# Could It Be Anymore Toxic?

# Toxic Masculinity and the Power of Representation in *Friends*

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Master's Thesis

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31 May 2022

Characters: 191,993.

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ABSTRACT

The portrayal of gender in popular media such as music, movies, and TV series have grown in popularity the last few decades. Consequently, representation of gender has become more important than ever to examine. The American sitcom *Friends* is a popular media text which portrays six friends as they try to navigate life as young adults. Through the theoretical lenses of Butler, Connell, Kimmel, and others, this thesis sought to analyze whether the male characters on *Friends* portrayed toxic masculinity, and whether the show endorses this representation. The thesis found that all main male characters attempt to emulate hegemonic practices in various aspects of their lives, and it can be difficult to discern whether the show's laugh track ridicules these attempts or endorses them. The men's oppressive behavior is often framed as jokes and the laugh track is quick to remind the audience that their behavior is one to be ridiculed. Other times, the men negate certain aspects of hegemonic masculinity through intimacy, close friendship, and support, but here the laugh track also is often quick to shut this down as well. The ambivalence of the show makes it hard to discern exactly which aspects of hegemonic masculinity the audience is supposed to endorse, and which aspects should be criticized. The men's behavior is not accidental since it creates the foundation for most of the show's jokes. While each character embodies their own flavor of complicit masculinity, they also express greater empathy and vulnerability than what hegemonic masculinity would expect. The show aired in the 1990s and this thesis attempted to keep this in mind through the analysis though it recognizes that the sitcom received a backlash in 2018. The reason for this backlash is partially rooted in a shift in audience, and a shift in how the audience perceives hegemonic masculinity and how men treat each other and women. The thesis concluded that the show has representations of toxic masculinity, it attempts to criticize exactly those representations, and that the show did not seem

to contain much competition between the men, something hegemonic masculinity would otherwise require. It suggested to investigate the representation of race on the show, as well as looking into its representation of the trans community which in both cases it was criticized for during its 2018 backlash.

KEYWORDS: Hegemonic Masculinity, Masculinities, Complicit Masculinity, Friends, Representation, Gender, Raewyn Connell, Judith Butler

## INTRODUCTION

Media's portrayal of sex and gender is a highly studied field within the academic field and has been for the last few decades. This attention is warranted because fictional characters are a window for self-reflection and for that reason, representation is an issue worth investigating. Gendered images play a significant role in producing and maintaining normalization of hegemonic standards for femininity and masculinity (Craig 12, 61). Fictional characters play an important role in making a show recognizable to its audience through identification and familiarity (63), and for that reason fictional characters participate in reproducing and creating norms for hegemony.

Over-generalized stereotypes dictate a certain understanding of gender and media perpetrates those relentlessly. Stereotypes are helpful to perpetrate because it caters to a collective understanding of a concept regardless of individual agreement. They are psychological beliefs or implicit attitudes that lead a person to associate someone or something with a certain trait or traits, and they can be either accurate or inaccurate (Puddifoot 14). In other words, it is an oversimplification of an impression of someone or something. Stereotypes are used to organize impressions into the individuals' mental schemas and help sort the constant stream of information which humans are faced with daily (Osland, Bird and Delano 73). While individual stereotypes exist, they do not make much sense outside of collective stereotypes. Collective stereotypes are the public information about social groups shared among individuals while individual stereotypes are personal stereotypes around certain groups. Individual beliefs around stereotypes can contradict with collective stereotypes and change the collective stereotype or vice versa (Stangor and Schaller 4-5).

Gender stereotypes are everywhere in fiction and in the media as it bases itself on gender expectations and allows for quick access to easily understood social discourses. One of these stereotypes is hegemonic masculinity, a cultural idea of what the ideal man is supposed to look and behave like. Connell argued that fictional men may be visible bearers of hegemonic masculinity in the same sense that real men are (R. W. Connell 2005, 77). Media portrayals of men are more common than portrayals of women, and men often take the role of main characters (Craig 11; Lotz 2014; Sink and Mastro). Representation of gender on TV is important to consider because it feeds into gender stereotypes and forms people's expectations of their own and others gender.

Television is a tool for cultural storytelling and is known as a sort of "window on the world" offering a glimpse outside out daily experiences (Lotz 4). The norms around television consumption have changed drastically from 1950s to now (6), such as which channels are offered and how rigid one has to be to watch a certain program. Not long ago, all television was linear: "[it] is what people watch when they watch "what is on"" (14), however, streaming services are slowly but steadily overtaking linear television (Ramon 243). An era of streaming might be flourishing as streaming services allow for a choice in what content is watched to a much greater degree than linear tv can offer.

With linear TV becoming overruled by streaming services, people have a greater freedom in what they choose to watch. While mass media is a powerful tool for circulating gendered images (R. W. Connell 186-188), streaming services have not limited this circulation. *Friends* is a TV show that flourished on linear television from 1994 to 2004 with 236 episodes and a reunion episode which aired in 2021. The show revolves around the everyday life of six fictional characters who live in New York with focus on two apartments where most of the main

characters live. The three male characters: Chandler Bing, Joey Tribbiani, and Ross Geller, and the three female characters: Monica Geller, Rachel Green, and Phoebe Buffay, are followed as they support each other through jobs, relationships, love, disputes, and later parenting and embracing adulthood. Its final episode ended with 52.5 million viewers (Bazzan), and now, as a streaming choice, reaches a new generation of 20-30 year olds (Sternbergh) first through Netflix and now on HBO Max as of May, 2022 (Jarvey).

The show has also become a focus of academic studies (Gullage; Kutulas; Chenot; Bazzan; Dillion; Leppert; Thompson; Quaglio) though much of this attention was given after the show had ended in 2004. The sitcom has been described as a 'comfort show', the show one sits down to watch without engaging critically with it – or at least it was when it aired on television. It had a substantial backlash 2018 when *Friends* was exposed to a new generation of young adults born in the 1990s who brought up issues such as female sexual harassment, whitewashing, and hegemonic masculinity (Kaplan; Schwind and Knox 4-5). In comparison to other shows that aired around the same time such as Seinfeld, *Friends* has not attracted the same academic attention (Schwind and Knox 13). It was suggested that the show was not given much attention in academia because it was not though to be an innovative contribution to the genre of sitcom (11). The lack of academic interest was one of the reasons this was chosen as the topic of this thesis because popularity means that more people are exposed to its representations of gender, race, and equality.

For a show as popular as this one, the male characters are neither fathers or husbands, and they work in rather ordinary male-dominated fields such as computing, academia, and acting with mediocre success. In other words, the male characters are presented as ordinary young adult men where their skills as workers do not define them which is something many young adult men

can easily relate to. Relatability was something the show was praised for as it could handle darker themes and personal struggles through intimacy both between the characters and between the characters and the show (45-46). This intimacy welcomes the audience into a sense of belong with the characters rather than watching a sitcom about six friends. This also allows the potential to hide harmful presentations of hegemonic masculinity and the binary gender.

Studying the representation of masculinity, in this case white heterosexual masculinity, is a way to study how representations promote or deny current hegemonic traits. As such, studying representations allows for a broader understanding of how popular shows might affect society. There have been many calls to action to push against toxic traits of hegemonic masculinity such as Gilette's "We Believe: The Best Men Can Be" ad campaign (Gilette) and the organization Promundo which promotes caring, non-violent, and equitable masculinities and gender relations. It suggests that while scholars have focused on this issue, it seems to become a public awareness and more people are critical of the media they consume.

While popular media and TV shows are not always meant to represent real life situations but rather imagined, scripted situations which mimics real life situations, it can be argued that popular media's representations influence the general public's understanding of gender. Toxic masculinity in popular media is harmful masculinity as it perpetrates an acceptance of harmful behavior towards men and women. In *Friends* (1994-2004), the masculine representation is intertwined with the everyday life of the three male main characters and is intertwined with toxic representations. It reinforces the idea that hegemonic masculinity is the only accepted kind of representation for men including fictional characters. While the show masquerades as progressive through positive representations of masculinity, it intertwines toxic traits with

everyday representations of masculinity hides them in plain sight. Thus, the show perpetrates harmful stereotypes through humor.

If feminine behavior in masculine bodies is presented as harmful, it limits which behaviors masculine bodies can safely inhabit to be accepted by society. Creating presentations of masculine bodies with harmful behaviors that perpetrate stigmatization around masculine behavior, men's perception of and behavior towards others, can cause mental health issues in men (Kupers; Emslie, Ridge and Ziebland; Valkonen and Hänninen; Khan, Dery and Helman; Genuchi; Levant and Wong), prevent them from seeking mental and physical help in cases of abuse (Rowlands; Morgan and Wells; Kay and Jeffries) and create a dangerous environment for women (Jewkes and Morrell; Anwary; Hearn) and members of the LBGTQ community (Bhana and Mayeza).

The purpose of this thesis is to dive into the representation of masculinity in *Friends* and look at how it is performed, whether it abides or deviates from hegemonic standards and how this affects the overall representation of the three male characters. I will furthermore look at how the show handles issues which peaked at its time such as the LGBTQ+ representation and how the male characters interact with LGBTQ+ characters. I will consider how the representations of masculinity both promote deviation from hegemonic masculinity and enforce a compliance with it.

## METHOD

Contemporary media and its representation of masculinity is in a state of constant change as they are dependent on the cultural values and policies developed by the current hegemonic masculinity. This thesis too will be affected by what is currently understood to be contemporary

and what traits hegemonic masculinity is defined by in 2022, but it will attempt to consider the time the show *Friends* aired on and what the ideals were back then and compare it to what the current ideals are. While the focus is on analyzing the created masculinities in the show, the reading of those traits may have changed, and the thesis will attempt to account for them during the analysis.

This thesis will use an interdisciplinary theoretical approach with a focus on discourse critical analysis supplemented with media analysis. Discourse can be regarded as 'the flow of knowledge – and/or societal knowledge stored – throughout all time" (Wodak and Meyer), and analysts using this method argue that we continuously build and rebuild our social world and our own identities through speech and behavior. In a broad sense, discourse can be defined as a context specific framework of meaning-making and create or redefine the limits of what can be known (Fairclough). Language serves the purpose of creating meaning which contributes to reproducing or transforming society and culture as well as power relations (Fairclough, Mulderrig and Wodak 370).

The aim of feministic critical discourse is "to show the complex, subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, ways in which frequently taken-for-granted gendered assumptions and hegemonic power relations are discursively produced, sustained, negotiated, and challenged in different contexts and communities" (Lazar 142). Feministic critical discourse combines linguistic analysis and social theory to address how power and dominance are enacted and reproduced in text. It is centered around an interest in how the construction of social phenomena occurs wherein it focuses on a wider social, political, and historical context in which text and talk occurs. This approach has no unifying theoretical perspective, essential methods, or standard

formula as it makes up a diverse range of methodological perspectives, not just one. Rather, it only has unified epistemological and ontological assumptions (Wodak and Meyer).

The ontological assumption of critical discourse analysis is that social reality exists in a discursive sense and only means something because we attach meaning to it. In other words, discourse create the social reality. The epistemological assumption of critical discourse analysis rest in post-structuralism and in critical theories. Language for post-structuralism is the place where all reality is created and the place that allows reality to be deconstructed and challenged. Post-structuralism's deconstructive strategies are useful for naming power relations and questioning assumptions of dominant discourses such as hegemonic masculinity (Leotti, Surgrue and Winges-Yanez 4). Furthermore, the post-structuralist understanding as power as diffuse and discursive are helpful for deepening critical readings of structural power and dominance.

The interdisciplinary approach encompasses elements of cinematic discourse which is an approach that uses the multimodal features of the fictional narrative: verbal, non-verbal, audio, and visual (Piazza, Bednarek and Rossi). While the primary focus is on the discourse critical analysis, there will be an added emphasis on the mise-en-scène when appropriate since the arrangement of a character and the background can convey a deeper meaning than the dialogue alone in a scene might do. The mise-en-scène creates a sense of place for the audience and the body language of characters help establish context for the dialogue.

The theories that have been chosen for this thesis focus on gender and in particular masculinity. Judith Butler's work on gender is used to establish a foundation for sex, gender, and sexuality, while Raewyn Connell is to establish a foundation for masculinity and masculinity studies. Their theories complement each other well in the endeavor to elucidate gender through a constructivist lens wherein this thesis' focus is on how masculinities are constructed. A myriad

of other theorists is used but all serve the purpose of illuminating the very complex field of masculinity and create a strong foundation for analyzing *Friends* for its representation of masculinity.

## GENDER HISTORY AND THE CURRENT UNDERSTANDING OF GENDER

### *A Brief Overview of Gender Studies*

This chapter will introduce a brief history of gender studies. Gender studies was born out of the second wave feminist movement but studies on women were conducted much earlier on. It is important to clarify the difference between sex and gender as the theories used in the later analysis all distinguish between these two. Furthermore, the theorists mentioned in this section are in no way a full overview of the history of gender studies but due to space limitations, only so many can be mentioned.

Sex differences is a popular topic in the field of psychology where every subfield of the discipline has touched upon it at some point. This popularity has a myriad of reasons but a prominent one may be that sex is something we notice on people and something we remember best about others. Sex is especially salient in social groups (McCreary and Chrisler 4). For almost 100 years, psychological research and theory focused on sex as a universal, biologically based cause of behavior. Gender studies grew out of the second wave of the women's movement which criticized academia for leaving out women in academic disciplines and studies (1). Although this meant women were added to the mix, men were still the primary focus in studies until very recently. This field was at first named Women's studies and focused on examining

women's lives and experiences and was later expanded to be named Gender studies although the field of Women studies still exist today as an interdisciplinary academic field.

The term gender started appearing as feminist psychologists, influenced by the Women's Liberation Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, began to write about sociocultural influences on the psychology of women (McCreary and Chrisler 1). They used this term to describe psychological and social aspects of behavior and social roles, and with time gender roles replaced the older term sex roles. It was understood that gender was performed rather than something embodied whereas sex was still firmly planted within the body and the main modifier for actions: "It represented the characteristics taken on by males and females as they encountered social life and culture through socialization" (Wharton 6). Theories about gender like the gender identity theory Theorists like John Money, and Robert J. Stoller popularized the idea of gender as an identity rather that was formed by the individual very early on.

In the early days of gender studies, the word "gender" was often synonymous with women since psychologists believed that man is the norm and women is the 'other' (McCreary and Chrisler 2). Women as the 'other' was a prominent issue as well. Despite an increase in attention paid to women, studies focusing on only one side of the 'coin' rarely came to light: "much more was written about differences between women and men than was written about variations among women and among men" (Wharton 4). Researchers were focused on looking for gender differences and the studies were often simplistic with no more rational than simple personal interest (McCreary and Chrisler 2).

By the late 1980s, feminist scholars considered gender as a complex with multiple dimensions. Among them was Connell's multi-level theory of gender which will be expanded upon later, and Lorber's theory of gender. Lorber's theory argue that women and men are

constantly engaged in doing gender: “Gender, like culture, is a human production that depends on everyone constantly “doing gender” (13). She argued that gender is one way humans organize their lives and this process is legitimated by religion, law, science, and the society’s entire set of values (15). In her theory, gender is removed from physical appearance, opposite earlier views on gender where physical appearance would dictate which gender was assigned to the person. She views gender as an institution comparable to the economy, the family, and religion in its significance and consequences: “The social order constructs and holds individuals to strongly gendered norms and expectations” (25). Along with Connell’s theory, Lorber’s theory of gender helped aid to the discussion of gender as enacted rather than a biological construction, and as an invisible phenomenon that takes place on multiple levels.

With this shift, men also became gendered rather than generic beings. It was slowly recognized that gender itself is relational; understanding what women are or can be required attention to what men are or can be (Wharton 5). As the study of gender grew, so did the recognition of variations among men and among women and rather than speak of a single masculinity or femininity, it became crucial to speak of multiple masculinities and femininities. Men’s studies and masculinities will be expanded upon later in the paper.

As recognition of variations between men and women became more mainstream, inequality also gained attention. This is not to say that inequality did not exist before it became mainstream in sociology, however, the realization that gender and inequality may be influenced by each other. As early as the 19$^{th}$ century, black women wrote about inequality, race, class, and gender and how these intertwined (Risman, Froyum and Scarborough 6). Sociology was slow to pick up on this framework for understanding inequality, and first was introduced to mainstream social sciences in the early 1990s. Intersectionality was coined by Crenshaw in 1989 and was

used to describe the interrelation between gender and race that caused discrimination towards black women (6). Today, intersectionality is utilized to analyze differences between social groups but also the interrelation between several system of inequality (7). This is not only about women experiencing discrimination but all kinds of different discriminations such as male to male discrimination, disability discrimination, and discrimination of people of color.

