad time span to be analyzed, since it aired for 10 years (Poniewozik, 2004). This study uses coding of each stereotype to count the frequency that certain male and female stereotypes are portrayed in a sample of 25 episodes. The results are analyzed to either verify or disprove hypotheses made during the initial research process. The main hypothesis states that gender stereotypes are often portrayed in the sitcom *Friends*.

Literature Review

This study analyses the portrayal of gender stereotypes in the television show, *Friends*. The analysis investigates by way of a qualitative content analysis of 25 episodes of *Friends*, all
episodes spreading throughout all ten seasons. The results show the amount of times that the characters portray certain gender stereotypes as well as states the words said or actions made. Although studies show that men and women behave similarly 98% of the time, the differences that do occur dominate society and cause the stereotypes to grow (Vogel, Wester, Heesacker, & Madon, 2003).

The stereotypes that are often associated with men and women have been analyzed on television. Julia Wood proved that they are emphasized in media-television especially. Because of this, society picks up the trends they are exposed to and it becomes a cycle-strengthening the portrayed stereotypes of men versus women. Goodall states, “The media do this through the presentation of images of men and women, which allows the media [to] advance ideals of what is desirable in men and women because the media have provided the audience with models of what it means to be male or female, or in a relationship as well as images of what men and women are and should be” (Goodall, 2011). Sitcoms, particularly Friends, show the everyday life of typical Americans, causing the ideal images to change viewers’ reality. The stereotypes of men and women are emphasized through normal life experiences. The data collected in this study functions as the next step to verifying these hypotheses:

H1: Gender stereotypes are often portrayed in the sitcom Friends.
H2: The data will change throughout the ten seasons based on culture changes.
H3: The stereotypes determine the characters and the plot.

General Male Stereotypes

Gender stereotypes are researched and analyzed in sitcoms and in other television shows, but there are many studies about the general stereotypes that people have of men and women in reality. These are the stereotypes that are focused on for this research of Friends, so that the
options are not limited. One traditional stereotype about men is that they are sexual pursuers and adventurers. Studies show that men are more sexually motivated, and they often see women’s friendly behavior as sexual. Other men are even willing to deceive women for sex. Media has promoted this stereotype that men are driven by sex, so society has allowed it to grow (Clements-schreiber & Rempel, 1995).

Another common stereotype is that men are hypoemotional, the opposite of hyperemotional. This means that they are closed off to and do not express emotion. They are described as “having problems with emotions”, having an “inability to express feelings”, and “unable to feel emotionally alive.” One statement that is often used when referring to these men is, “men are afraid of their feelings” (Heesacker et al., 1999). Not expressing feelings or emotions plays into the large, previously mentioned, stereotype of masculinity. Men tend to feel masculine if they hold in their emotions because of the stereotype that has been placed on them (Janice & Hutson-comeaux, 1999).

Men are stereotyped as dominant and superior, while women are stereotyped as passive and inferior. Men are seen as the intelligent ones with high-paying jobs. They are higher in status and are considered more important than women (Kray, Thompson, & Galinsky, 2001). Being dominant and superior must be followed up with the stereotype of the prideful man. These men are seen as big-headed and arrogant, only thinking of themselves and thinking very highly of themselves, in that (Janice & Hutson-comeaux, 1999).

Another type of stereotype that shows masculinity is the man who never grew up. He is the anti-adult who is seen as an overgrown child. He often times has not settled down with a wife and does not have a steady job. He is seen to be involved with many sexual partners and is
inappropriate, irresponsible, and immature (Miller, 2011). Contrary to the theme of masculinity in all the previous male stereotypes, the last one is femininity. When men show feminine attributes, they are stereotyped to be gay. These attributes include the way they dress, talk, walk, act, and present themselves. They are less likely to have masculine occupations and roles in life (Fingerhut & Peplau, 2006). This study analyzes the male stereotypes of:

- sexually driven, hypoemotional, dominant/superior, prideful, childish, and gay.

**General Female Stereotypes**

Women have a wide range of what would be considered positive and what would be considered negative stereotypes. All of the men stereotypes are considered negative. A negative stereotype is when the stereotype will have a negative effect on society, and a positive stereotype is when it will have a positive effect on society. One of the negative stereotypes of women is that they are sex objects. This stereotype labels women for their bodies and sex rather than their characteristics and capabilities. It demotes them from having a position in life to being powerless (Goodall, 2011). This leads into the next stereotype in which women are passive and submissive. Women are often seen as “below” men, or inferior to men, causing them to be passive and submissive. These women are described as quiet, weak people who do not stand up for what they believe and who submit to what men tell them (Kray et al., 2001). The complete opposite of the latter stereotype is the one that states that women think of themselves as independent. They are the stereotypical matriarch, or woman head of the house. These women either have jobs to sustain their own living, or assume the position of head of the house (Senzani, n.d.). The last stereotype for women that could be seen as a negative stereotype is that women are hyperemotional, or extremely emotional. Typical actions of hyperemotional women include
crying, whining, and laughing hystically. These women express every feeling whether it is being sad, annoyed, happy, loving, upset, or angry with extreme emotion. They are the opposite of the stereotypical hypoe-motional man (Heesacker et al., 1999).

Leaning toward positive stereotypes, is the stereotype that women are affectively oriented. According to Holmstrom, women value affectively oriented communication skills meaning they are comforting and make a genuine effort to listen (2009). As another study described it, they strive for intimacy and connectedness with society and relationships (Suh, Moskowitz, Fournier, & Zuroff, 2004). The last main stereotype given to women is that of a caregiver. Some women are stereotyped as nurturing people who care for others. They show genuine concern and are often times mothers. Women who fit this stereotype are frequently associated with housework and raising children (Vogel et al., 2003). This study analyzes the female stereotypes of:

- sex objects, passive/submissive, independent/matriarch, hyperemotional, affectively oriented, caregivers.