Gender studies is now an interdisciplinary academic field devoted to analyzing gender identity. It touches almost every field in academia and has many dedicated subfields. The current understanding of gender is that it is as much a process as a fixed state; it is continuously produced and reproduced. In other words, gender is not simply expressed but enacted constantly, as will be explained later in the section about Judith Butler. Researchers disagree over how these gendered characteristics are acquired by the person but agree that people's behavior, the way they see themselves, and how they view others make up gender (Wharton 9). Second, gender occurs on all levels of the social structure, not just on a social or personal level. Gender is a system of practices that are interlocked, far-reaching, and exists outside of individuals. As started earlier, it is a multilevel phenomenon, and this insight allows individuals to explore interactions, social institutions, embodiment of gender and the reproduction of it (7).

*Gender Performativity*

As this chapter will introduce a myriad of theories regarding masculinity, it will need a theoretical framework for approaching the notion of sex, gender, and sexuality as masculinity is intrinsically tied to the notion of sex and gender. For this framework I will use Judith Butler, an American philosopher who has defined the field of gender studies through contributions on queer theories and feminist theory.

The physical sex of a body is often assumed to be directly tied to gender and sexuality; indeed, sex and gender are often thought of as one and the same. Once a person is born into this world, their genitals decide whether they are a boy or a girl. These are the two polar genders: the male and the female gender. They are expected to be universal and defined by the mere existence of bodies and acts as a biological facticity. However, there is a distinction to be made between sex and gender where gender is the cultural interpretation of the biological facticity, sex. Sex is in itself not meaningful; it is not historical and carries no expectations. Gender, on the other hand, is historical, temporary, and carries with it a cultural sign which dictates how a body should perform. This gender system forces bodies into expected norms, actions, and behaviors: "Through the gender system, gender meaning becomes embodied. Bodies become 'sexed', which sex as 'the sign on the body'" (Kimmel, Heam and Connell 21).

This view that sex and gender are separate as a cultural gender and a biological sex is not one that is shared by contemporary theorists, including Butler: Gender is "the knowledge that establishes the meaning for bodily differences" (Harvey 297). As cited above, bodies become sexed as the gender becomes embodied; bodies themselves may as well be blank canvases that do not naturally adhere to a set standard of behaviors, actions, or styles. Sex cannot exist outside of gender: sex is a biological category while gender is a historical category: "Sex could not qualify as a prediscursive anatomical facticity. Indeed, sex, by definition, will be shown to have been gender all along" (2007, 11). Butler argues that gender is something embodied and created, maintained within the social world: "Gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender" (190). It is a construction created within the culture of a society; a collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain genders including the western approach to gender as polar opposite. This does mean that in

theory, any expression of gender is possible, but genders are conditioned and limited by terms set within a hegemonic cultural discourse dominated by binary structures that disguise itself as universal rationality (12).

Similar to Erving Goffman's theory about social interaction as the dramaturgical model of social life, Butler argues that gender is "a kind of doing, an incessant activity performed, in part, without one's knowing and without one's willing" (2004, 1). Gender is a collection of actions, bodily gestures, movements, speech, and styles that create an illusion of a gender. All these gestures are dictated by a myriad of unsaid rules that keep a person from doing their gender wrong. Butler argues that one is never alone when acting their gender and thus cannot remove themselves from their gender. It is an act performed together; it is never done alone, and gender cannot be found or maintained alone as it is intertwined with being born into and living in a society and the social norms carried within this society. Even if one is alone in a room, Butler argues: "One is always 'doing' [gender] with or for another, even if the other is only imaginary" (1). But even in the absence of physical bodies, representation of polar genders appears everywhere. In advertisement, in the media, in the written text, representation is abundant and constantly redefined: "It is deployed in images, texts, and practices to shape meaning, and these meanings then mold people's understandings and experiences" (Harvey 297). Butler describes these acts as rituals which achieves its naturalization in the context of a body; a myriad of acts that make up an illusion of something natural and stable (2007, xv).

Moreover, a person's gender is a subjective experience which adheres to society's expectation of said gender or transgresses it, challenging the contemporaneous hegemonic discourses. It is not a stable identity given to a person at birth that remains unchanging through time, and neither is it a locus of agency that determines all other acts. It is rather an identity

enacted through stylized repetitions of acts that is continuously refined as a social temporality: "[it is] an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts" (191). Should a person transgress the gender rules, they become an outcast of society: "Discrete genders are part of what "humanizes" individuals within contemporary culture; indeed, we regularly punish those who fail to do their gender right" (190). In other words, there is "a tacit collective agreement to perform, produce and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions obscured by the credibility of those productions" (190) and this is what creates gender and the illusion of polar genders. Gender is complex as it at once humanizes the person and puts them at risk of violating rules that determine their personhood and acceptance within a society (2004, 2).

The performance expected of the polar genders is different not universal and though this is something scholars agree upon, it could be argued that gender is the cultural interpretation of sex. Butler (2007) argues that "if gender is the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes, then a gender cannot be said to follow from a sex in any one way. Taken to its logical limit, the sex/gender distinction suggests a radical discontinuity between sexed bodies and culturally constructed genders" (9). This is because sex is itself a gendered category; one cannot conceive gender outside of sex since gender is discursive and performative. The construction of gender "neither precedes nor follows the process of this gendering, but emerges only within and as the matrix of gender relations themselves" (1993, xvi). In other words, sex is embedded in gender relations and vice versa; it is a matrix where one cannot be defined discursively without the other.

Finally, surviving in a society is often considered a mundane task that none need to pay much attention, but Butler points out that gender is the reason this is considered so mundane as

gender is: “a strategy of survival within compulsory systems, gender is a performance with clearly punitive consequences” (1988, 522). The regulative discourse of gender imposes compliance and conformity onto the individual and creates the binarity of gender. Those who fail to comply to the established framework of gender may be subjected to social punishment and in some cases political punishment. An example of political and social punishment is the state of Texas introducing measures that aim to disrupt the lives of transgender Americans in April of 2022, especially focusing on trans children in schools (Coughlin and Cahn). In the case of the transgender children in Texas, the children do not fit into an agreed upon established illusion of the binary genders and political action have been acted upon them to ensure they know their transgression is not favored.

Butler points out that transgenderness transgress the established notion of humanity itself because there are established norms surrounding what one considers ‘human’: “If there are norms of recognition by which the ‘human’ is constituted, and these norms encode operations of power, then it follows that the contest over the future of the ‘human’ will be a contest over the power that works in and through such norms.” (2004, 13). The category of ‘human’ is historically constructed and it works to exclude a wide range of minorities. This category dictates a myriad of things such as conditions for adoptions, marriage, and reproductive technology by excluding minorities who do not fit within the binary sex. Creating changes in this category requires a fundamental reconfiguration of “the social conditions under which humans are born and reared” (14). In order to become human, one must become recognized as fitting within the human category. Recognition is the foundation of a social existence:

> If recognition is fully lacking, that is, a life is unrecognized, is refused recognition, and has no standing before the law, or is deprived of legal rights and protections, then that life

> is actually imperiled by the lack of recognition. In this sense, the life and death struggle remains internal to the struggle of recognition. Indeed, without certain substantial forms of recognition, our lives continue to be at risk (Willig 140-141).

In order to be recognized as human and thus be granted the social acceptance and conditions which this category offers, one has to fit within the societal norms and within the binary sex. Discrete genders are part of what humanizes individuals within contemporary culture because to be 'human' is to be recognized and legitimized as such. Recognition is site of power that produces a human or inhuman social status; if no political and social recognition exist for a person whose gender defies the current framework for gender, this person is treated as an outsider without any rights to their existence as human (Butler 2004, 2). Withholding recognition renders a person's existence invalid as an ultimate kind of punishment (1988, 528). The scene of recognition is set by existing norms and powers, and the subject cannot operate independently of what can become an object of recognition (Willig 139).

## THEORY OF MASCULINITY

This chapter will first draw an overview of masculinity in the historical sense as masculinity studies have not always been present in academia and how masculinity was understood has changed over the years. After that, this chapter will establish the main theoretical framework for masculinities provided by the Australian sociologist Raewyn Connell; an impactful voice on the field of masculinity studies who has provided groundbreaking work and is still highly acclaimed for her work. Her aim in her book *Masculinities* (2005) was to redefine a notion of modern masculinity from a cultural standpoint as she found that earlier work had "failed to produce a coherent science" as they focused on what characterizes a person who is masculine (67-68). As

mentioned in the historical overview, Connell contributed greatly to the current understanding of gender and added an otherwise lacking focus to the gender theory on masculinity. This section will also look at female masculinities as well as Kimmel's conceptualization of 'aggrieved entitlement', both important aspects of masculinity. Towards the end, traits of toxic masculinity will be summed up with a focus on Sharon Bird's theory of toxic masculinity.

*A Brief Overview of Masculinity*

There is an abundance of literature analyzing constructions of masculinity throughout history, including but not limited to masculinities in the middle ages (Harvey), men and their understanding of home in the 1700s (Harvey 2009), and what it mean to 'be a man' through time (Sussman), and much of it has been analyzed through the lens of hegemonic masculinity (Harvey and Shepard). However, as this overview is brief, I have chosen to limit myself to the early 1970's and up to the 2000's as this area had a significant shift in the understanding of gender and sex. As shown earlier, dividing the field of masculinity studies into separate parts is a noble endeavor but nevertheless impossible; it is a broad field with many theories and focuses that cannot be accounted for in this brief overview due to space limitations. This is in no way a lack of significance but a lack of space, and this overview is to be understood as brief. The waves are loosely intertwined with the three waves of feminism although they are not directly connected.

The first wave of critical studies of masculinity refers to the sex role paradigm of the 1970s and onward where the key emphasis was to demonstrate the socially constructed nature of masculinity (Edwards 22). The sex role paradigm created the belief that being a man, or a woman meant enacting a general set of expectations attached to one's sex hence the sex role (Connell 22). The sex roles were believed to be internalized rules produced through social

learning. With this wave also came the Men's Liberation Movement which was an imitated version of the Women's Liberation Movement (235). It was a small but impactful movement that argued the male sex role was oppressive, similar to what the Women's Liberation Movement did. Thus, this wave also attempted to document how these processes limited masculinity and were harmful to men: "Male liberation calls for men to free themselves of the sex-role stereotypes that limit their ability to be human. Sex-role stereotype say that men should be dominant; achieving and exacting a dominant role in relation with others is often taken as an indicator of success" (Murphy 25).

Tolson was one of many who explored the negative effect sex roles had on men. He looked at how men were removed from their humanity through work and how this shaped the expectation of how they should act: "men come to work with an ambivalent emotional structure, a subservience to authority, and a compulsive need for recognition" (Tolson 50). He argued that "fixed routines give rise to rigid, masculine stereotypes, defensively oriented against their own disintegration" (51), wherein he points out that work is a constant threat to masculinity as men risk disappointment from the people working above him but having no work means he will be socially castrated (48). Work is an integral part of masculine solidarity; something that women in the workforce do not need as they get this socialization and support elsewhere.

Another one of Tolson's main points was that he believed that there is a fundamental difference between sex and gender. This separation of sex and gender allowed him to suggest that there are more than two genders: "We can begin to acknowledge that 'masculinity' is not simply the opposite of 'femininity', but that there are many types of gender identity (including homosexual and trans-sexual identities), and different expressions of masculinity within and

between different cultures" (12). Although his work did not explore different masculinities to the extend later works in later waves did, he was an important voice through the first wave.

Masculinity studies became a focus partially because the second wave of feminism had liberated and benefited women, and some believed it had done so at the expense of men (Edwards 24). Because of this experience, some scholars are more critical of the feminist movement and draw parallels between experiences women points out as problematic due to power differences and experiences men have in their social circles. Similar to Tolson's argument that work stripped men of their humanity, Farrel argued that men experience an inequality as 'success objects': if men are unable to win over the women, they will be regarded as a loser by society and they will be stripped of some of their humanity (Farrell 49).

The first wave opened for the possibility of discussing a more nuanced idea of what it means to be a man, but it still heavily referred to a singular masculinity. Even if Tolson presented the possibility of looking at masculinity in plurality, his view remained rather narrow on what it constitutes to be a man. He, for example, does not bring up race in his example, and his understanding remains focused on a hegemonic notion of masculinity centered around a white middleclass man (Tolson 13). Although impactful, there was negative push-back against the feminist movement for bringing up oppression as part of womanhood and the sex role paradigm strongly limited how masculinity could be understood. Furthermore, although this wave produced some studies on stress associated with masculinity in the 1970s, it took until the 2000s before the first journal focused on men and masculinity separate from women appeared under the name *Psychology of Men & Masculinity* (McCreary and Chrisler 2).

The second wave which emerged in the 1980s exposed the first wave's subject of analysis as primarily the most hegemonic type of men and such analysis led to an issue of

oversimplification and singularization of masculinity itself; a white, middle-class, and Western man (Edwards 2). This wave aimed to critically explore and define the complex set of meanings behind 'masculinity' (Nobel xiii), and was led by Connell who criticized the first wave for "its ethnocentrism, lack of power perspective, and incipient positivism" (Kimmel, Heam and Connell 1). Other noteworthy authors in this wave are Jeff Hearn, Michael Kimmel, David Morgan, and Victor Seidler, although their influence often extends beyond this decade and wave.

This wave was generally more political than the first wave as scholars who participated in this wave was pro-feminist and sought an alliance with feminism rather than felt attacked by the feminist movement. The 1970's sex role paradigm became politically questionable as it implied an equality between the sexes that the second wave sought to analyse. The main focus became notions of complex systems of powers such as institutions, plurality of masculinity, and hegemonic subordination based on gender, class, and sexuality. Connell's work published in her book *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics* (1987) introduced the concept of hegemonic masculinity which will be explained in dept later in this chapter; it was a groundbreaking and fundamental concept during this wave, and greatly influenced how masculinity was defined and understood.

Victor Seidler published his book *Rediscovering Masculinity: Reason, Language, and Sexuality* in 1989 which proposed that there are multiple masculinities and that masculinity is situated in time: "When we consider the historically-emergent character of this fragmentation, we can come to see that it constitutes both a source of the damage that, as men, we do to ourselves, and a facet of our patriarchal power" (3). Power is a focal point of his book as he both explores it in relation to others and in relation to how men experience power: "Feminism has crucially grasped the ways women have been rendered invisible within the public realm, but it

has been rarely appreciated how men are often left invisible to themselves" (108). Although he does not refer to Connell's hegemonic masculinity, he uses several examples that aligns itself with this term. He for example brings up an internal hierarchy between masculinities:

> An internal hierarchy is set up which takes the form of a relation of domination, whereby that part identified with reason dominates emotions, feelings, and desires. This builds a consequent distancing from feeling, often in the form of a propensity to admit feeling only in so far as it can be assimilated into rational categories. This is to distort feelings through intellectualizing them, and to suppress feelings that do not fit into a model of instrumental action (8).

He wanted to shed nuance on masculinity as a faceted experience but ultimately fails to bring up other kinds of masculinity than hegemonic masculinity. Along with David Morgan's book *Discovering Men* (1992), where he presents a plurality of masculinity that is more nuanced and pronounced than what Siedler manages to do (Morgan 45), he attempted to show that while all men benefit in some way from patriarchy, they do not benefit equally.

The third wave of critical studies of masculinity is greatly influenced by the advent of post-structuralist theory and views gender issues in relation to notions of performativity and normativity (Edwards 2). As it flourished in the 1990's it expanded from a field lead by primarily white, pro-feminist male sociologists and sociologists in English-speaking countries to many different areas of the world. As this is the case with third wave feminism, this wave is more ambiguous and interdisciplinary than the first and second wave of masculinity. It noticeably became less definable and freely moved beyond sociological discussions and into many other fields of study. The main focus is now media studies, literary studies and representation of masculinities in cultural texts (3), while the shift from gender as closely tied to

biology to gender as performative and social construct influenced the thinking of this wave. Some notable scholars during this wave are Michael Messner, Michael Kimmel, and Judith Butler, though many others also contributed and still contribute to the studies of masculinity. Judith Butler and her notion of performativity of gender is perhaps the most noticeable author in this wave.

Michael Kimmel was one of many authors who supported Butler's approach to gender as a social construct and the notions of normativity which defined this area, can be found in several instances in his books: "That which is normative — constructed and enforced by society through socialization of the young and through social sanctions against deviants — begins to appear as normal, that which is designed by nature." (2005a, 67), where it becomes clear that he supports the notion. He approaches masculinity as a plurality rather than a singular instance and as sensitive to a culture and time: "The historical construction of gender is a process through which various forms of power are reproduced and power becomes indelibly inscribed onto everyday life" (2005b, 6). Furthermore, he emphasizes that shifts in the social constructions of gender is powerful: "This idea that manhood is socially constructed and historically shifting should not be understood as a loss, that something is being taken away from men." (2005a, 26), as this allows people to challenge current hegemonic standards.

While the second wave carried important notions with it that are still relevant today, particularly those of hegemonic masculinity and gender as performative, masculinity studies have integrated many other fields of study such as fields of queer and sexuality studies and frameworks of intersectionality (Edwards 2). The current field of masculinity is a broad field that came into existence as a reaction to the second wave of the feminist movement and has now

developed into a field that focuses on incorporating voices that were originally excluded from the original focus on middle-class, heterosexual, and white men.

*Connell's Theory of Masculinity*

As this thesis is about masculinity and toxic expressions of it, it is fitting to attempt to define what it is. Masculinity is a very broad term that is difficult to define (Brod 94), it is easily recognized in society and reinforced by punishing feminine expressions in bodies that convey masculine traits (R. W. Connell 2005, 70). This section will explore and attempt to define masculinity and focus on the four terms outlined in Connell's book: 'hegemonic masculinity', 'subordination', 'complicity', and 'marginalization', as these four terms provide a useful "framework in which we can analyze specific masculinities" (81). They address key aspects of masculinities and the polar gender system but do so in different ways. Each key aspect does not refer to fixed character types that are natural and unchanging but rather configurations of practice that are historically and culturally dependent (81).

Connell's definition of gender builds upon Butler's theory of gender and mentions many of the same issues such as societal construction of gender versus biological gender (35). The social definition of masculinity is thoroughly investigated in her book and highlighted as an exaggerated power fantasy that exists to heighten patriarchy. One of her arguments is that "the social practices that construct gender relations do not express natural patterns, nor do they ignore natural patterns; rather, they negate them in a practical transformation." (79). Furthermore, she highlights that while biology may dictate some behaviors of the sexes, gender "is not dichotomous and is not necessary assigned on biological criteria." (75), and gender can be chosen regardless of biology, similar to Butler's gender theory.

Society limits masculine and feminine expressions into asserted biological differences which strongly excludes similarities between the two sexes and violently enforces gender rules through stereotypes. An example of this is noted by Halberstam on public restrooms:

> The women's bathroom accordingly becomes a sanctuary of enhanced femininity, a "little girl's room", to which one retreats to powder one's nose. The men's bathroom signifies as the extension of the public nature of masculinity – it is precisely not domestic even though the names given to the sexual function of the bathroom – such as cottage or tearoom – suggest it is a parody of the domestic (24).

However, "exclusive gender identity is the suppression of natural similarities" (R. W. Connell 2005, 79), and while biological differences exist, Connell argues there is a gross exaggeration of said differences between men and women that does not reflect natural differences but rather symbolic differences: "In fact the social practices are not reflecting natural differences with these diacritical marks of gender. They are weaving a structure of symbol and interpretation around them, and often vastly exaggerating or distorting them" (80). This exaggeration takes place as it reinforces and sustains the social definition of the polar genders and is required as the gender categories cannot be sustained by a biological logic (81). The social practices around constructing gender focus on negating the major pattern of difference that occur between the sexes rather while rejecting the similarities the two sexes might share (80). Because of this hyperfocus on differences between the sexes, Connell suggests that an assessment of the polar genders should focus on both sexes, their gendered lives and how they relate to each other through practices that reinforce hierarchical systems, and how these practices might affect personality, culture, and bodily experience (71).

The core of Connell's theories is the claim that masculinities exist in multiple forms which interact with each other in an ever-dynamic hierarchy. As shown above, she defines gender as a tool to order social practices, and she underlines that while masculinities are often associated with male bodies, females can embody masculinity. Furthermore, any understanding of gender is historically situated, and today's current understanding of gender, including hegemonic masculinities, may change in the future, or even allow for a third or fourth gender: "Masculinities and femininities can be re-constructed historically, new forms can become dominant. It is even possible for a whole new category to be constructed" (81).

Institutions are also a key element of Connell's theories as she defines them as gendered the same way bodies are. Institutions are defined as an organization or other formal social structure that governs a field of action, such as a school, the military, the workplace, or even the state. An example Connell points to is how the state is heavily structured around the male gender as men often occupy the highest seats of power (82). One possible reason is that the majority of workers within the political state are male and practices such as internal divisions of labor, recruiting, and hiring, are configured to the male biological area which put non-subordinated men at an advantage (73). This can be linked to the idea that men are constructed as biologically superior through bodily superiority in strength and size (85), as patriarchal power on the large scale requires the "construction of a hypermasculine ideal of toughness and dominance" (80), and often as intellectually superior to women as well in regards to leading.

An argument can be made that the state as an exclusive male institution might be slowly changing. As of 2022, the first female black woman started serving on the Supreme Court in the US (Hulse and Karni), and several countries in the EU now have had or have women in high political positions (News; Lyall and Castle; Engelbrecht and Anderson), though at the current

time the US still has not had a woman as president despite several candidates, and only few European countries have had women as prime ministers elected. Non-Western countries seem to follow a similar rise of women in power such as in Jamaica (Romero), Argentina (Berrionuevo), and in Japan (Rich, Inoue and Hida).

The most famous part of Connell's theory is the notion of hegemonic masculinity. This key term is derived from Antonio Gramsci's analysis of class relations in which he defined 'hegemonic' as referring "to the cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life" (R. W. Connell 2005, 77). Thus, hegemonic masculinity is defined as the current figuration of gender practice which embodies traits that guarantee the dominant position of men and the subordination of women. She notes that "Hegemonic masculinity is always constructed in relation to various subordinated masculinities as well as in relation to women" (R. W. Connell 1987, 183). While hegemonic masculinity is viewed as an ideal, it is a minority who embodies it (Connell and Messerschmidt 832).

The key term has two primary concepts: (1) a social practice that legitimizes and normalizes a hierarchical dominance of male masculinity in society and (2) a marginalization of 'un-maleness' which most notably includes femininity but also encompasses some masculinities. In other words, it is a type of masculinity that generates the most benefit to society and holds the highest amount of social power, or the masculinity that represents "currently accepted answers to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy" (R. W. Connell 2005, 77). Both the relational aspect and legitimation are features central to this key term. Hegemonic masculinity has no meaning outside of its relationship to femininity and nonhegemonic masculinities (Messerschmidt 86). The meaning and essence of hegemonic masculinity is revealed through its relationship to all other kinds of femininities and masculinities which legitimizes its existence and power. The

subordinated gender groups still have agency and can cause changes within the power of dominant groups (Connell and Messerschmidt 848).

The second concept is based on the ever-changing nature of hegemonic masculinity. It is situated in time and culture and the traits and ideals associated with it can change as society changes or due to social pressure; the dominance of any patriarchy can be eroded when conditions change (835). Furthermore, hegemonic masculinity is not the same all over the world or even within the same community. Constructions of hegemonic masculinity take place both locally, regionally, and globally where the global processes influence the local and regional constructions (849; Messerschmidt 88). Local constructions of hegemonic masculinity which include face-to-face interactions of families, organizations, and immediate communities are the most studied (Lamb, Kosterina and Roberts; Tomsen and Gadd; Emslie, Ridge and Ziebland), but this does not mean that localized constructions are the most important. Although regional studies are fewer, they do show that beyond the local construction, hegemonic masculinity affects a number of things for example mental and physical health (Schermerhorn and Vescio), food consumption (Campos, Bernardes and Godinho) and representation (Boni; Nemoto). Global constructions of masculinities include world politics and transnational business and media but has been researched very sparingly (R. W. Connell 2005; Connell and Wood; Kronsell). Connell and Messerchmidt argue that there are links between the three levels that intertwine in creating and maintaining normative standards regarding masculinity (849).

Connell notes that hegemony is only likely to be established if the cultural ideal and institutional power correspond to each other. It requires both a display of masculinity, and that the people embodying these traits are in positions of high institutional power. Thus, visible bearers of hegemonic masculinity might not hold the most power in society and can be

exemplars such as actors in a movie or fictional depictions in a book (R. W. Connell 2005, 77). In other words, the display does not have to correspond to real life experiences; the boss at a high institution might not adhere to hegemonic masculinity ideals but there needs to be some display of it and enough of it to convince the public that this masculinity's traits hold the most power. She also notes that there is a certain ambiguity in the mechanisms of hegemony. This is because there is myriad of models of admired masculine conduct and the models might not share the same traits: the churches' ideal masculine conduct might not be the same as mass media's narrative about masculine ideals, and the everyday social practices might have a third or fourth way of defining masculine ideals (Connell and Messerschmidt 838).

Another key term in Connell's theory is the opposite of hegemonic masculinity which has a cultural dominance in the society as a whole: subordinated masculinity. Subordination refers to power relations between masculinities and includes an array of masculinities that for one or another reason do not adhere to hegemonic masculinity and thus do not fit. An example of this is homosexual men as they do not adhere to one or several hegemonic traits such as heteronormativity. As Connell (2005) notes: "Gayness, in patriarchal ideology, is the repository of whatever is symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity, the items ranging from fastidious taste in home decoration to receptive anal pleasure" (78). It is assimilated to femininity from the point of view of hegemonic masculinity. Some might argue that homosexual men are biologically different, but this is a social definition; a homosexual man who is too feminine, or a homosexual woman who is mannish in her appearance, are pointed out as transgressive only because they disagree with the normative gender expectations (80).

But heterosexual men and boys can be subordinated as well and experience discrimination. Examples can be drawn from nerd or geek masculinities, or of masculinities who

enjoy feminine coded hobbies, boys who find interest in trying out their mother's clothing or makeup, men expressing fear or sadness; men who fail to remain stoic. The subordination is plentiful and embodying the ideal of masculinity is no easy task. Some of these traits will be further elaborated later during the definition of toxic masculinity.

A noticeable example of a subordinated masculinity is female masculinities which is an area rarely explored as an expressed masculinity and certainly not one that adheres to hegemonic masculinity standards. As Halberstam describes it: "Female masculinities are framed as the rejected scraps of dominant masculinity in order that male masculinity may appear to be the real thing" (2). Similar to gay masculinities, female masculinity is "generally received by hetero- and homo-normative cultures as a pathological sign of misidentification and maladjustment, as a longing to be and to have a power that is always just out of reach" (9). Subcategories of female masculinities include tomboys, dykes, and drag kings; they are all gender identities that fit the queer category, and that deviates from hegemonic masculinity and normative gender expectations which can cause alienation by a society that adheres to binary gender rules. Halberstam argues that: "The tomboy, the masculine woman, and the racialized masculine subject […] all contribute to a mounting cultural indifference to the masculinity of white males" (41), which speaks for a recognition of subordinated masculinities but that those masculinities are not powerless in the face of hegemonic masculinity.

As noted earlier, the number of men who actually meet the normative standards for hegemonic masculinity is quite small. Yet the majority of men benefit from hegemonic masculinity and the overall subordination of women through the patriarchal dividend (R. W. Connell 2005, 79). This relationship between hegemonic masculinity and a large number of masculinities who do not quite meet the normative standards yet endorse and reinforce

hegemonic standards is a complicit kind. Complicit masculinities are not a lazy version of hegemonic masculinity where some traits get excluded or become subtle but rather a carefully crafted compromise with women where they for the most part do not engage in active patriarchy but still believe hegemonic ideologies (80). Connell draws upon football as an illustration of the hierarchy: “The difference between the men who cheer during football matches on TV and those who run out into the mud and the tackles themselves” (79), and this illustration points to exactly the difference between hegemonic masculinity standards and the complicity of other masculinities. Complicit masculinities play an active role in legitimizing hegemonic masculinity and its pivotal role is to define the remaining types, namely marginalized and subordinated masculinities (Wojnicka 201).

Complicit masculinities give birth to concepts such as aggrieved entitlement, a concept coined by Michael Kimmel in his book *Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era*. In this book, Kimmel explores masculinity’s connection with anger and entitlement to power centered around American anger, particularly white American anger (xii). Aggrieved entitlement refers to men who grieve the loss of entitlement to a world that belongs to him and never questions his male privilege and enforces it on others as a simple fact through anger, violence, and blind rage (xiv). In other words, it is: “that sense that those benefits to which you believed yourself entitled have been snatched away from you by unseen forces larger and more powerful” (18). It is a particular kind of entitlement that makes men long for the past, long for a nostalgia trip in which they once had power. They seek to restore which has been lost by making life worse for those underneath them on the social ladder and assigning them the role of scapegoat and the role of ‘other’, an ‘other’ which can always be attacked and blamed for those men’s unhappiness (24).

Hegemonic masculinity dictates a certain kind of masculinity, and complicit masculinities strive to adhere to the expectations of hegemonic masculinity by enforcing them even if they do not themselves fit them. The same is true for aggrieved entitled masculinities which exclude several other masculinities such as blacks, gays, immigrants, and women, masculine or not (32). Masculinities who fit this term often act out anxieties of failed dreams, dreams they believe were promised to them by their birth right, and they seek to restore dominance even if they never had that dominance before (41). It is "a gendered emotion, a fusion of that humiliating loss of manhood and the moral obligation and entitlement to get it back" (75). It is not just entitlement, but also entitlement while looking down on others who they perceive to threaten to emasculate them and remove their birthright to dominance and power (63). In some way, masculinities who adhere to this term are desperately looking to earn back their hegemonic masculinity and systematically amplify marginalization and subordination of other masculinities.

Marginalized masculinities refer to relations between masculinities in dominant and subordinated classes or ethnic groups. It includes masculinities that lack characteristics that allow them to conform to hegemonic masculinities such as racialization, effeminacy, lacking stoic traits, or disabilities that removes the possibility of conforming to physical normative standards. The difference between this group of masculinities and subordinate masculinities is that there is an authorization of hegemonic masculinity that might affects this group in ways it does not affect subordinated groups such as cultural, political, economic, and legal discrimination (R. W. Connell 2005, 80-81). White supremacy has long reigned in western societies and hegemonic masculinity among whites enforces the institutional oppression that frames the creation of black masculinities. As Connell notes: "Black masculinity has commonly been pictured as a sexual and social threat in dominant white cultures" (197) which draws

attention to the notion that race especially is a reason for marginalization as seen through the treatment of black men and women including a rise in hate groups targeting families of color and mixed families (Ferber 16-18).

An example is black athletes who might be treated as exemplars of hegemonic masculinity, but this treatment will not expand to all black athletes or all black masculinities. Furthermore, this treatment is completely dependent on the complicit masculinity as seen during the final in football, July 2021, where Marcus Rashford, Jadon Sancho, and Bukayo Saka were treated as heroes and enjoyed privileged positions as representatives of a fanclub featuring strong hegemonic masculinity traits. However, when they lost the game, thousands of disappointed football fans removed them of their status and relegated them back to the category of marginalized masculinities (Wojnicka 3). The marginalized masculinities have no authorization of themselves or their treatment; they completely rely on acceptance from hegemonic masculinity and complicit masculinity. One way this can be seen is for example the lack of studies focusing on black masculinities in comparison to white masculinities (Edwards 69).

Marginalized masculinities can include a myriad of masculinities, and one can talk about specialized masculinities such as a lower-class masculinity, a disabled masculinity, or a transgender masculinity. The emphasis here is on the social, political, and cultural identities that impact gender relations and how this impacts the dynamic between masculinities; these dynamics must be considered for a nuanced analysis of masculinity (R. W. Connell 2005, 79). Furthermore, Connell emphasizes that both hegemonic masculinity and marginalized masculinities should not be related to fixed character types but rather configurations of practices within a changing structure of relationships (81).

## MALE INTIMACY AND HOMOSOCIAL GROUPS

This section aims to address the role homosociality plays in maintaining hegemonic masculinity and towards the end attempt to define toxic masculinity. It is an extension to the section of Connell's theory though its length warrants its own section. Homosociality defines social bonds between persons of the same sex (Hammarén and Johansson; Bird 121), and the field of male-to-male relations are very popular in the studies of masculinity. Homosociality between men is interesting because "men's practice of gender has been theorized as a homosocial enactment, in which the performance of manhood is in front of, and granted by, other men" (Flood 341). Men seek approval of other men while also competing against them as they define their own masculinity in reflection of others. The gendered power experienced through the masculine hierarchy is part of men's tight bond among groups of other men (342).