**Sitcoms**

Sitcoms are a medium in which viewers’ reality are changed because they depict the average life of an American. Poniewozik explains that the plot of sitcoms redefine the idea of a normal life (2004). The dialog of the characters captures the linguistic characteristics of natural conversations. The writers of the scripts purposefully created conversations that would happen within particular circumstances according to everyday life. Words that are considered “smart” are not used unless it is essential for storytelling purposes. Instead, the dialog consists of informal language, such as slang. The dialog also presents the characters’ main traits. The way
they each convey opinions and feelings varies by the way they express themselves through
dialog (Al-surmi, 2012). When comparing the dialog of the sitcom *Friends* to natural, real
conversations, researchers are able to conclude that the sitcoms and real life often feed off each
other. This study focuses strongly on dialog, mostly focusing on the stereotypical dialog
expected from men and women.

**Men in Sitcoms.** Being masculine is a broad stereotype of men that sitcoms often
portray. Masculinity comes in different forms. The two most common forms are anger and high
status. If the man is fast to anger, or has a high status due to wealth, he is seen as masculine.
Another type of masculinity often shown in sitcoms is the anti-adult male role where the man
behaves like an overgrown child. There are also the “hen-pecked” husband who is fearfully
respectful of his wife, and the caring, emotional father (Miller, 2011). As masculinity is the main
broad stereotype, one still remains of the feminine man. Some men on sitcoms are pronounced as
homosexual characters, others simply portray the attributes that lead to the viewer’s speculation
of them being homosexuals. The attributes that contribute to this stereotype are that the men tend
to be less masculine in physical appearance, traits, roles, and/or occupations. They are seen as
“feminine” (Fingerhut & Peplau, 2006).

**Women in Sitcoms.** Women have been portrayed a few different ways in sitcoms, one
being the stereotype of a sex object. According to Castro, women are often portrayed this way
because they reflect the patriarchal society’s gender hierarchy and dichotomy that the audience
has experienced in reality. The vulgarity that shows up in sitcoms is unwelcome in reality, but is
pleasurable on television. This idea comes from the argument that women can be portrayed as
sex objects as long as it is for the purpose of entertainment only (Castro, n.d.). The portrayal of
women in sitcoms is not always demeaning, however. Another stereotype often portrayed in this
genre of television is the wise matriarch woman (Senzani, n.d.). According to Webster’s dictionary, a matriarch is a woman who is the head and ruler of the family (Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2013). From the 1970s sitcoms to the 1990s sitcoms, the stereotype of women on television changed from being inadequate to being the head of the house. They were given more power (Senzani, n.d.). Lastly, women are often portrayed in sitcoms as smart, witty, and attractive. When the women portray this stereotype, they play two different roles: the woman who is physically and intellectually superior to her husband, and the woman who is inferior to the male dominance (Walsh, Fürsich, & Jefferson, 2008).

Friends. When studying these gender differences in sitcoms, Poniewozik looks at the show Friends because of its popularity in American culture. The results of his study show that most young people can identify with the normal nature of the characters. It is important to analyze the content of Friends, because it is a show that has reached many people across America since 1994 (2004). It depicts what should be the “typical relationships” between men and women through six characters: three guys and three girls. The dynamics of these six friends are a good subject to analyze because they provide an even ratio of the portrayal of the everyday life of men and women interacting together and separately.

Friends focused on the life of people in their mid-20s through the years of 1994 and 2004. The producers of the show wanted to explain people of that age and time to themselves; the aimlessness, the cappuccino drinking, the searching for spouses, the feeling that they were “stuck in second gear,” as the theme song says. As the show became more popular throughout the years, its focus altered to friends and lovers who suffered misunderstandings and mishaps together (Poniewozik, 2004). Togetherness is an important theme throughout Friends and is achieved through the constant interaction between the six characters. According to the studies
that show that sitcoms shape the world’s view of reality, Friends impacts society by showing what togetherness should look like. The three girls, Rachel, Monica, and Pheobe, and the three guys, Ross, Joey, and Chandler, are with at least one other person at almost all times. Their interactions between each other, same sex and different sex, are noticeable and easily picked up (Al-surmi, 2012).

As the focus of the show moved to togetherness through the ten seasons, the content also changed. This study analyzes whether or not the content changes were associated with society changes. For example, did actions promoting gay men become more prevalent, and if they did, was it because of society? Did technology become more advanced, affecting the characters’ interactions? Spreading through a span of ten years, society went through many life changes such as experiencing the growth of electronics and ways of communication. These changes may have affected the way Friends characters interacted and communicated with each other which in turn, affected the way they portrayed gender stereotypes.

The study of gender stereotypes in the show Friends is important because it informs the reader how many times stereotypes are portrayed, showing them that the actions made by the characters are exaggerated stereotypes made by society. Goodall says that men and women look at television to determine how they should act (Goodall, 2011). In sitcoms particularly, it is important to identify how often stereotypes are portrayed because people see themselves through the show. Sitcoms are made to relate to the society (Poniewozik, 2004). This study analyzes how often stereotypes are made and the context in which they are made. It also looks at the changes of stereotype representation over the ten years that Friends aired. The results inform society how often they are basing their words and actions off gender stereotypes they see on Friends.
Methodology

The sitcom, *Friends*, has 10 seasons, each season consisting of 24-25 episodes, except season 10 which consists of 18. This study analyzes 25 episodes, spreading evenly throughout the seasons. Two are taken from every season, and three are taken from every other season. The episodes within each season are chosen randomly. The purpose of this is to have a sample of the entire show of *Friends* that represents it with the most accuracy. Each episode is content analyzed for its stereotypical portrayal of men and women.