Friendship is a large part of the narrative of *Friends,* and the relationship dynamics between the cast, both male and female characters, provide a presentation of how the hierarchy of masculinities might work. As Kimmel, Heam and Connell write: "Men and masculinities are not formed by gender alone. Men are not simply men or simply about gender, and the same applies to masculinities. Men and masculinities are shaped by differences of age, by class situation, by ethnicity and racialization, and so on. The gendering of men only exists in the intersections with other social divisions and social differences" (3), gender does not exist outside of social interactions, and the same applies to hegemonic masculinity. Many interactions between the male friends in the show *Friends* either applaud or shame the others' behaviors and through this endorsement or disagreement they shape each other's masculinities. As such, there

is grounds to believe that their relationships to each other may challenge or reinforce hegemonic masculinity.

Friendships have been a part of humans' ability to survive throughout many, many years long before a word existed for friendships (Greif 22). Friendships are one of the first relations children get to other children and one they see constantly represented by their parents when they interact with their friends. Young friendships often create stronger relational bonds if they carry into adulthood which many simply do not for one reason or another (27). Adult male friendships often have a reputation of being non-existent, or if they do exist, they are shallow and with little substance to them (18). There is a connotation with close intimate friendships and femininity, and while this connection is a rather recent development, and not a universal one (Way 2013), it is nevertheless a stereotype connected to hegemonic masculinity, and one rendered harmful to boys and men (American Psychological Association).

Male friendships are substantially different from female friendships, and this is perhaps where the idea of hollow friendships among males stems from. Female friendships are defined by different expectations of the friendship such as talking or sharing the same feelings with each other as sufficient to maintain a satisfying friendship. Whereas male friendships are defined by doing activities together such as sports, drinking, or exercising (Brod 213; Greif 163). While females often express intimacy with their friends and maintain their friendships into adulthood, males often lose their friendships as they enter adolescence and cite that romantic relationships and work kept them from their friends (Way 2013, 209). But while males generally report lower intimacy with their friends, "we assume that what boys have in their friendships is the same thing as what they want", and the belief that men do not desire friendships as long they have a

romantic relationship seems to be wrong; adolescent boys report that they want close friendships as much as females do (Way 2013, 210; Way 2011, 184-185).

Hegemonic masculinity dictates that emotional expressions are considered to be feminine traits and are equalized with loss of personal control. Studies have shown that most male friendships have limits on self-disclosure with their male friends, and they reveal more about themselves to their closest female friends than to their closest male friend (Brod 218-219). However, Migliaccio argue that "men can be expressive as long as the relationships are strongly characterized by the more masculine aspects of friendships, instrumentally" (229) An example is in Underwood and Olson's study which found that people in hypermasculine spaces still express emotions by using strategies to mitigate the perceived feminine aspect of emotions (101-104). As there are many ways to act out masculinity, men have several ways to mitigate their expressions of masculinity and one way is to overemphasize the instrumentality of their friendship in exchange for expressiveness. In other words, behavior in intimate relationships is constituted by performances of gender rather than simply being biologically male (Migliaccio 226).

Other studies find that men in general fail to communicate intimacy with other men and are less satisfied with their friendship than women. However, Brod suggests that intimacy for men is perhaps not relevant to their lives as they seek companionship rather than disclosure and commitment (221). Men infer intimacy not because of shared stories and feelings but because of shared activities where they act in solidarity and bond over the experience (Brod 222). Friendship is part of the performance of masculinity, and this is perhaps why men seek companionship rather than intimacy; hegemonic masculinity does not allow for intimacy since that is connected to femininity (Migliaccio 238). However, a study suggests that male confidentiality with others and male friendships are significantly lower in older men who adhere

strongly to hegemonic masculinity (Campos-Castillo, Shuster and Groh), suggesting that as men grow older, the performance of hegemonic masculinity greatly decreases their chance of close relationships.

Hegemonic masculinity ideals can be embodied to the point of harm but still praised by a social group to the point it blinds. In 2018, the American Psychological Association published a report regarding masculinity: "Traditional masculinity ideology has been shown to limit male's psychological development, constrain their behavior, result in gender role strain and gender role conflict and negatively influence mental health and physical health" (3), and effectively moved an issue that has been discussed since the early 1980s into the limelight. Male solidarity can generate traits so harmful they both harm women and they harm men themselves.

The phenomenon of 'toxic masculinity' has existed far longer than the term has been around since the characteristics that are typically associated with exaggerated masculine traits have been present for much longer than the past 20 years. According to Whitehead, toxic masculinity was coined around 2013 in the academic lexicon (1). Although the term quickly became popular with the #MeToo movement, it is not a widely agreed upon one in the academic sense. Different theories list different criteria included for the term, and it is sometimes called 'traditional masculinity' or confused with 'hegemonic masculinity'. Whitehead draws attention to the idea that toxic masculinity is not a new concept: "We simply saw male aggression, violence, rape and the general exploitation and marginalization of women as part of some 'natural gender order'" (3).

The three main concepts of toxic masculinity are outlined in Sharon Bird's article "Welcome to the Men's Club". While her article was only one of many pointing to characteristics harmful to men and women in the 1990s, the three concepts do not seem to have

changed since it was written as evident by a study by Levan and colleagues in 2012. The study found that participants associated three main structures with masculinity: (1) Emotionally Detached Dominance; (2) Toughness; and (3) Avoidance of Femininity (363). For this reason, this thesis has chosen to align itself with Bird's original outline of toxic masculinity and outline three main categories of toxic masculinity: (1) Sexual objectification of women, (2) Emotional detachment, and (3) Competitiveness. While the following paragraphs will establish an overview of the three concepts, they will be defined in depth during the analysis.

Emotional detachment is one of three main criteria outlined in Bird's article. It refers to certain behavioral expectations of hegemonic masculinity by withdrawing expressions of intimacy and attention given to emotional expression (121). Murphy explains the detachment happens "because men are not permitted to play freely, or show affect, [thus] they are prevented from really coming in touch with their own emotions" (26). Vulnerable emotions such as sadness, fear, or expressions of love between friends and colleagues are associated with feminine traits. Vulnerability is viewed as a weakness and a lack of control, something hegemonic masculinity dictates should never happen. This pattern of emotional detachment is one that develops in early high school where the boys are open and vulnerable with their friends but by the time they graduate, they are emotionally closed, distrustful, and seemingly alone (Way 2011, 259).

Competitiveness refers to characteristics of a homosocial where a hierarchy is maintained which separates and keeps its members distinct from each other through competition against each other. This means that while the group might be protective of its members, the members are themselves in competition with each other to maintain status and hierarchical position. For example, physical fighting is a demonstration of competitiveness and hierarchical debate: it

already disallows women from participating in the hierarchy and allows the competition to only include valid members (R. W. Connell 2005, 85). Parents of boys also worry about their child's ability to compete with other boys even before they start school, suggesting that competition is a strong hegemonic trait that are both enforced through friendships and parent-child relations (Albanesi).

Competitiveness can also take place at a much larger scale such as seen through aggrieved entitlement where white American men feel robbed of their right to an American dream and attack other men who are lesser in their eyes. Those men can be members of another race such as Hispanic or Asian or be non-white (M. Kimmel 2013, 57), and for that reason be labelled as the ones crossing boundaries and asking for a fight. Or it can take place in the workplace where a hyperactive environment ensures employees constantly seek to maintain their own status which is a rather typical kind of competitiveness (Matos, O'Neill and Lei 501).

Finally, sexual objectification of women refers to marginalization and objectification of women which creates a symbolic distance with the rejection of anything feminine and maintains a sense of maleness and superiority. This also includes transprejudice rejecting and mistreating trans women by denying them access to womanhood and denying them their former space in the male community (Türkoglu and Sayilan). Sexual objectification is perhaps the most studied of the three characteristics, and perhaps the one also viewed as most difficult to solve as actions associated with sexual objectification might read as a recreational activity for men engaging in it (Quinn).

Connell pointed out that hegemonic masculinity is embodied by a small percentage of men, and Bird adds to the discourse with a similar opinion: "the norms and expectations of hegemonic masculinity and individual conceptualizations do not necessarily fit" (128). The

desire to adhere to hegemonic masculinity standards influences the type of friendships males will pursue since hegemonic ideals provide social capital. Men with stronger hegemonic masculinity adherences will seek out other men with similar adherence rather than adopt someone who has less social capital and adheres less to the normative standard (Greif 32-33). Similarly, men with lower social capital will seek out men who are like them and form homosocial groups that encourage practices and traits that might not adhere as strongly to hegemonic masculinity (Migliaccio 227-228).

The three categories of toxic masculinity are often complex and intertwined with everyday interactions. Emotional detachment for example might not appear as complete lack of emotions but may instead take the form of lack of emotional sensitivity to others' emotions or suppressing emotions when it may be appropriate to express them, or even to downplay others' emotions. Competitiveness might not only appear as physical fighting but as bickering or hostility towards other men even if they are not physically present. Sexual objectification of women can appear as sexual comments on other women, as inappropriate touch, or as speaking about women as sexual objects without acting on it physically. It can also appear as treating women as trophies or as only valuing them when they are sexually available. Last but least, sexual objectification of women can also appear as rejecting femininity in other men and treating femininity with avoidance and disdain if expressed by otherwise masculine bodies.

With those examples clear in mind, it is important that one looks at many different traits to spot toxic masculinity as it disguises itself well in the eyes of an uninformed audience or reader. This thesis will look at the three definitions Bird provided for toxic masculinity but primarily focus on subordination of women and emotional detachment as competitiveness is not very prevalent in *Friends*. For that reason, this thesist will focus on three main points: (1) The

mise-en-scène of the show when appropriate. The setting of a scene can amplify or reduce how a TV show presents its characters and this includes the possible toxicity of masculine characters. This also includes what is not there; what is lacking is also a way to heighten harmful ideals. (2) The discourse of the show including dialogue and humor. Humor is a way to win people's consent to perpetrate and enforce toxic masculinity as laughter is contagious and laugh-tracks easily dampens the potential backlash; after all everyone else is laughing (Smirnova 2). (3) Body language and character interactions. While discourse is intertwined with body language, physical touch, or bodily reactions, who a character faces and their facial expression might tell a different story than what is said in the dialogue. In the following chapter, the three different categories will be used to analyze the TV-show *Friends* with the lens masculinity and how of hegemonic masculinity ideals and toxic masculinity affect the main characters of the show.

## ANALYSIS OF FRIENDS

In this chapter, the portrayal of masculinity on *Friends* will be the focus. Representations of gender influences the general public's understanding of gender, its expectations, and reinforces potential harmful stereotypes. On Friends, masculinity is intertwined with toxic masculinity traits hidden behind the male main characters' everyday life. This can be seen through their fear being viewed as queer, objectification of women, and emotional detachment. Representations can reinforce hegemonic masculinity and for that reason, it is important to highlight when the show embraces hegemonic masculinity and when it criticizes it. The analysis starts with an overview of *Friends* and the time it was originally produced in, then it will focus on the main characters' fear of femininity in themselves, in each other, and their interactions with LGBTQ+ characters. It

will then shift to focus on the main characters' subordination of women and how this comes to view, and lastly will round off with a focus on emotional detachment and competition.

In one way, *Friends* seems almost timeless. It achieved 20+ million views for each of its ten season premieres and was the most binge-watched television show in 2018 (Schwind and Knox 2). Not much has changed in 30 years, it seems, not enough to lose popularity and not enough to not be relatable a new generation whose parents watched the show while pregnant with them or after they had put their toddlers to bed. The show's premise caters to most young people today as well; young adults still deal with many of the same issues the show focuses around, and it is exactly the lack of political debates and pop-cultural references that allows the show its feeling of timelessness. Some scholars refer to the show as 'comfort food' television; a show that has a deep connection with its viewers as it turned the question of exactly how young, single Americans might live their lives into something intimate and meaningful (Kutulas 1172).

One reason the show feels timeless is that the visible aging is minimal. The only hints are the lack of technology and when technology is present, it stamps itself as typical 90s. Noteworthy are landline phones and answering machines which are now, in 2022, completely replaced by personal mobile phones which renders some jokes such as Phoebe saying: "Monica get the wine and unplug the phone" ("The One with the List": 00:00:18) feel dated and in some younger viewers' case absurd.

Similar to phones, computers are mentioned but rarely. Computers and printers now have greatly improved and render the pride Chandler feels about his new laptop in the same episode almost ironic. In fact, the newer generation might not recognize the laptop he describes as a laptop due to how rapid the development of computers has changed the designs of computers. They might find it absurd that he is proud of a hard drive that has only 500 megabytes of space

when most popular games of 2022 take up about 30-50 gigabytes of space on a hard drive (as of May 2022, the newest game, Elden Ring by FromSoftware, requires 60 gigabytes of storage space to be installed). Even phones today have a bigger storage space than the one he describes (as of 2022, most phones have built-in storage of at least 128 gigabytes).

In other ways, *Friends* are dated by how it handles gender and sexuality. For women, the third wave of feminism emerged in the mid-1990s and attempted to dismantle the system of patriarchy and it improved the living standards and liberties but nevertheless remained limited to them (Harrison 13). More Americans were employed in the 1990s than ever before, and this included women whose overall employment rose to about 60% (Perry-Jenkins, Repetti and Crouter 982). A decline of male-headed households and debates over issues such as minority rights, multiculturalism and national identity raged in the 1990s as well, making equality seem less like a dream and more like a reality (Harrison 18).

Issues of race and gender emerged where the desire for black representation overshadowed the sufferings of black women (15), and black gay and lesbians fought for the right to be included in the LGBTQ+ community. Whiteness was taken up in academia as a historical and ideological construct rather than a universality, and in the public, whiteness became an identity that brought relief to the increasing ethnic and racial diversity of American society and became the symptom of crisis (25). The LGBTQ+ movement had a focus on reducing violence against them which was nothing new, however, the focus had now shifted from state violence to an emphasis on violence perpetrated on the street. If anything, the movement had grown louder and more prominent in the public sphere and the fight for a right to exist was fought both on the street and politically (Haight).

With the choice to steer clear of political debate and current events of the decade it was born in, *Friends* disguises itself well as a show that could take place at any time and any place. While the inclusion of lesbianism and later a transgendered character were bold moves for a series airing during a time with strong public opinions leaning both for and against the LGBTQ+ community, it still avoided some portrayals  such as never showing the lesbian pair kiss on screen. It is especially important to note that the first legal marriage between two people of the same sex in the US happened on February 12, 2004, almost a decade after Carol and Susan's wedding aired on TV in 1996.

To round off the brief introduction to the analysis, there is a point to be made about the laugh tracks which did not fit into any particular category of analysis. The use of humor during the show often serves to either highlight or diminish certain behaviors of characters, however, the humor expects that the audience agrees with this humor. The laugh track serves as a parasocial constellation that allows the audience to feel like they are part of the show, as well as served as tool to make issues presented seem familiar and warm to the audience (Giotta 340). It breeds familiarity in the audience: "Broadcasters have long felt compelled to actively breed familiarity in order to become a welcomed part of the home—in order to avoid coming across to the home audience as uninvited guests with ill motive" (Giotta 341).

After twenty years of runtime, *Friends* met tremendous backlash from a new generation as well as an old one where many pointed to homophobia and toxic masculinity. This seems to underline that the audience's humor has now changed and the laugh track no longer resonates with the ones watching. It raises the question to whether a laugh track is enough to justify problematic portrayals of gender on TV shows. After all, a show that was made during another time might still be viewed by a new audience who sees and embodies the portrayals of gender. A

show cannot be more futuristic than the time it is produced in and thus the portrayals of gender in *Friends* should be considered from the point of view of the time it was made during, not the current time.

With a very brief overview of 1990s and the social issues present at the time, the following sections of the chapter will look at masculinity in four different categories. The first section will look at the show's depiction of men's fear of the LGBTQ+ community, and the main male characters' potential fear of femininity. The second will look at the subordination and objectification of women on the show by the main male characters. The third section will look at emotional detachment and competition and whether these characteristics of toxic masculinity affects the characters of *Friends*.