Coding

The episodes are viewed from DVDs, so the seasons and episode titles are easily referable. Each episode is viewed, and both the dialog and actions made by the characters are analyzed. This may require multiple views of the episodes. The characters are only analyzed for their gender, so the women’s dialog and actions are only recorded under the female stereotypes, and the men’s are only recorded under the male stereotypes. This is done in an excel sheet that has the following stereotypes:

1. Men are sexually driven: sexual desires (Clements-schreiber & Rempel, 1995)
2. Men are hypoemotional: showing no emotion (Heesacker et al., 1999)
3. Men are dominant/superior: high status, more important than women (Heesacker et al., 1999)
4. Men are prideful: arrogant (Heesacker et al., 1999)
5. Men are childish: immature, irresponsible, single (Miller, 2011)
6. Men are gay: show feminine attributes (Heesacker et al., 1999)
7. Women are sex objects: disrespected for their body (Goodall, 2011)
8. Women are passive/submissive: inferior to men, quiet, weak (Kray et al., 2001)
9. Women are independent/matriarch: head of the house (Senzani, n.d.)
10. Women are hyperemotional: overly emotional and sensitive (Heesacker et al., 1999)
12. Women are caregivers: nurturing, do housework and raise kids (Vogel et al., 2003)

Since the research is a simple content analysis, the content is recorded as well as the count. For instance, if Rachel is emotional three times in one episode, the count is recorded as well as what she does or how she acts. Each quote or action is recorded verbatim on the excel sheet under the representative number coded for the corresponding stereotype. Appendix A displays 10 out of 25 of the episodes, the first episode analyzed from each season. This represents a sample of the coding method. When quotes or actions are used toward someone, implying that person has an attribute of a stereotype, it is recorded under the name of the person for whom it is implied. Each episode has its own spread sheet, and there is one sheet that combines all stereotypes recorded through the entire process. The spread sheets are analyzed by way of calculations. The numbers are added and frequencies are presented representing different statistics. Frequencies show how many times each stereotype is used within each episode, as well as how many times they are used throughout all ten seasons.

There are bar graphs for each episode that depict the frequency of each stereotype, enabling visual aid when analyzing for trends through the seasons (see Appendix B). There is also a bar graph that represents the frequencies of each stereotype throughout all seasons that specifies male total and female total (see Appendix C). To analyze the third hypothesis, there are line graphs for the number of citations for the male and female stereotypes throughout the seasons. It provides a visual aid for determining trends (see Appendix D). These calculations and the qualitative information recorded are analyzed to test the hypotheses that:

H1: Gender stereotypes are often portrayed in the sitcom Friends.

H2: The data will change throughout the ten seasons based on culture changes.

H3: The stereotypes determine the characters and the plot.
Results

To begin the process of calculating results, a bar graph was made for each episode showing the amount of times each stereotype was portrayed (see Appendix B). The results of this process gave the totals of each stereotype in each individual episode. There was a total of 371 male stereotypes recorded throughout all episodes, averaging 14.8 stereotypes per episode. The episode with the least amount of male stereotypes was episode two of season four titled, “The One With All The Wedding Dresses” containing six stereotypes (Reich, Gohen, & Bright, 1997). The episode with the most male stereotypes was episode one of season ten titled, “The One With Ross’s Tan” with 23 (Reich, Gohen, & Bright, 2003). There was a total of 255 female stereotypes recorded throughout all episodes, averaging 10.2 stereotypes an episode. The episode with the least amount of stereotypes was episode one of season three titled, “The One With The Racecar Bed” and it contained 4 (Reich, Gohen, & Bright, 1996). The episode with the most female stereotypes was episode two of season four titled, “The One With All The Wedding Dresses” with 14 (Reich, Gohen, & Bright, 1997). Notice, this episode held the least amount of male stereotypes and the most female stereotypes. The total number of stereotypes throughout all seasons was 626, averaging 25.04 stereotypes an episode. There were 116 more male stereotypes which means that 59% of the stereotypes recorded were male. Depicted with detail is a graph that shows the total number of male and female stereotypes in *Friends* (see Appendix C for more details).
According to the graph above, the male stereotype from this sample that was portrayed the most was that men are childish. There were 102 citations of this stereotype. The next two male stereotypes were men are gay and men are prideful with 71 and 68 citations, respectively. The last three, in order, were men are sexually driven, men are dominant/superior, and men are hypoemotional. The female stereotype from this sample that was portrayed the most was that women are hyperemotional, with 90 citations. The next two were that women are affectively oriented with 54 citations and women are independent/matriarch with 38. Following in order were women are caregivers, women are passive/submissive, and women are sex objects. Notice, the least portrayed male stereotype was hypoemotional and the most portrayed female stereotype was hyperemotional. The lowest two stereotypes, men are hypoemotional and women are sex objects were rarely recorded. The stereotype that men are hypoemotional was recorded 18 times and the stereotype that women are sex objects was only recorded eight times.