*The Fear of Being Queer*

*Friends* was and still is a very popular show after it aired on Netflix in 2016, and one of those reasons is perhaps its inclusion of the LGBTQ+ community. While it was not met without censorship everywhere in the world, including complete censorship on Chinese streaming services of any LGBTQ+ mentions (Wang), the show was also met with high criticism when it did air again (Saunders; Gemmell). But the question remains: is *Friends* homophobic or is the show a product of its time? This section aims to look at how LGBTQ+ characters are treated on the show, and to look at whether the fear of being too feminine affects the three main male characters in order to adhere to hegemonic masculinity.

The show was progressive for including a same-sex couple since in 1994, the controversy of whether gay marriages should be legal was still a debate at the time, and same-sex parents were unheard of. During this time, the backlash against the LGBTQ+ community was growing

stronger than it had in the decades before, and while it struggled internally with inclusion such as transgender, bisexual and people of color, the movement primarily fought a war of eligibility against white straight middleclass Americans (Stone 63).

Character introductions are crucial to the understanding of how the audience will perceive the character throughout the show. The introduction to Carol, Ross' ex-wife, in "The One with the Sonogram", can be analyzed with two different lenses: one where she is framed as different from other women, or one where Ross is framed as metaphorically 'stuck in the past'.

Alienation of a character can be done in multiple ways, and one is through the mise-en-scéne which can be used to foreshadow something about the plot. The mise-en-scéne of Carol's character introduction has her standing behind a glass barrier, separate from Ross and his co-worker. The meaning behind the glass wall can be read in multiple ways. The glass can serve as a physical wall which alienates Carol to all other women on the show due to her sexuality. It can also function as a comment on Ross and Carol's ex-marriage; the glass window is a look into a past they used to have together and a past that is currently the barrier between them.

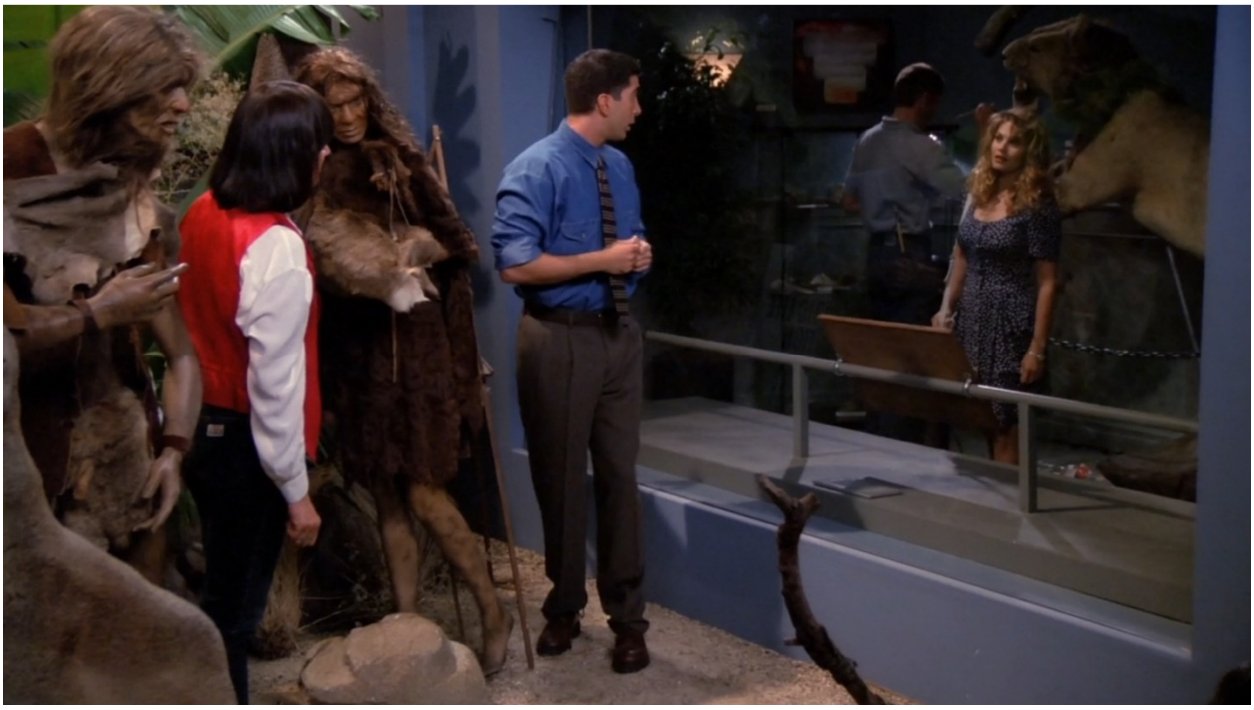

Image 1: Carol standing on the other side of a glass wall during her introduction scene ("The one with the Sonogram," 00:02:28).

If the focus is adjusted to reading Carol framed as alienated from all other women, it is an effective tool. While the coworker does not treat Carol with disdain, Ross does treat her with awkwardness and a longing for something she no longer is: heterosexual. Her alienation continues throughout the series as she is not seen interacting with the other friends of the show except for during "The One with the Lesbian Wedding". While this can be explained by her role as side character, it is quite interesting that Carol is so removed from the rest of the characters since the show explains she and Ross were together for 8 years. The strangeness is emphasized if one looks at other relationships on the show. Monica dates Richard, Joey and Chandler befriend him as well ("The One Where Old Yeller Dies"), and they dated for less time than Ross and Carol. Why would Carol not have any relationship to the other friends? Her sexuality might be the breaking factor – or it might be Ross' fault. For example, Phoebe suggests inviting Carol to Thanksgiving and Ross rejects the suggestion by pointing out Carol's sexuality: "Because she is my ex-wife, and will probably wanna bring her oh-oh lesbian life partner" ("The One Where

Underdog Gets away", 00:04:23). The laugh track emphasizes the absurdity of a lesbian life partner and how uncomfortable Ross is about Carol's sexuality. Ross' homophobia is a strong factor for why Carol is so alienated to the rest of the main characters.

If one looks at the mise-en-scène during Carol's introduction scene, the way the figurines in the room look at Carol can be read as implied social alienation. The man looks at her with disdain or shock, and the woman is turned away from her while carrying a baby, the way one might have expected society to react to a lesbian woman in the 1990s. The figurines' arrangement implies her to be almost monster-like and dangerous, someone they have to hide their children from and protect them against.

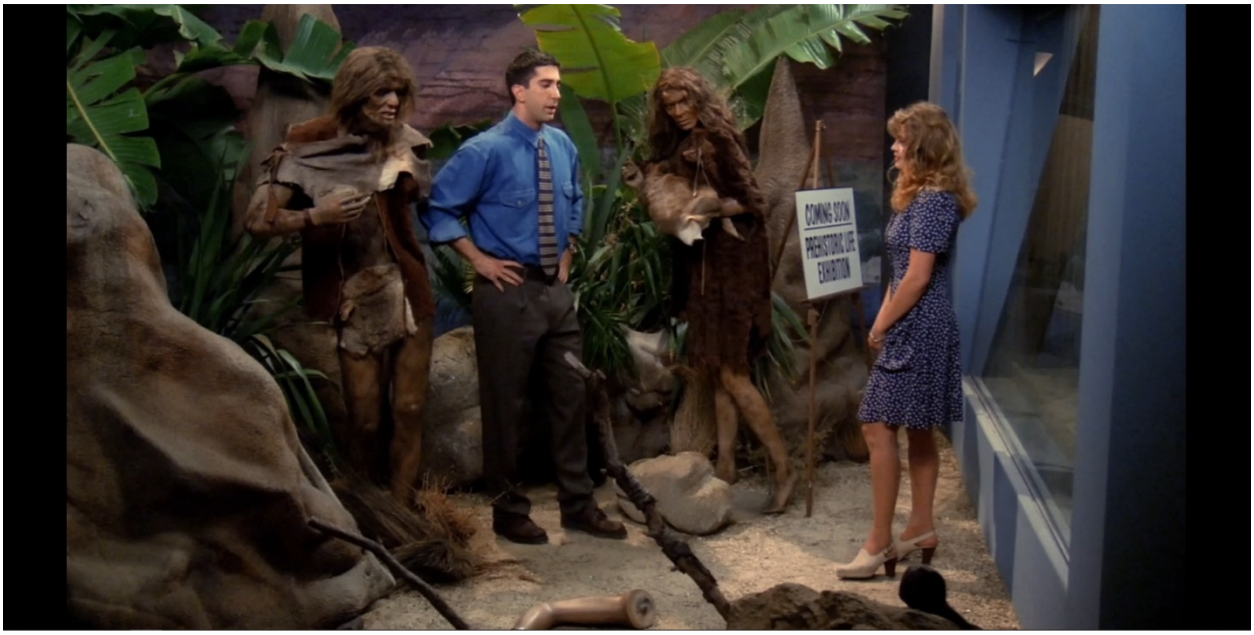


Image 2: Ross and Carol in the prehistoric exhibition with the two figurines ("The One with the Sonogram," 00:03:10)

The second lens of analysis is to view the glass wall as a looking glass where Ross is standing in the past and Carol is looking back. It can be read as a metaphor for Ross' inability to move on emotionally. His longing can be understood as a quiet form of aggrieved entitlement. This is also supported by the way he talks about her: "You look great. I hate that" (The One with the Sonogram," 00:03:02). His behavior towards her is typical for a freshly broken up couple

where awkwardness stains the conversations. But there is also a hopelessness which can be seen in his comment: “In here, anyone who… stands erect” (00:03:09). He cannot win her back or fight someone else for her; she is quite literally out of his league due to her sexuality.

Ross doubts that Carol is ‘truly’ a lesbian as he asks her if she’s “still a lesbian”, and when she nods, he replies: “Well you never know” (00:03:23), implying that he views her attraction to women as a decision; something that might change again. It is aggrieved entitlement that Ross assumes Carol’s attraction to women is secondary to her attraction to men; he feels he has a right to her. Homosexuality as an acquired choice is also made into a joke in “The One Where Underdog Got Away”:

**Ross:** “You sure do have a lot of books about being lesbian.”

**Susan:** “Well. You have to take a course. Otherwise they don’t let you do it” (00:05:19). While at face value, Susan’s comment is an honest answer, her tone and the context of the situation makes Ross’ comment absurd and out of place, and her reply is made with sarcasm. The show frames Ross as disrespectful for asking the question and it aids to humanize Susan and Carol as a regular couple. The show’s framing of homophobia as prehistoric suggests that the show supports homosexuality in a subtle but effective way during the early seasons.

Within the representation of the 90s which was the time where the show came out, female masculinities were both praised and rejected depending on the character. Masculine femininities are often featured as a rarity if not portrayed through main female characters. During the show,

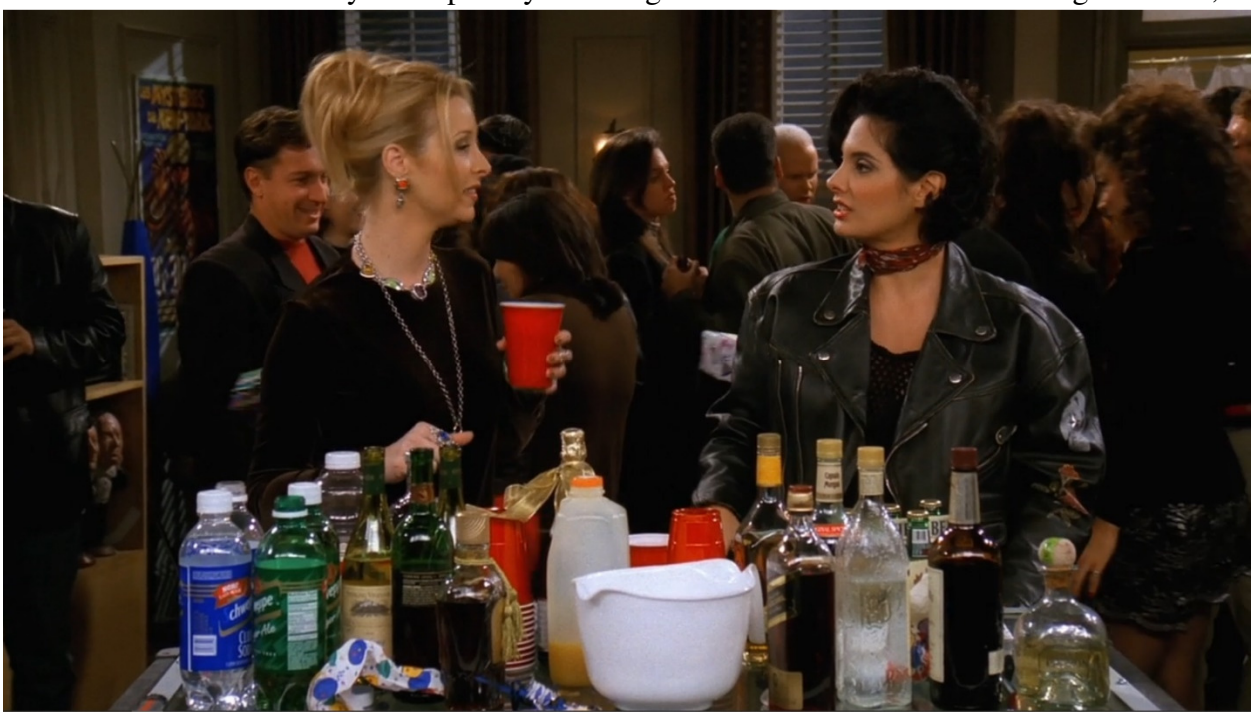

Image 3: Phoebe and Joey's sister talking behind a table during Joey's birthday party "The One Where Chandler Can't Remember Which Sister," 00:07:49).

the audience is presented with one of Joey's sisters ("The One Where Chandler Can't Remember Which Sister"). She has short hair, wears a leather jacket, and speaks with a lower voice.

Her only conversation with Phoebe frames her as violent and even deadly:

> **Phoebe:** "Oh, well, I have a vodka and cranberry juice."
>
> **Joey's sister:** "No kidding? That's the exact same drink I made myself right after I shot my husband."
>
> **Phoebe:** "Okay, I don't know how to talk to you" (00:07:52).

The choice to introduce Joey's only butch sister as aggressive and capable of murder frames masculine women as alien and an 'other' to even feminine women. As Halberstam describes: "female masculinity is generally received by hetero- and homo-normative cultures as a

pathological sign of misidentification and maladjustment, as a longing to be and to have a power that is always just out of reach" (9). Having a masculine women use murder as an ice breaker is exactly what hegemonic masculinity would describe as the only logical way to deal with such transgression. It feeds into the stereotype that masculine women are violent and dangerous exactly because they are transgressors of the polar gender order established by hegemonic masculinity.

To become a person in the eyes of society, one's publicly recognized sense of personhood is fully dependent on legitimation. Butler notes that "the sphere of legitimate intimate alliance is established through the producing and intensifying regions of illegitimacy" (2004, 105). Gay marriage in this case is a purchase of legitimacy; it allows two people to be legally and publicly together as a pair; as an allowed kind of love that is not excluded from the social sphere (106). The state is the highest power able to legitimate someone in the eyes of the public though the public may choose not to recognize this. Since gay and lesbian marriages do not comply with the marriage norm which dictates that only heterosexual couples can marry (5).

One of the most memorable episodes of *Friends* is "The One with the Lesbian Wedding," which features a myriad of transgressing social standards for its time. Despite the name, Susan and Carol do not have much screen time during this episode. The focus of the episode is centered around how uncomfortable Ross is about his ex-wife getting married again after their divorce. One way to read this is to understand this lack of screen time as a highlight of how unnatural the wedding and their relationship is. In that case, it would strongly undermine an otherwise powerful chance to portray the queer community in a positive light.

One of the plotlines of this episode is Phoebe's possession by an elderly woman. While this possession is framed as a joke as Phoebe repeatedly makes inappropriate comments, it is

during the ceremony it peaks. Phoebe exclaims: “Oh, my God! Now, I’ve seen everything!” (00:18:42), right as they are about to get married. When she gains everyone’s attention, she announces: “She’s gone, she’s gone. Go ahead. Get married. Go. Go” (00:18:54). The lack of reaction from the other characters suggests it is to be understood that a lesbian wedding is unnatural. It is in fact so unnatural that it would drive out the soul of a living person as the possession ends during the ceremony.