To look at trends, two line graphs were made of the male stereotype numbers and female stereotype numbers through the seasons (see Appendix D). Over the ten seasons, the male
stereotypes that increased in number were that men are sexually driven, men are childish, and men are gay. Men are hypoemotional increased in the middle of the ten seasons and then decreased again. Men are dominant/superior and men are prideful decreased over the ten seasons. When looking at the female trends, there were not as many noticeable increasing or decreasing stereotypes. Women are independent/matriarch and women as hyperemotional both increased over time. The rest, however, stayed fairly balanced. Women are sex objects and women are passive/submissive were evenly low, whereas women are affectively oriented was evenly high. Lastly, the stereotype that women are caregivers stayed even throughout the seasons at an average number.

In the descriptions of the full coding section, the different characters caused certain stereotypes to increase. For example, Monica portrayed the stereotype that women are caregivers 27 out of the 34 times it was recorded throughout all the seasons. When reading the description, one can see that she always cooks and cleans for all six friends. Rachel often portrayed the independent/matriarch and hyperemotional stereotype more than Monica and Pheobe. Joey and Chandler both portrayed the childish stereotype many times in each episode. There were zero episodes where neither Joey nor Chandler portrayed either of the two stereotypes.

Analysis

There was no previous research done for a study exactly like this one, but many studies have been done over gender stereotypes both in general and on TV, specifically sitcoms. For the most part, the results backed up literature. The results of the male stereotypes portrayed are better supported than the female stereotypes. Miller states that one main type of masculinity often shown in sitcoms is the anti-adult role. In this role, the man acts like an overgrown child.
He is often single, immature, and does not have a steady job or income (2011). This was backed-up in the results well since this stereotype was seen the most often out of all 12. Previous literature also discussed the homosexual stereotype for men in sitcoms. The characters on sitcoms portray feminine attributes that cause viewers or other characters to label them as homosexuals (Fingerhut & Peplau, 2006). In this study, the results showed that this stereotype was the second highest male and third highest overall stereotype represented. These two stereotypes are seen as entertaining, fun, and funny, and *Friends* portrayed them wisely.

There was one female result that was not backed up by literature. Previous research on women in sitcoms discussed that the commonly portrayed stereotype is the woman as a sex object. Castro explains that this occurs often because sitcoms are a way that people see or live reality on television. It is entertainment (Castro, n.d.). This stereotype was the least used stereotype in *Friends*, even when including male stereotypes. It was only recorded eight times from all 25 episodes. The fact that the research was so different allows for further investigation. The episodes often times refer to girls as sex objects, and the three characters, Joey, Chandler, and Ross, often see women as sex objects. As proof, the men portray the stereotype of being sexually driven 51 times. If they are being sexually driven, but the three main female characters are not being seen as sex objects, then the women seen as sex objects must be either extras or special guests on the show. When looking through the descriptions on the full coding pages, the references of men being sexually driven are mainly toward or about other women. To name a few examples, Joey checks a woman out at the coffee shop in “The One With The Cuffs” (Reich, Gohen, & Bright, 1997); Chandler looks up a woman’s skirt at work in “The One With All The Wedding Dresses” (Reich, Gohen, & Bright, 1997); Ross sleeps with a girl he just met in “The One Where Ross And Rachel Take A Break” (Reich, Gohen, & Bright, 1996). The fact that
there were still many sexual references toward women shows that this previous research has not been disproven, it is simply not backed up in the restraints of this particular study.

There was a study done on women in sitcoms in which this *Friends* study was able to back up. This study states that women are portrayed in sitcoms as independent and matriarchal (Senzani, n.d.). In the results of this study, this stereotype was the top third highest ranked female stereotype, cited 38 times. The only research that was not backed up was research that was beyond the limits of this study, and the conflict with the stereotype of women being seen as sex objects. Other than those exceptions, this study was well supported.

The results also verified the three hypotheses previously stated:

H1: Gender stereotypes are often portrayed in the sitcom *Friends*.

H2: The data will change throughout the ten seasons based on culture changes.

H3: The stereotypes determine the characters and the plot.

From this sample, there was a total of 626 stereotypes throughout all seasons, averaging 25.04 stereotypes an episode. The episodes coded were an average of 23.55 minutes long. This averages to 1.06 gender stereotypes per minute. Over one stereotype per minute verifies the hypothesis that gender stereotypes are often portrayed in the sitcom *Friends*. With the detailed results, it is also possible to average frequencies of male and female stereotypes independently.

There were a total of 371 male stereotypes recorded, averaging 14.8 stereotypes per episode. This averages to .59 male stereotypes every minute. With a total of 255 female stereotypes, averaging 10.2 stereotypes an episode, there was an average of .43 per minute. For better understanding, there were 1.26 male stereotypes and .87 female stereotypes every two minutes.
These statistics strongly support the first hypothesis, showing also that male stereotypes are portrayed more often than female stereotypes.

The second hypothesis states that the data will change throughout the ten seasons based on culture changes. Friends aired from 1994-2004 (Poniewozik, 2004), so research was done on culture changes around those ten years. An article written by James Martin in 1997 backed up this hypothesis. In this article, he deliberately stated there was increased awareness of gays and lesbians in the 1990s. He discusses how it “paved the way” for the types of books published, which can be seen in the same light as television. Sitcoms were mentioned specifically in his article. “Lesbian and gay humor is really big,” one marketing manager said. She went on to discuss Ellen DeGeneres’s coming-out episode on her prime-time sitcom, “Some of the humor does reinforce stereotypes, but it is also creating a sense of identity and community, and it shows we are ready to be able to laugh at ourselves in a positive way.” This quote was taken in 1996, so it was the third season of Friends. According to this article, it was becoming a way to entertain; it was funny. It mentioned that one highly contributing factor to the raised awareness was the awareness of AIDS. Homosexuals were brought to the society’s attention much more because there was an overarching feeling of homophobia (1997).

In this particular study of Friends, specific results were calculated and analyzed for the trends of each stereotype. The stereotype that men are gay increased through the seasons (see Appendix D). The season containing the highest number of gay stereotypes was season nine, with 17 citations. Season one started out with six. Though, it must be noted that only two or three episodes were analyzed from each season so these statistics are only a mere sample. Within the sample, however, the stereotypes increased just as the gay awareness was increasing in society.
This gives substantial evidence to support the second hypothesis that the data will change throughout the ten seasons based on culture changes.

A trend that was seen when looking at the female stereotypes chart was the stereotype that women are independent/matriarch. This was previously defined as women who either have jobs to sustain their own living, or assume the position of head of the house (Senzani, n.d.). The trend showed that this stereotype, much like the stereotype that states that men are gay, increased throughout the ten seasons. An article written by Tom Monroy in 2000 discusses the rising of women’s dominance in the workplace around that specific time. The rate of women going to college was 69 percent where men were only at 64 percent. Education and training reports showed that women in that time were preparing better for high-tech jobs, specifically in the mathematical technologic fields (2000).

Although the women in *Friends* do not have mathematical technologic jobs, they still represent women with independence. The fact that this article was written in 2000 gives validity to the hypothesis because it was written during the seventh season. The portrayal of the independent/matriarch woman was almost to its high (which happened in season nine). This increase was due to culture changes, verifying the second hypothesis.

The third hypothesis states that the stereotypes determine the characters and the plot. The only way to analyze this hypothesis is to go through the coding of each episode. One specific episode is dissected: “The One With The Nap Partners” (Reich, Gohen, & Bright, 2000). To see the summary of this episode, or the other 24, see Appendix E. In this episode, the two biggest plots, or stories, going on are that Rachel and Pheobe are fighting over being Monica’s maid of honor, and that Ross and Joey enjoy taking naps together. All together, the three girls display the
stereotype that women are hyperemotional eight times in the episode, which is one every 2.9 minutes. Considering this is not the only story happening, this is a large frequency for one stereotype. Rachel was coded when she did each of the following: started the fight with Pheobe, yelled at Pheobe for lying, yelled out of anger for losing, and cried because she ended up winning. Pheobe was coded once for this stereotype, when she fought back with Rachel. Monica, however, was coded three times under this stereotype for other reasons. She got emotional when bringing up her past about being fat, got upset with Chandler for calling her fat in the past, and then got happy immediately when Chandler complimented her (Reich, Gohen, & Bright, 2000). These all display verification to the third hypothesis that the stereotypes determine the characters and plot. In this situation, it determines the plot because of the fight going on throughout the entire episode. It also determines the characters because it shows who is the most emotional. Rachel was coded four times, Monica was coded twice, and Pheobe only once. Rachel’s were also more intense; for example, she cried in one of hers when neither of the other girls did. It shows that Rachel is the most emotional character in that episode. That verifies that the stereotypes determine the characters.

The other main story in the episode, “The One With The Nap Partners” is that Ross and Joey nap together (Reich, Gohen, & Bright, 2000). One of the stereotypes coded was that men are gay. This was defined as men who show feminine attributes such as the way they dress, talk, walk act, and present themselves (Fingerhut & Peplau, 2006). The coding sheet for this episode has a count of eight citations that the men acted gay. As with the girls, this means there was a gay portrayal once every 2.9 minutes. Five of them were Joey, two were Ross, and one was Chandler. Four out of five of Joey’s citations were solely about napping with Ross, and both of Ross’s citations were about napping with Joey. Chandler’s one reference was when Monica
called him gay. The fact that six out of eight gay citations were referring to one of the main plots of the episode verifies part of the third hypothesis, that the stereotypes determine the plot. The second part of the third hypothesis, that the stereotypes determine the characters, is verified in the fact that the stereotypes labeled Joey as the gayest character in the episode. Though the hypothesis is verified using this particular episode, it is noticed that this is only one episode out of 25. The results could be different when dissecting another episode.

**Discussion**

The data provided interesting information and occurrences dealing with the relationship between gender stereotypes and the different episodes and seasons. One of the larger observations made, yet not addressed, is that there were more male stereotypes than female stereotypes portrayed throughout the sample episodes chosen. This could be for many possible reasons. For example, the episodes chosen weighed heavier in male coverage or exposure, or the coding for male stereotypes was more accurate or better defined. The best way to further this research would be to broaden the number of episodes analyzed.

Another result showed that one particular episode, “The One With All The Wedding Dresses” in season three, held both the lowest number of male stereotypes and the highest number of female stereotypes (Reich, Gohen, & Bright, 1997). As previously stated, there were only six male stereotype citations and there were 17 female citations. This brings forth the question of “why,” especially since there were more male stereotypes than female over all. The assumed reason is because the story is heavily weighted on the girl plot. When looking through the coding and the episode summary of this episode, it seems that the wedding dresses portion
was the main story. It also shows that the boy stories that the episode did include were not worthy of citing (Reich, Gohen, & Bright, 1997).

Lastly, it is interesting that the highest represented female stereotype was the opposite of the lowest represented male stereotype. The highest represented female stereotype was women are hyperemotional, and the lowest represented male stereotype was men are hypoemotional. Hyperemotional is being extremely emotional, whereas hypoemotional is being closed off to emotions or not expressing emotions (Heesacker et al., 1999). Unless results were skewed because of the small sample used, this means that the women were stereotypically emotional, and the guys were more emotional than the stereotypical man. This would further explain why the second highest represented male stereotype was men are gay. Many conclusions are able to be made from simply analyzing the relationships between stereotypes.