This possession can also be understood as an embodiment of traditional beliefs. Many of the episode’s jokes are centered around Phoebe’s character acting out-of-character by breaking with expected behavior. Those character breaks come to light through discourse such as telling Chandler to sit up straight when he lounges around on a couch (00:07:02), or telling Rachel: “In my days, divorce was not an option” (00.09:58). The humor of the scenes relies on the implied audience having knowledge of the time’s social understandings between gender and behavior, and what was then understood as traditional rules for the behavior of the polar genders. Generation gaps are often the reason for misunderstandings between young and older people, and the jokes build on this gap between social constructions of gender and sex.

In 1996 when this episode aired, the LGBTQ+ community’s fight to be given the right to marry had not yet flourished, and no same-sex couples had been legally married in the US. With that in mind, Phoebe’s possession can be seen as a metaphor for letting go of another generation’s beliefs and assumptions about marriage, love, and sexuality. Phoebe’s outcry during the lesbian wedding: “Oh, my God! Now, I’ve seen everything!” (00:18:52) is a statement about the otherness of the lesbian wedding but as it causes the possession to disappear, it is a metaphor for letting go of old perceptions and stigmatizations of homosexuality. Furthermore, using the

possession as a tool to include humor during something so traditional as a wedding lessens the threat of the idea of a same-sex wedding to the audience.

The traditional roles and expectations sadly did not leave with the old lady during that episode. As Susan and Carol share custody with Ross, he is sometimes shown interacting with his son Ben where he tries to align him with hegemonic masculinity ideals. In "The One with the Metaphorical Tunnel," Ben has picked up a Barbie doll as his favorite toy:

> **Ross:** "What's my boy doing with a barbie?"
>
> **Carol:** "He picked it out at the toy store himself, he loves it"
>
> **Susan:** "He carries it everywhere, it's like a security blanket but with ski boots and a kicky beret" (00:04:35).

Despite Carol and Susan both assuring Ross that the toy was Ben's choice, he repeatedly attempts to socialize Ben into adopting masculine coded toys such a soldiers, dinosaurs, and monster trucks: "Don't you wanna play with a monster truck? Or what about a Dino-Soldier?" (00:05:14). When Ross' first toy choices fails, he attaches more masculine centered language to the toys he presents to Ben: "Guess who's here. It's the toughest guy in Toyland, Ben. Real American hero, I'm G. I. Joe… drop the Barbie, drop the Barbie" (00:13:52). Descriptors such as 'tough' and 'American hero' imply that Ross expects Ben to admire and understand that he is supposed to identify with such adjectives and want toys that carry such descriptions. The show also implies that the main male cast played with such toys as children as seen by Joy enthusiastically joining Ross' attempt at convincing Ben that the toy is admirable (00:14:07).

The fear that his son will grow up and become queer is overarching for Ross' interactions with him. In "The One with Rachel's New Dress," Emily, Ross' girlfriend, comments: "I left a bra drying on the shower rod. You don't think your son will think it's yours and be horribly

traumatized?" (00:02:18). The joke here is that Ben would think that Ross has become a woman or wears bras, and it draws on hegemonic masculinity as it would be out of place for a man to wear women's clothes. The show feeds into the stereotype that Ben mirrors himself in Ross as his father and Ross' noblest duty is to present Ben with the best display of masculinity possible. While some studies have found that fathers are not the main reason for boys to embody hegemonic masculinity (Van Doorn, Dye and De Gracia), the show embraces the stereotype that feminine portrayals of masculinity would harm children's perception of the polar genders and possibly traumatize them.

Ross' obsession with gender around his children does not change when his daughter, Emma, is born. Although he does not interfere with Emma's gender the same way he does with Ben, the show still portrays him as controlling her expectation of gender. In "The One with the Male Nanny," Ross acts uncomfortable around a nanny that they found for Emma. Upon first meeting him, his first response is: "And she's a little mannish" (00:04:59). While Sandy's name is female-coded, it his choice to be a nanny which is the point of the joke. As domestic household chores are associated with a traditional feminine role (Coltrane), the show underlines the transgression of a man applying for a traditionally woman's job. While Sandy is shown as capable of caring for Emma, and Rachel approves of him, Ross cannot let his gender expectations go and ends up firing him. This excludes the possibility that Emma would grow up with a portrayal of masculinity that allowed vulnerability and emotions and makes it more likely that she would grow up believing hegemonic masculinity is the ideal masculinity. However, throughout the episode, Ross' choice to fire Sandy is critiqued by the show's laugh track and Rachel, suggesting that while the show includes Ross' homophobia, it also critiques it.

One major flaw the series has is that it never brings up is the fact that while Carol, Susan, and Ben likely experienced homophobic actions due to their family, Ross is never hurt by proxy due to his ex-wife's relationship. Harm by proxy often occurs in same-sex relationships where children are present in the family and where an ex-partner is also a parent of the child (Buxton). Ross does not experience any negative backlash from being the 'man of a family with two women' which would have been a normal social reaction during the time the series aired. However, something does suggest that Ross abandons Ben after Emma is born as Ben disappears out of the show after season 8. One could read such a situation as Ross choosing Emma because he has full control over her. By choosing her, he is closer to a nuclear family and thus adheres stronger to hegemonic masculinity by abandoning him. The lack of social backlash, and the abandonment of his son, suggests that the show chose to exclude homophobia as public issue and rather framed it as an individual issue.

Alienation and illegitimacy are issues that queer characters on TV shows deal with due to their transgression of established norms dictated by hegemonic masculinity. Ross' relationship to Susan, Carol's girlfriend, and later wife, is hostile and competitive. This may be understood through Judith Butler's theory of the heterosexual matrix which dictates that men and women assume heterosexuality when they view each other. As she writes: "Femininity becomes a mask that dominates/resolves a masculine identification" (2007, 72), femininity in this matrix establishes masculinity by creating grounds for which masculinity is not. However, when heteronormativity is broken, it breaks with the grounds of this masculinity as well since they can no longer desire masculine bodies, and thus become direct competitors with other men as long the sexuality of the desired woman is assumed to be heterosexual (61). Hegemonic masculinity dictates that heterosexual couples are the norm both in sexuality but also in family life as the

straightness of a man excludes him from feminine characteristics (R. W. Connell 2005, 157). Gay men are traditionally associated with feminine characteristics not because they do not embody the cultural meaning of masculinity but because they are attracted to the wrong kind of body (156). This is because the boundary between straight and gay is blurred with the boundaries of masculine and feminine (40). Lesbians, then, are regarded as the opposite of a feminine man and become a masculinized woman who challenges the very notion of masculinity by being a woman.

Ross' aggressiveness towards Susan can be explained by Susan's break with the heterosexual matrix; she is no longer able to establish Ross' masculinity by her femininity because she is a direct competitor to Ross. The alienation of Susan as Carol's current partner and the mother of Ben relies on Ross viewing Susan as an 'other' in his relationship with Carol. This becomes evident when Ross still assumes Carol speaks about him as though they are still together:

**Carol**: "I've got some news. It's about us."

**Ross**: "Oh, you and me?"

**Susan**: "The other us" (00:00:31).

To Ross, he and Carol are living a nuclear family life with Ben, and Susan is the partner who stole Carol from him much the same way a man would. He removes Carol's sexuality from this idea and blames Carol's sexuality shift on Susan. This is amplified by his fear that Emily might figure out she is a lesbian when she and Susan go to London together ("The One with Rachel's New Dress"). His aggression towards her is because he sees her as a competitor. He sees her as someone who can turn straight women into homosexual women. He does not seem to realize that Carol might have figured out on her own that she is attracted to women regardless of Susan.

He amplifies this otherness of Susan by treating her as he would treat a man and judge her on the same criteria, he would judge a man on. Upon first meeting her, Susan shakes his hand, and he comments: “Good shake, good shake” (“The One with the Sonogram”, 00:14:13), and shakes his hand after she lets go. This gesture implies she has too firm a handshake for a woman, and the laugh track amplifies it. Mocking her handshake is a way to ridicule her femininity. It is the only flaw Ross has that he can use against her; he cannot mock her for a lack of masculinity since Carol is attracted to femininity and winning her back would require that he highlights Susan’s lack of femininity. He still views Carol as heterosexual and treats Susan the same way he would treat another man.

However, when it comes to the question of her right to participate in the family, Ross highlights his own masculinity as the reason there is no space for. Since a nuclear family has a mother and a father, Susan cannot fit into it in Ross’ eyes. Susan’s desire to parent Ben along with Carol is met with ridicule from Ross:

**Susan**: “It’s my baby too.”

**Ross**: “That’s funny. Really? I don’t remember you making any sperm” (00:19:06).

Ross’ behavior devalues Susan’s desire to be a mother to Carol’s child and devalues her potential care and love for this baby. She was not the one to get Carol pregnant, thus she cannot be considered a legitimate parent of the child, and he has no reason to include her in his idea of their family. Becoming a mother is a privilege in the US, or at least it is treated as such. Allowing Susan that privilege would be a loss in Ross’ experience since it breaks his nuclear family ideation. His hostility towards Susan as a ‘second mother’ to the baby is also born from entitlement. This child is his creation, not Susan’s, and he asserts himself as more important in

the parental relationship than Susan despite that she is the current partner of Carol. This is further underlined when they discuss names for the baby:

> **Susan:** "We agreed on Minnie."
>
> **Ross:** "It's funny, we agreed we'd spend our lives together. Things change. Roll with the punches" (00:16:26).

While Susan and Carol seem to have expected that Ross would not want to be part of the child's life, his assertion in the situation disregards Susan's opinion completely. Ross uses his entitlement in this argument as well; he shames her by undermining her and silencing her. He feels entitled to change the options for names for the child as he is the father, and Susan is the third wheel in this family arrangement. She has to 'roll with the punches' because he has the power to lead this discussion due to his status as father, much the same way he had to accept that she emasculated him by changed his marital status by showing up in Carol's life.

While the three male leads on the show at times disagree and fight, they also have scenes where they disobey hegemonic masculinity ideals. In "The One with the Cheap Wedding Dress", Joey finds out that Ross uses a mask to handle a skin issue which he calls an oily T-zone, referring to the skin from the nose and up across the forehead. This scene initially shows Joey disapproving of Ross using skin care products, particularly noted by his scornful, almost mocking reply: "Okay, dude" (00:13:26). This is further backed up by the laugh track underscoring that Ross' awareness of his skin issues is not aligned with hegemonic masculinity. Later, after having a fight with Ross, Joey takes the small container with the skin-care product Ross uses and leaves only to come back a moment later and ask him how to apply it. Ross, despite their ongoing fight, happily guides him in how to use it (00:14:08). While the laugh track again underscores how this is an atypical masculine conversation, it is not framed as a negative

conversation. It could be argued that the laugh track underscores the absurdity of two men fighting and pausing said fight to discuss skin-care products, rather than their lack of hegemonic masculinity alignment.

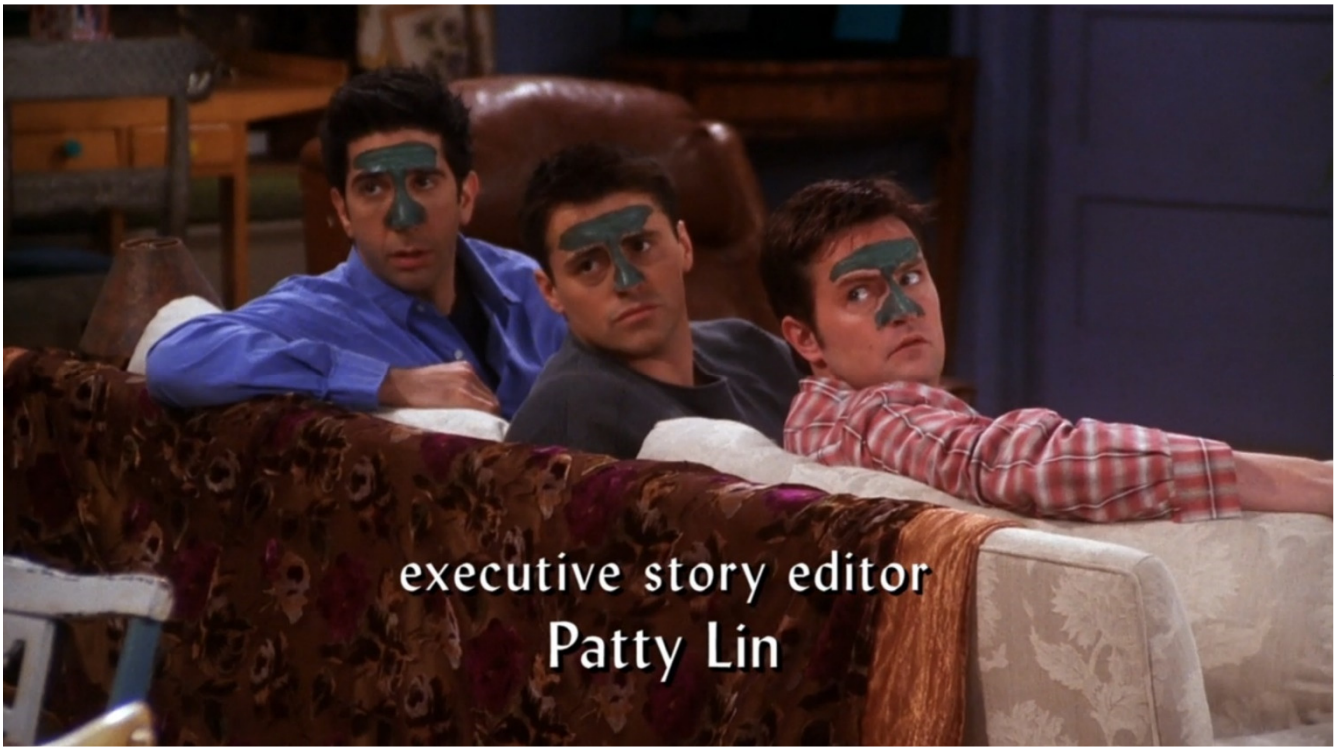


Image 4: Ross, Joey, and Chandler sitting on a couch with a green skin-care product on their T-zones ("The One with the Cheap Wedding Dress," 00:20:30)

Joey and Ross' deviance from hegemonic masculinity is further supported when Monica enters her apartment and finds Chandler watching TV with Joey and Ross. She requests their attention but fails to gain in as Chandler notes: "I thought you'd be gone all day." They turn around to show her they are all wearing green-colored skin-care products on their T-zones as seen in image 4. The laugh track played here underscores how out of place it is for them to watch sports and use skin-care products at the same time. Monica replies: "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I should probably leave you girls alone" (00:20:39). Her disapproval and mocking of the situation highlight that the men are displaying too feminine characteristics due to their skin-care activity. Ross reiterates: "Laugh all you want but in 10 minutes we will have young-looking skin"

(00:20:47) as she leaves the room and heads into the bedroom. Joey supports him by adding "You know, she could use a little" and gestures to his own T-zone covered in the facial mask. Monica's behavior towards them do not affect them because they collectively decided to do this and collectively do not find it shameful as long the others are support them.

It is worth noting that they engage in this activity as they watch a sport channel, an activity that strongly adheres to hegemonic masculinity. This is also highlighted during the scene as they all react to a score in the sport playing on the TV exactly the way they would have done if they had not been wearing facial masks. It supports the notion that while they engage in transgressive behavior, they are still men; they still watch sport, and they still adhere to other aspects of hegemonic masculinity.

Vulnerability is associated with femininity which is one of the many reasons hegemonic masculinity frames it as negative and unmanly. Even so, men can express emotions and do so through several different methods to navigate the potential backlash of expressing vulnerability; typically, men use masculinizing strategies through humor and irony which allows them to negotiate acceptable norms within traditional hegemonic ideals (Underwood and Olson 104). One study found that hegemonic masculinity is better predicted by lack of friends who do not adhere to hegemonic masculinity rather than hegemonic fathers and absent mothers. They found that "adult men's friendship groups explain some variance in men's adherence to traditional masculine norms", and it negatively impacts men's deviance from masculine norms if the support from peers decreases (Van Doorn, Dye and De Gracia 4).

In "The One with the Ballroom Dancing", the building where most of the friends live has a superintendent named Mr. Treeger who asks Joey to be his dancing partner in exchange for not telling the landlord about Monica subletting her apartment. Joey's reaction to that is to ask:

"That's not prison lingo, is it?" (00:10:31). While the question at face value is simple, the underlying question refers to gay sex since dancing is considered something partners do intimately. Later, when he joins Treeger in his home to dance, he asks: "Wow, wow, don't we need to do some preparation first like get really drunk?" (00:13:17). Getting drunk would make it more acceptable since society excuses mistakes done under the influence of alcohol. If they were drunk, it erases the intimacy of dancing together as true intimacy. It would make it less deviant in the eyes of hegemonic masculinity.