Limitations

This process is not spotless because there are limitations to consider. First, there are 236 episodes of *Friends*, and this study analyzes 25 of them. That is only 11%. There would be much more data, and it would be more accurate if all the episodes were analyzed. Because only 25 of them are analyzed, there are only a few viewed from each season; this sample size is not a sufficient representation. Second, the interpretation of when the stereotypes are portrayed and where they should be placed during the coding process is subjective. It is subject to human error and/or human bias. Because of this, if someone different were to perform the exact same research, their results may vary from these. The hope, however, is that the research is set up in a way that eliminates room for much human error so that the results only slightly vary. Lastly, the stereotypes chosen to look for are limited. There are much more than just six male stereotypes and six female stereotypes. Using more stereotypes in this research would have given more
validity or invalidity to the hypotheses. This study, however, focuses on the ones that previous studies have labeled the most prevalent in society.

Conclusion

This sample of Friends provides the researcher and readers with insight on many aspects of gender stereotypes in Friends, sitcoms, and television in general. Although it is a small sample from television as a whole, it still provides a base of information from which to make inferences. Sitcoms are worth studying because of their personal relationship they hold with the average American. This study shows that male stereotypes were portrayed more often than female stereotypes, and provides details on the frequencies of each stereotype in the episodes and overall. It also shows trends over the span of the ten seasons. The data adds validity to all three hypotheses that were stated. Gender stereotypes were often portrayed in the sitcom Friends, the data changed throughout the ten seasons based on culture changes, and the stereotypes determined the characters and plot.

The frequencies, percentages, and trends from this study are important to society because this world consists of media consumers. These media consumers should know the amount of stereotypical portrayals they are being fed, or have been fed in past years. With this knowledge, it will increase their media literacy, and they will be better equipped to consume media responsibly. Further research is suggested on the analysis of more episodes in Friends, the broadening of coded stereotypes, and the correlations between positive and negative stereotypes.
Appendixes

Appendix A

### Season 1

#### The One With The East German Laundry Detergent

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<td>&quot;Women can see breasts any time they want.&quot;</td>
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<td>Gets told he does not have a real job</td>
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<td>&quot;I'm not proud of this! Well, maybe I am a little.&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;It says I'm a sensitive, warm, kind of guy.&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;I don't get how guys can do so many mean things and then not even care.&quot;</td>
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## Season 2
### The One With The List

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<td>Simply states &quot;I kissed Rachel&quot;</td>
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<td>Cooks dessert for everyone</td>
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<td>Wants to sleep with his students</td>
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<td>Cannot write his name properly</td>
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<td>&quot;On my first day as Dr. Drake Remoray on Days of Our Lives&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;The bell doesn't dismiss you, I dismiss you.&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;Hey good lookin.&quot;</td>
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Season 3
The One With The Racecar Bed
### Season 4

**The One With The 'Cuffs**

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<td>&quot;She's not just the boss in your office, if you know what I mean.&quot;</td>
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<td>Listens to Monica and encourages her to keep cooking</td>
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## Season 5

### The One With All The Kissing

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<td>&quot;Say that to him and you're golden.&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;I'll kick that door in if you'll give me a little sugar.&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;Oh my, you're leaking!&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;I asked him to marry me after four dates.&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;You should see the treatment I get when I'm with that car.&quot;</td>
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<td>Acts like he owns a place upstate</td>
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<td>Wears Porsche clothes and hat and bag and says, &quot;I just love the way it feels when everybody thinks I own a Porsche.&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;Little baby girl Chandler. Where have I heard that before? Oh right! Coach Ruben.&quot;</td>
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<td>Brings and action figure for the babies to play with</td>
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<td>Swallows a sonic blaster gun</td>
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<td>Monica, &quot;This whole time we were concentrating on the babies and no one was watching Chandler!&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;I couldn't face another failed marriage.&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;I picked up the forms and I will take care of everything.&quot;</td>
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<td>To Rachel, &quot;If you think about it, this is all your fault.&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;I am so mad Ross. I don't think I've ever been this angry!&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;I came here for an annulment and I am not leaving until I get one.&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;I have soap and sponges and rags...&quot;</td>
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<td>Talks about how she is flexible in bed and Monica says, &quot;How are you still single?&quot;</td>
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<td>Proud of herself for taking care of the babies by herself</td>
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## Season 7
### The One With The Nap Partners

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<td>Monica calls him gay</td>
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<td>&quot;I broke up with her because she got fat.&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;You know what they say, elephants never forget.&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;Wow this cologne really is every bit as good as Georgia.&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;Maybe if they can open up that bikini shop.&quot;</td>
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### Season 9

#### The One With The Pediatrician

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<td>Hints that she has been in a threesome</td>
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<td>Gets humiliated because Joey lied to her</td>
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### Season 10