However, Joey feels bad about Treeger getting discouraged when the dancing does not work out and he apologizes by facing some of his own homophobia: "Plus it was probably mostly my fault anyway. I mean, I'm not really that comfortable dancing with a-- wee-hee!" (00:14:10), as Treeger swings him around. This is a positive representation of defying masculinity; it faces Joey's fear of becoming too feminine by engaging in an activity that is typically considered exclusive for a romantic partner with another man. It simultaneously shows other men that engaging in feminine activities with other men will not emasculate them. Joey also tries to defend himself when Monica calls him gay for dancing with Treeger: "Hold on. This isn't some kind of girly dance. Alright, it's like a sport, you know, it's manly" (00:15:07). By redefining the activity as manly and as a sport, Joey avoids emasculating himself in front of the women. Redefining the activity as manly allows him to enjoy it without shame; something hegemonic masculinity requires. The choice to redefine the activity as masculine is a tool to allow for greater inclusion of activities men can do (Underwood and Olson 98).

The strategy to masculinize an activity to make it acceptable for men to participate in it is a common one used during the show. In "The One Where Chandler Takes a Bath", Monica draws a bath for Chandler who expresses that he does not like baths. To convince him to try it,

she bought him a plastic navy boat to masculinize the activity, to which he replies: “Well, it does butch it up a bit” (00:06:13). In the bath, the show vocalizes his thoughts: “This is okay. I like the flowery smell. Which is okay, because I’ve got my boat” (00:06:44). He uses a masculinizing strategy to allow himself to enjoy the bath without risking emasculation. This is because there is some intimacy in taking a bubble bath; it connects you to vulnerability by soaking in a hot bath. When Monica takes the boat away, he is left with no strategy to masculinize his bath and both Monica and Phoebe tease him:

> **Monica.** “Now you’re just a girl in a tub.”
>
> **Chandler:** “Hey!”
>
> **Phoebe:** “Oh, hi Bubbles. Manly” (00:17:43).

The removal of the boat suddenly emasculates him even if the activity is the same. The purpose of this scene can be read as two-fold: first, that men can take baths without shame and needing a boat to justify it does not make it any more masculine than it is without the boat. Or, that baths are not meant for men since hegemonic masculinity would dictate that men cannot participate in feminine-coded activities and this one includes bubbles, candles, and flowery scents, something all connected to femininity. The show’s choice to let the friends go into the bathroom during the end scene also draws attention to the absurdity of Chandler taking a bath especially by highlighting that the friends can see his penis under the bubbles. It highlights how vulnerable Chandler is in the bath and how out of place it is for him despite that none of the guys tease him the way Phoebe and Monica did.

Speaking about feelings is part of intimacy, and one that many boys lose the ability to do as they grow up. Way’s studies suggest that adolescent men grow afraid of speaking about feelings because it is associated with femininity despite that they have the same emotional need

and capacities as girls (Way 2019, 926). Homophobia is a primary explanation for the loss of friendship as they found questions of close male friendships: “Talking about feelings is like gay, so we don’t talk about feelings” (Way 2011, 221). Conventions of hegemonic masculinity get reinforced through the distance friendships young adolescent males have with each other; they experience fear of being seen as gay if they do have close intimate relationships with other guys.

Joey experiences a similar difficulty on the show when finds he has feelings for Rachel, and he needs to speak to Chandler about it in the episode “The One Where Chandler Takes a Bath”. After Joey requests Chandler’s attention, Chandler asks: “Is this a cold pizza talk or a leftover meat loaf talk?” (00:02:06) but expresses worry when Joey replies that it is neither. However, when they sit down to talk, Joey cannot find the words to express his emotional needs to Chandler. He squirms and fiddles with his hands anxiously and even attempts to leave once where Chandler calls him back. Regardless of Chandler’s supportive approach, Joey does not manage to adequately bring up his feelings around Rachel but rather avoids it by making comparisons to Chandler’s current relationship to Monica (00:02:43). He ends up leaving the conversation by saying: “You know what? This was a bad idea. Forget all about it. And listen, do me a favor, this conversation between you and me never happened” (00:03:08). The shame expressed around talking about feelings align with the stereotype that men cannot talk about feelings with other men. The laugh track also underscores that Joey’s lack of ability to talk about his feelings is supposed to be funny. The show’s focus on Joey’s inability to talk rather than his attempt to talk leans its presentation on a negative portrayal on hegemonic masculinity. Chandler’s further support of Joey wanting to talk also suggests the show wants to make fun of the idea that men do not talk about feelings rather than Joey wanting to talk. In fact, it comes off as pitiful that Joey cannot find the courage to talk to his best friend about what bothers him.

Emotional vulnerability is considered a woman's trait which is heavily shunned by hegemonic masculinity as explained in the theory; a lack of emotional expression is praised and admired while expressions of vulnerability is not (Bird 125). In "The One with Ross's Teeth," Joey lives on his own and has acquired a female roommate named Janine who has taken Chandler's room after Chandler has become married to Monica and moved in with her. As Chandler moves and Joey's new roommate moves in, the apartment changes to include more decorations, more colors, flowers, and art. This change is noted by Chandler:

> **Chandler:** "Oh my god it's like a guy never lived in here. You gotta be careful this girl thing is dangerous, it's spreading already."
>
> **Joey:** "It is?"
>
> **Chandler:** "Is this your pretty pink pillow on the couch?"
>
> **Joey:** "No."
>
> **Chandler:** "Is that your tiny little box that's too small to put anything in?"
>
> **Joey:** "No?"
>
> **Chandler:** "No okay, this is not good. You are a guy, okay? This is a guy's place. If you let this go, you're going to be sitting around with your fingers soaking and stuff" (00:00:57).

In this scene, Chandler reinforces a hegemonic masculinity trait by establishing several transgressions on Joey's enactment of his masculinity. It implies that if Joey embraces too much femininity either in his behavior or in his way of decorating his home, he will lose his masculine gender and become excluded – or worse, become feminine. The expressed feared femininity is done through several behaviors but also outside appearances. It includes behavior associated

with feminine self-care such as manicures and pedicures: 'with your fingers soaking and stuff', which is implied to be exclusive to women or gay men.

The pink couch cushion is only a problem because of the color; had it been blue or a darker color, Chandler would not have pointed it out as problematic. Pink is associated with femininity and therefore not a color Joey should proudly present in his home. There is an unsaid agreement that men should keep their home in a certain way to convey a certain kind of masculine aura about them. As men often are considered out-of-place at home when it is conceived as a 'feminine space' (Varley and Blasco), Joey's masculinity is perceived through his home as he is not married to his roommate despite that share-housing creates quasi-family qualities, and Janine's choice to decorate the home is an expression of this (Gorman-Murray 431).

Chandler furthermore points out the difference between his space and Joey's: "Totally different situations" (00:01:12), as Chandler's home is no longer dictated by his own masculinity but rather a shared space understood to be dominated by Monica's femininity. Chandler's code switching between his conversation with Joey to his conversation with Monica denoted by his tone of voice and his choice of words, implies that he has no agency over his house or his free time. His time is dedicated to Monica, and she dictates the time they spend with each other, at least in this scene. Chandler is furthermore seen as doing Joey a kindness here. The joke depends upon the expected audience's understanding that Joey is blind to how much his roommate affects his home and his behavior and Chandler is saving him by reminding him of stereotypical masculine expectations of a 'guy's home'. There is also an implication that Janine is attacking Joey's space:

**Joey:** "Alright, you're right, I'll-I'll talk to her."

**Chandler:** "Yes, talk to her! Be a man!"

**Joey:** "I'm a man!"

**Chandler:** "Defend yourself!" (00:01:03).

The implication that he must defend himself against an enemy invading his space further emphasizes this idea that it is Joey's space, a man's space. Chandler's suggestion to have Joey express this unfitting behavior and décor in the house enforces that Joey is the 'man of the house' and should be the one to dictate the social space of the shared apartment. Although Joey himself does not claim as such, Chandler's enforcement of Joey's masculinity can also be read as an entitlement that he, as a man, is expected to have over his home. As he is the man of the house, he is entitled to have her create a space that supports his masculinity rather than have a shared gender-neutral space.

Hegemonic masculinity sets very strict rules for how invested a man can be in the way he looks. Typically, this focuses on sports, on building muscle, and on appearing capable of physical activity and fights. Too much investment with the wrong focus such as skin, hair, or clothes easily makes the man fall into a deviant category of femininity. An example of this is mentioned earlier with Ross' t-zone and focus on skin care. But other times it is in a certain phrase or small actions that make men appear deviant of hegemonic masculinity. The following situation is a continuation of the one discussed above where Chandler attempts to call out Joey for deviating from hegemonic masculinity expectations:

**Chandler:** "You're turning into a woman."

**Joey:** "No, I'm not. Why would you say that? That's just mean."

**Chandler:** "Now I've upset you? What did I say?"

**Joey:** "It's not what you said. It's the way you said it."

**Joey:** "Oh, my God. I'm a woman!" (00:15:22).

Here, Joey's focus on the way Chandler spoke to him regarding the issue. It involves a stereotypical idea of women being more sensitive and emotional and thus easily offended by certain phrases or words when confronted with difficult situations. It demonstrates that even vulnerability is not acceptable by hegemonic masculinity regardless of an emotional need to express it and seek comfort. Despite that at the surface level, Chandler's question sounds genuine: "What did I say?", he asks it to prove a point to Joey. This point is that he demonstrates too many feminine traits, and it is harming his expression of masculinity.

Emotional vulnerability is often covered up by 'manly' feelings such as anger and aggression. While no physical fighting takes place during the show, they do have disagreements and at times harm each other with their actions and words. While Bird notes: "Emotional detachment is viewed not only as desirable but as imperative" (125). In "The One Where Chandler Crosses the Line," Chandler kisses Joey's girlfriend and admits it to him. Rather than attacking Chandler physically, Joey chooses the silent treatment to handle the situation: "From now on, this apartment is empty to me, and I'm not happy about you, either" (00:19:38). His choice to not engage with Chandler is a kind of psychological violence. He takes it so far that he refuses to speak to Chandler as seen in "The One with Chandler in a Box," where he hangs up the phone whenever Chandler calls (00:00:09).

Ceasing communication and refusing to acknowledge Chandler is emotional abuse as it serves to punish him for his actions. Joey also acknowledges that he has sentenced Chandler to a punishment: "Don't do the crime if you can't do the time" (00:06:17), and cites that it is only fair since Chandler betrayed him. Way (2011) notes that betrayal is a reason why men lose their friends as they grow up: "Once a best friend is "lost" or commits a betrayal, the friendship is

over and a replacement for that friend is difficult, if not impossible, to find" (189). Joey's feelings of betrayal extend to the point that he wants to move out: "It's not about her, okay? But seeing you two together just reminds me of what you did, and I don't wanna live with someone who doesn't know what it is to be a friend" (00:08:41). Joey's reaction through anger rather than

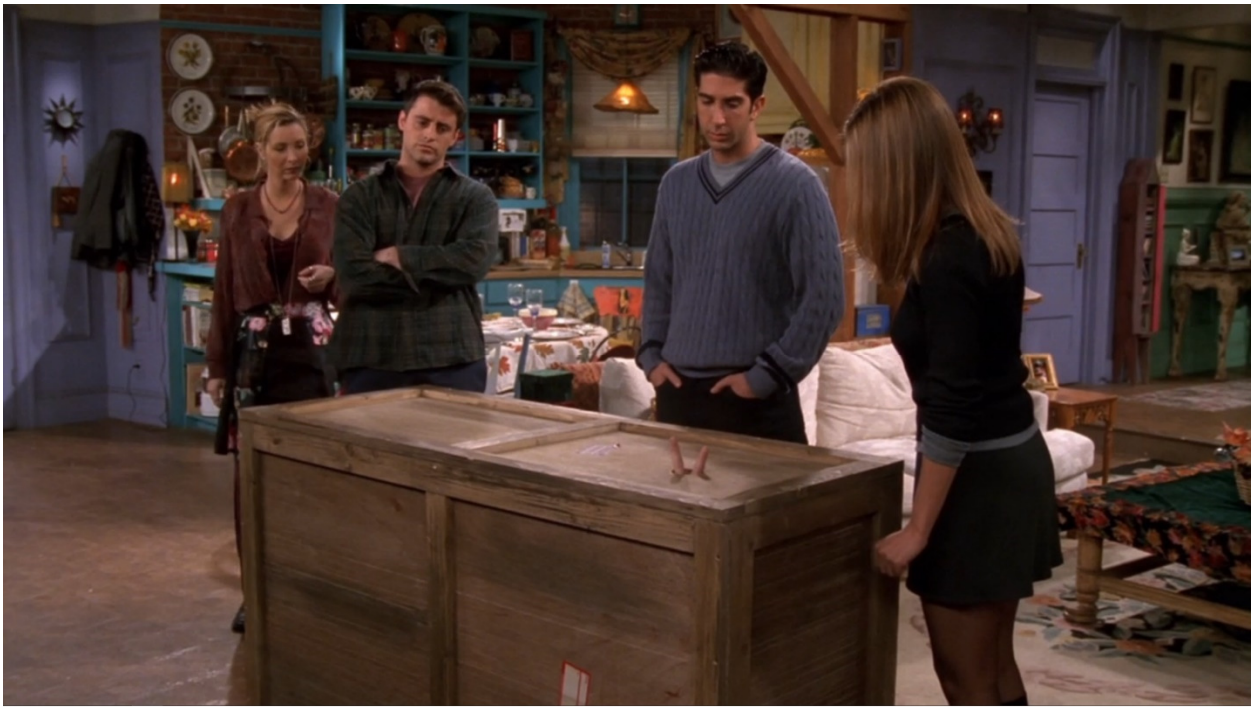

Image 5: The box where Chandler is locked inside as punishment for betraying Joey ("The One with Chandler in a Box," 00:12:14)

hurt is the only language of masculinity, and while he does not physically hurt Chandler, he does punish him through exclusion. This behavior is consistent with hegemonic masculinity since he cannot openly speak about feelings without risking emasculation.

However, the show does not align itself with this trait of hegemonic masculinity. Joey and Chandler do end up talking and finding a solution although not the kind where they talk it out. Chandler agrees to lock himself in a box, actively excluding himself from the Thanksgiving party, to prove to Joey that he cares about their friendship. Joey accepts this act as it puts him in control of how much Chandler interacts with the other friends and allows him to sufficiently

punish him without eradicating him from his life. Joey lets Chandler out of the box after Kathy, Chandler's girlfriend and Joey's ex, come to break up with Chandler, and he realizes that Chandler is willing to let go of his girlfriend in order to keep their friendship. It negates the fear that many adolescent boys have about their male peers as they grow up: "Although the degree of distrust varied, boys often feared […] "being dissed" by their male peers. "Being dissed" included having their friends spread confidential secrets, lie, steal their girlfriends, or talk about them behind their backs" (Way 2011, 190). That Joey and Chandler manage to overcome a betrayal and stay friends is unlike what hegemonic masculinity would dictate; the anger and betrayal should have made Chandler untrustworthy to Joey and ended their friendship. While the audience would likely not react well to ending their friendship, it is still a positive portrayal of communication between men as they manage to repair their friendship.

The main characters on *Friends* also attempts to break with stereotypes in other ways and open up the possibility that men can engage in more activities without rightfully feeling ashamed of it. In this episode, "The One with All the Rugby," Chandler has gone with Rachel to a nail salon to get his nails done under the expectation that it would be fun. Rachel is the one to reinforce hegemonic norms:

> **Chandler:** "I can't believe I'm getting my nails done. And you said it was gonna be fun… which it kind of is. Also, you said there were gonna be other guys here, there are no other guys here" (00:00:08).
>
> **Rachel:** "Chandler don't worry, this isn't gonna make you any less of a guy… that does" (00:00:30).