#### The One With Ross's Tan

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<td>&quot;No, that's the stuff I'm good at.&quot;</td>
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<td>Has a routine for seducing a girl</td>
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<td>Grazes Chandler's leg</td>
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<td>&quot;More foosball?&quot;</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<td>&quot;I'm an expert at taking off bras!&quot;</td>
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<td>I don't have another lever</td>
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<td>Likes it when Joey grazes his leg</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;And beer!&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thinks Ross is checking out Monica</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gets pedicures</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monica and Ross make fun of him for getting pedicures</td>
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<td>Tells a woman he gets pedicures</td>
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<td><strong>Ross</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Considers a spray on tan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chandler, &quot;Sure, then you could get a mini skirt to show it off.&quot;</td>
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<td>Talks about going to an adult video store</td>
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<td>Gets a spray tan</td>
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<td>Gets called miss Hawaiian tropic</td>
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<td><strong>Rachel</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hits Joey when he moves his hand up her leg</td>
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<td>Hits him again</td>
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<td>Hits him a third time</td>
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<td>Doesn’t want to cut Amanda out because she feels bad</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;I have an uncontrollable need to please people!&quot;</td>
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<td>Chandler stares at her breasts</td>
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<td>Gets mad at Pheobe for cutting her out</td>
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<td>Forgives Pheobe</td>
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<td><strong>Pheobe</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;You’re generous and kind and scrappy.&quot;</td>
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<td>Tells Monica she is glad they are friends</td>
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Appendix B

Frequencies of Stereotypes in Each Episode

Y = Number of Citations
X = Stereotype
GEN GENDER STEREOTYPES IN THE SITCOM FRIENDS 37
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<th>Season 6 Episode 2</th>
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Appendix C

Total Number of Stereotypes in Friends

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Stereotype Coding

1. **Men are sexually driven**: sexual desires (Clements-schreiber & Rempel, 1995)
2. **Men are hypoemotional**: showing no emotion (Heesacker et al., 1999)
3. **Men are dominant/superior**: high status, more important than women (Heesacker et al., 1999)
4. **Men are prideful**: arrogant (Heesacker et al., 1999)
5. **Men are childish**: immature, irresponsible, single (Miller, 2011)
6. **Men are gay**: show feminine attributes (Heesacker et al., 1999)
7. **Women are sex objects**: disrespected for their body (Goodall, 2011)
8. **Women are passive/submissive**: inferior to men, quiet, weak (Kray et al., 2001)
9. **Women are independent/matriarch**: head of the house (Senzani, n.d.)
10. **Women are hyperemotional**: overly emotional and sensitive (Heesacker et al., 1999)
11. **Women are affectively oriented**: comforting, listening (Suh, Moskowitz, Fournier, & Zuroff, 2004).
12. **Women are caregivers**: nurturing, do housework and raise kids (Vogel et al., 2003)
Appendix D

Male Stereotypes Through Seasons

Female Stereotypes Through Seasons
Appendix E

Episode Summaries

1.5 The One With The East German Laundry Detergent: Chandler and Pheobe break up with their significant others. Ross strategically makes plans to do laundry with Rachel and ends up teaching her how. She gets so excited about standing up for herself that she kisses Ross. Joey wants to date his ex-girlfriend so he arranges a dinner with Monica, his ex, and her boyfriend.

1.12 The One With The Dozen Lasagnas: Monica is stuck with a dozen lasagnas because she did not know they were supposed to be vegetarian. Rachel and Paolo getting serious when he makes a pass at Pheobe. Rachel and Paolo break up. Chandler and Joey need a new table but cannot choose one, so they buy a foosball table instead. Carol finds out the gender of her and Ross’s baby, but Ross refuses to find out.

1.18 The One With All The Poker: Rachel sends out resumes to get a new, better job. The girls decide they want in on the guys’ poker games and the guys accept. The girls lose, call a rematch, get poker times from Monica’s aunt, and play the guys again. They lose their second game and play a third, and Rachel gets a call saying she did not get the job she interviewed for. The game comes down to Ross and Rachel, and Ross lets Rachel win because he wants to see her happy.

2.09 The One With The List: Chandler gets a new computer. Ross is depressed because he has to choose between Rachel and Julie. The guys make pros and cons on Chandler’s computer but they never get past the cons. Ross chooses Rachel, but she finds the list and says she does not want to be with him anymore. Monica finds a new job creating Thanksgiving recipes for Mockolate, a synthetic chocolate substitute.

2.20 The One Where Old Yeller Dies: Pheobe discovers that her mother used to shield her from the sad parts of movies, like Old Yeller, so she rents them and becomes depressed and angry. Ross takes Ben for the weekend, upset that he is missing him grow up, and Ben says his first words. At Monica’s request, Chandler and Joey start hanging out with Richard. They start to like him and then admitted it was because he was like their father. Ross tells Rachel his future plans with her and she panics.

3.07 The One With The Racecar Bed: Monica and Pheobe shop at Chandler’s girlfriend’s exhusband’s mattress store and Monica buys one. The wrong one gets ordered and Pheobe signs for it. Rachel convinces Ross to have dinner with her father, and it goes badly. They have lunch the next day and it goes well. Joey teaches an “Acting for Soap Opera” class. While trying to return the bed, Joey and Monica see Janice kissing her husband.

3.09 The One With The Football: The girls cook Thanksgiving dinner while the guys watch a football game on TV; all six characters decide to play football together. Monica and Ross compete for the “Geller Cup.” Joey and Chandler compete for a Dutch girl during the game, and Rachel is bad so she “goes long.” Pheobe flashes the other team to get points.

3.15 The One Where Ross and Rachel Take A Break: Pheobe dates a diplomat who doesn’t speak English; she convinces Monica to double with them so the translator will have a date. Chandler and Joey gawk at the Xerox girl, who invites them both to a dance club. Ross interrupts Rachel’s late night emergency at the office, leading to a fight; Rachel wants to take a break. Ross goes to the club and ends up kissing the Xerox girl.

4.03 The One With The ‘Cuffs: Chandler and Joey try to make patio furniture and a canoe as their only furnishings. Chandler dates Rachel’s boss again. Rachel finds Chandler half naked and hand-cuffed to a chair in her boss’s office. Monica catered her mother’s party and “pulls a Monica” when she loses a fake nail in one of the quiches. A salesman tries to sell Joey encyclopedias, but Joey just cannot afford a while set.

4.20 The One With All The Wedding Dresses: Joey snores and Chandler makes him go to a sleep clinic. While at the clinic, Chandler gets a girlfriend. Rachel gets jealous that Ross is marrying Emily and she scares Joshua away. Monica caters her mother’s party and “pulls a Monica” when she loses a fake nail in one of the quiches. A salesman tries to sell Joey encyclopedias, but Joey just cannot afford a while set. Pheobe and Rachel catch the spirit as well and they all sit in the apartment and wear wedding dresses.

5.02 The One With All The Kissing: Monica and Chandler try to keep their relationship hidden so Chandler has to kiss Rachel and Pheobe twice. Pheobe is upset that she missed out in London so they plan a trip to Atlantic City. On their way, Pheobe’s water breaks. Rachel gives Monica the job of making her decisions and Monica says not to tell Ross she loves him, but she does it anyway.

5.13 The One With Joey’s Bag: Chandler hates Monica’s massages and she finds out. Joey is auditioning for a play so Rachel offers him a “man’s bag” that looks like a purse. He falls in love with it but does not get the part. At Pheobe’s grandmother’s memorial, she finds her real father. They meet up and it is awkward.

5.15 The One With The Girl Who Hits Joey: Chandler gets scared when they talk about his possible children with Monica. To make up for it, he impulsively proposes to Monica but she says no. Joey dates a girl who punches him all the time and they end up breaking up. Ross moves into his new apartment and refuses to donate to their charity. Because of this, people hate him.

6.05 The One With Joey’s Porsche: Rahel and Ross try to get annulled but end up having to get a divorce. Ross reveals he still loves her and she says I was her fault they got married. Joey finds the keys to a Porsche and acts like it is his. Pheobe, Monica, and Chandler take care of Frank and Alice’s babies.

6.14 The One Where Chandler Can’t Cry: Unable to handle the idea of Ross and Jill together, Rachel asks Ross to stop seeing Jill. Jill is upset and throws herself at Ross, attempting to use him to get back at Rachel. Chandler does not even cry in sad movies or for any other reason. They find out that Ursula is making porn movies in Pheobe’s name.

7.07 The One With The Nap Partners: Rachel and Pheobe fight over who gets to be Rachel’s maid of honor and Rachel ends up getting it. After watching Die Hard, Ross and Joey fell asleep on the couch and have a very good nap. At first they were upset it happened, but eventually they decide to try it again.

7.08 The One Where Chandler Doesn’t Like Dogs: They play a game where they have to list the 50 states, and Ross gets angry and does not eat Thanksgiving dinner. Chandler finds out Pheobe was hiding a
dog and claims he is allergic because he is scared. Tag comes to dinner and gets sad to Rachel, who tells him she has feelings for him. He says he has them back and they kiss.

7.14 The One Where They All Turn Thirty: Rachel’s struggles with turning thirty prompt the rest of the gang to remember they’re 30th birthdays. Monica got drunk; Pheobe found out she was 31; Ross bought a sports car; Chandler just turned 30; Joey cried and blamed God. Rachel breaks up with Tag because she realized she should be with the man she will marry.

8.05 The One With Rachel’s Date: Monica hires a new chef, and Pheobe dates him. They fight to see who can fire/break-up with him faster. A guy at Chandler’s work calls him Toby. Rachel goes on a date with an actor and Ross does not like it. He comforts her when she comes back sad. She goes after him, but sees him with another girl and turns away.

8.13 The One Where Chandler Takes A Bath: They all find out that Joey has feelings for Rachel. Monica introduces Chandler to the art of relaxing baths. Ross and Rachel discuss on possible names for the baby and later find out it’s a girl.

9.03 The One With The Pediatrician: Chandler and Monica announce their plans to move to Oklahoma. Monica takes a job in New York. Rachel calls Emma’s pediatrician so much that she has to change doctors, and goes to Ross and Monica’s old pediatrician. She finds out “Rossy” still goes there. Joey and Pheobe agree to set each other up with people for a double date and Joey forgets. They leave dinner angry, but Pheobe later meets him at the coffee shop and they talk.

9.11 The One Where Rachel Goes Back To Work: Chandler, with no job, decides he wants to do advertising. He gets an unpaid internship. Joey gets Pheobe a job doing extra work on Days Of Our Lives. Rachel discovers someone was a temporary replacement and she got jealous. She quit maternity leave and started work early.

9.13 The One Where Monica Sings: Ross, jealous of Rachel and Gavin’s kiss, picks up a desperate woman. Ross and Rachel talk and Rachel decides to live with Joey again. Joey has to get his eyebrows waxed for headshots, and only gets one professionally done. Chandler does the other. Monica sings at a bar and the crowd likes her because they can see through her shirt.

10.03 The One With Ross’s Tan: Joey and Rachel try to get physical but do not feel at ease. Ross gets a spray-on tan but messes up counting and gets sprayed multiple times on only the front. Monica and Pheobe’s friend from England comes to town and they try avoiding her. Joey and Rachel realize their relationship is not going to work.

10.16 The One With Rachel’s Going Away Party: Rachel finished preparations to go to Paris. Monica and Chandler pack up their apartment with the gang’s help. During the going away party for Rachel, she says individual goodbyes to everyone except Ross; he is upset and confronts her, leading to a passionate kiss. Erica goes into labor with Monica and Chandlers baby.
References


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