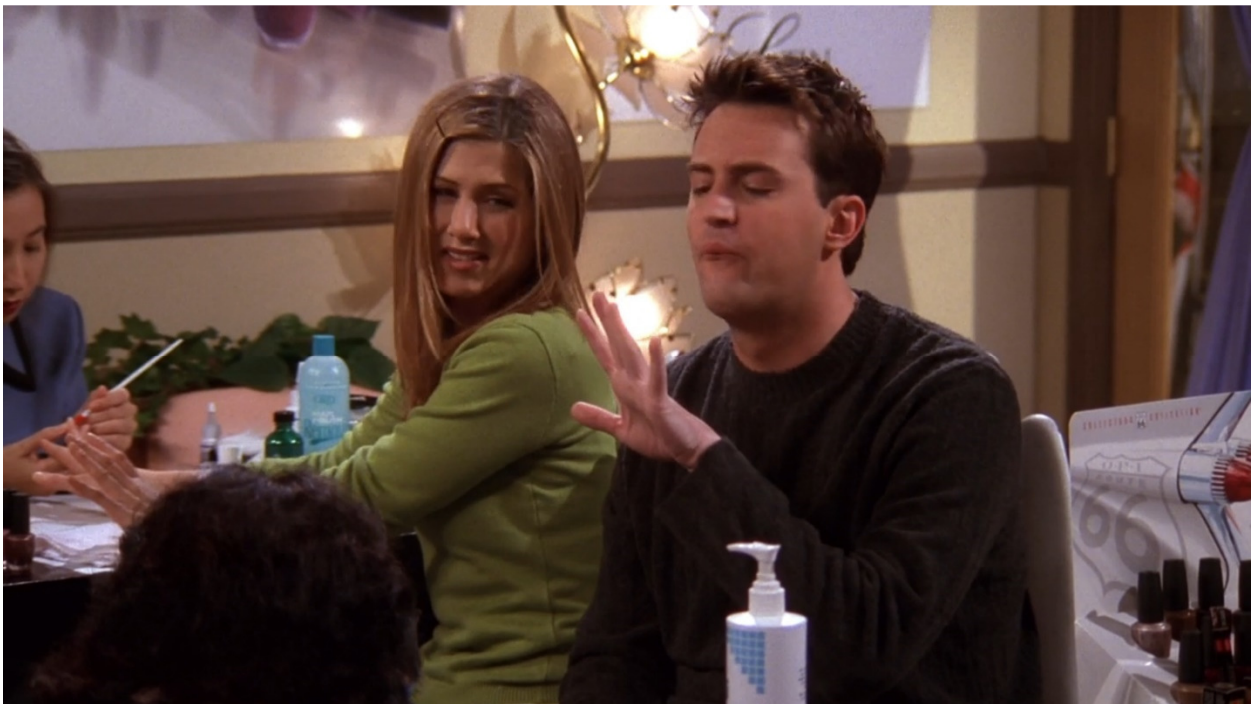

Image 6: Chandler with his right hand close to his face, palm faced outwards, and fingers spread, as he blows on the nails. ("The One with All the Rugby," 00:00:30)

Rachel's disapproval of Chandler engaging in feminine-coded behavior such as blowing on his nails as they dry reinforces hegemonic masculinity. Chandler's embracement of more feminine-coded activities is only allowed as long he still acts according to hegemonic masculinity's standards, and typically only if other men allow this too. The show has many instances of attempting to be progressive by allowing men in otherwise feminine coded spaces without degrading their masculinity, or have men carry feminine-coded items or take on feminine-coded roles, but at the same time has the characters degrade certain actions or behaviors as unfit for a masculine man.

But not everything is about a fear of being a queer. There are scenes in the show that present the male leads as having genuine intimate moments with each other with no fear of being ridiculed or shamed for their intimacy. In "The One with George Stephanopoulos," Chandler and

Joey invite Ross to a hockey game. They invite him by claiming it is a birthday gift to him, and Joey kisses Ross on the cheek while saying: “We love you, man!” (00:02:43).

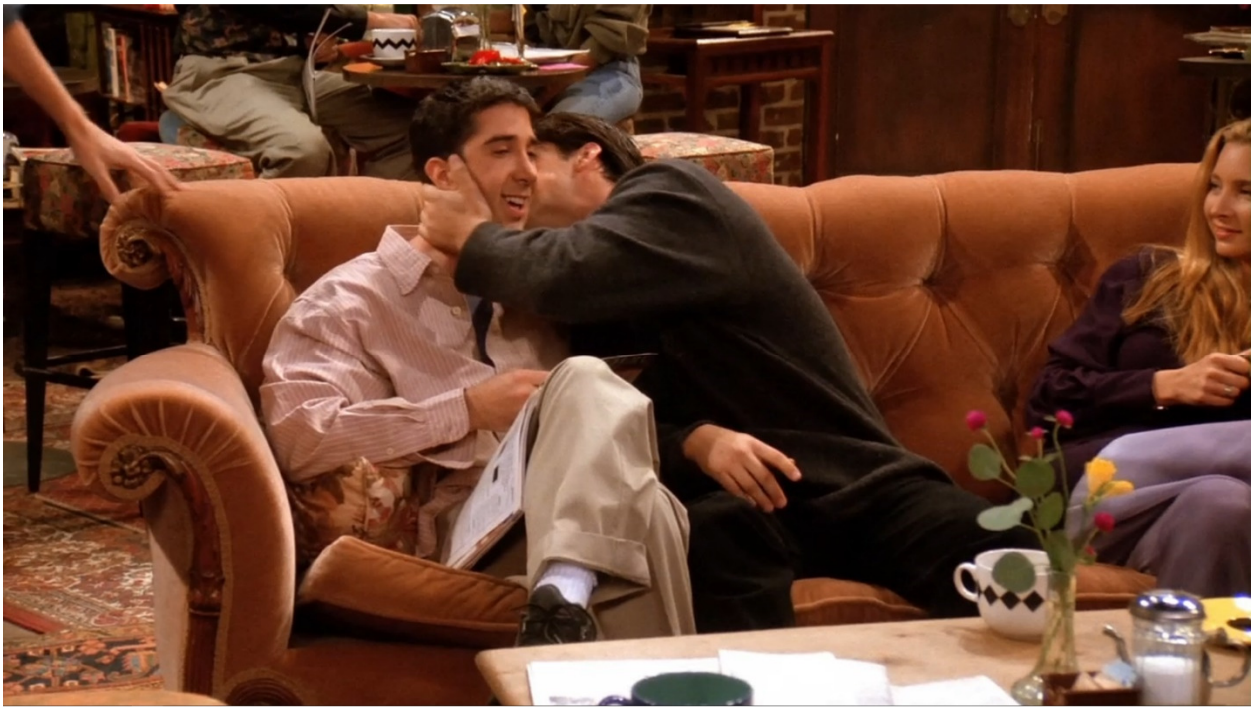

Image 7: Joey wishes Ross happy birthday by kissing him on the cheek (“The One with George Stephanopoulos,” 00:02:42).

While this is done for laughs and partially for authenticity, both the laugh track and Ross emphasize that it is not his birthday. Instead, Ross guesses he is the one they chose to bring because neither of them could decide which one should bring a date. Joey kissing him, then, can be read as him choosing Ross as ‘the date’. This scene is not, however, framed as negative in any way. Neither the female characters nor any of the male characters comment on Joey kissing Ross on the cheek. It negates the stereotype that men cannot be intimate with each other in expressions of love and care; the exact lack of focus on Joey kissing has the effect that it is simply experienced as a normal everyday occurrence.

*Subordination of Women*

In this section the second of Bird's three meanings of masculinity will be analyzed. While the former section focused on the fear of femininity in men, this section will focus on men's treatment of women as objects through sexualizing them. I will first focus on the women as of lesser value than men through objectification, then I will cover how the traditional female role is enforced on certain characters, and lastly, I will focus on aggrieved entitlement and gaslighting.

The woman as an 'other' is a concept worth taking into account when looking at sexualization and depersonalization of women. The concept is notably associated with the French philosopher and feminist Simone de Beauvoir who theorized that women is always defined by and in relation to the man while the man is allowed to be an autonomous agent. With this power dynamic it allows hegemonic men to define what is acceptable on a discursive level (Beauvoir 25-27).

Verbal objectification is performed repeatedly during the show, usually in the form of this 'otherness'. While Joey and Chandler often are highlighted as the more perverted friends of the two, Joey because of his success with women and Chandler because of his lack of success, Ross also at times contribute to the 'otherness' of women. Breasts are often the body part most sexualized on the show and the body part that ensures men are sexually interested in women; if they did not comment on breasts and had no interest in them, they might be considered gay. The fact that Ross only remembers an applicant because of her lack of a bra and not her hair color ("The One with the Male Nanny", 00:04:34), or that Chandler feels he has to point out that Rachel is standing in a towel while she tries on shoes: "I don't think anyone is going to focus on that when you're wearing that towel dress" ("The One with All the Jealousy", 00:00:09), or the

need to comment on one of Joey's sister's breasts ("The One Where Chandler Can't Remember Which Sister", 00:08:18).

The relationship between patriarchy and women's bodies are examined during the show as well. Particularly Joey perpetrates objectivistic views of his female friends regardless of his chance for sex with them. He believes himself to be entitled to women's bodies since he believes

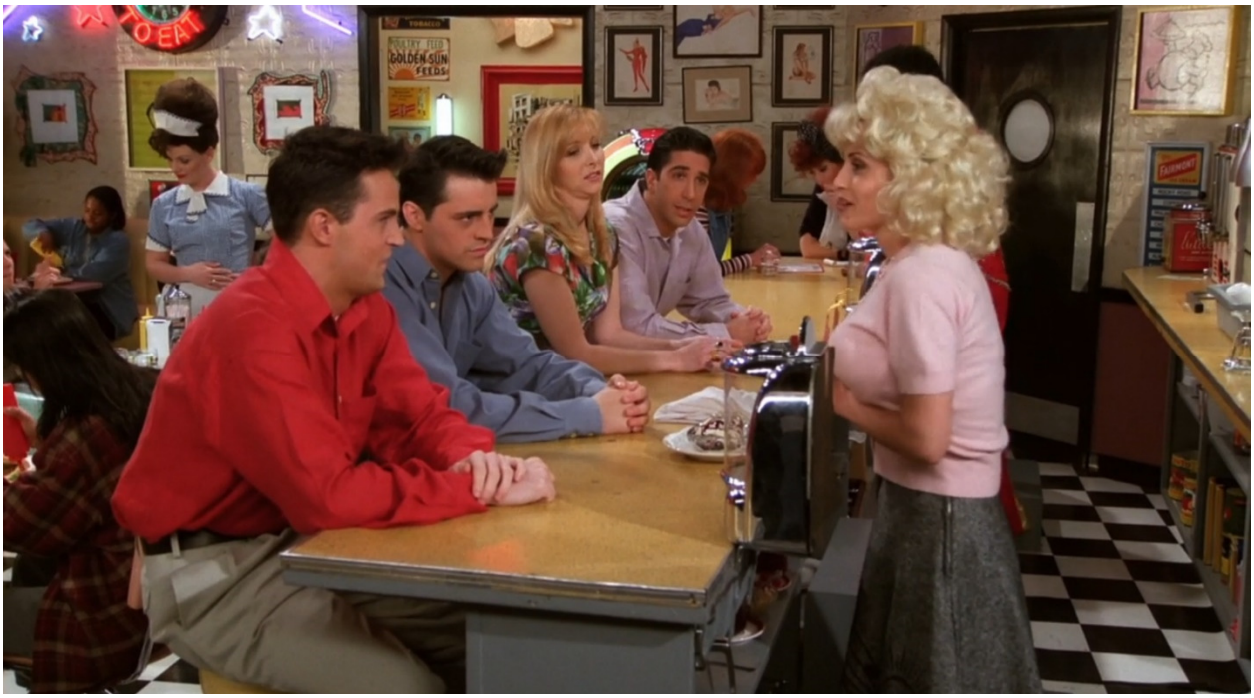


Image 8: Monica working at the diner in her uniform with the breast implants while Chandler, Joey, Phoebe, and Ross are talking to her ("The One with the Two Parties," 00:00:13)

women want him as well. This is because he establishes his masculinity by establishing authority over women through charm and sex appeal. In "The One with the Two Parties," Monica is dressed up as a 1950's waitress as she works on The Moondance Diner. Her uniform includes her wearing a blonde wig and implants to enlarge her breast size which can be seen in image 8. Monica notices that Joey is staring at her chest and comments on it:

**Monica:** "Joey, they're not real."

**Joey:** "Huh?"

**Monica:** "I start miles beneath the surface of these things. See? Honk honk" (00:00:50). She grabs the implants and squeezes them to prove to him they are not real. Regardless of if they were real or not, it illustrates that the show presents objectification of women as a normal and expected reaction from a man. While the laugh track conveys that Joey's obsession with Monica's breasts is a joke, the show still leans into the belief that men must always be interested in women's bodies or they fail to conform to hegemonic masculinity. The women's reaction to his objectification is often met with an eye roll or a smile; they understand his objectification as a joke but nothing about Joey's behavior signals that it is a joke. They brush him off because he is their friend.

His objectification of other women is also agreed upon by the other male characters. In "The One with the Boob Job," Joey lends money to Chandler and Monica individually. When Chandler finds out that she borrowed money from Joey without telling him, Joey tries to find a lie to cover for her. While he thinks, a waitress picks up a coffee cup from the table between them and Joey stares at her breasts as she does so as seen in image 9. This 'inspires' Joey to say Monica is getting a boob job for the money she borrowed:

**Chandler:** "I don't want her to get a boob job! That's crazy!"

**Joey:** "It's not that crazy, okay? Making them smaller that would be crazy" (00:09:23)

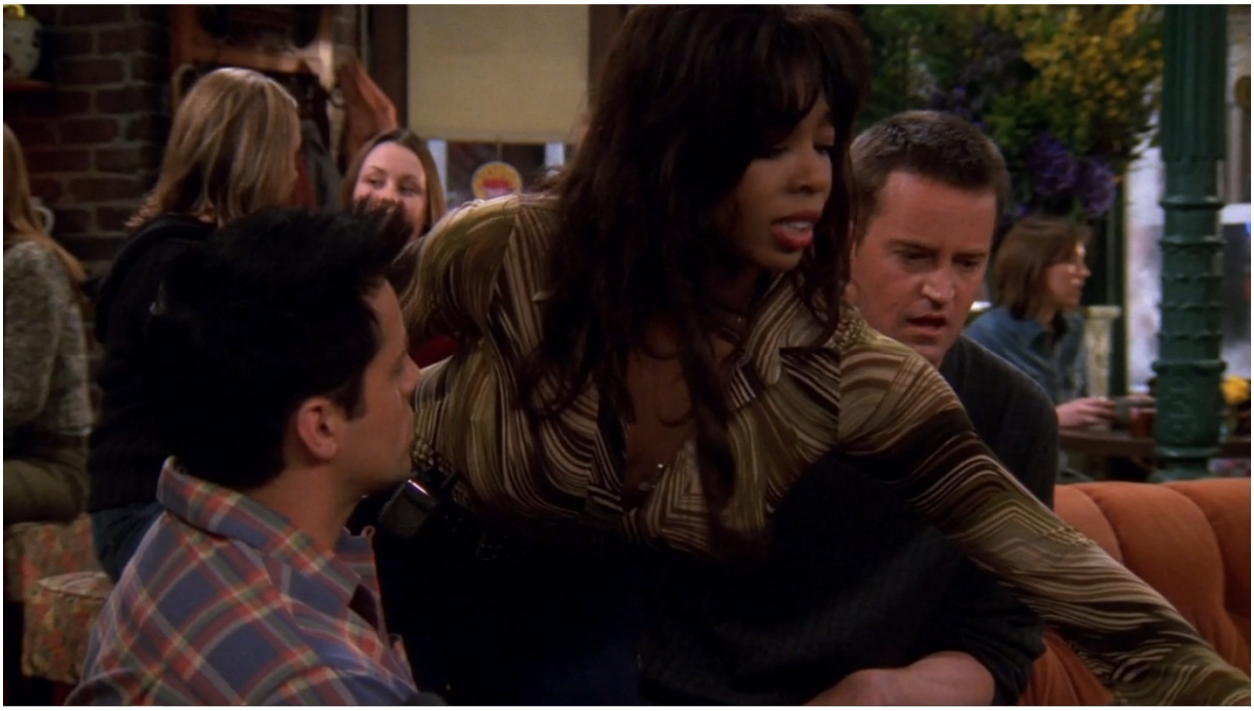

Image 9: A waitress picks up a coffee cup between Joey and Chandler ("The One with the Boob Job," 00:09:11)

Joey's comment and his behavior around the waitress underlines the point. Both Chandler and Joey act entitled in this short conversation. While Chandler is entitled because he believes Monica is getting breast implants for his sake, Joey believes women only should get breast surgery to enlarge their breasts because it enhances their sex appeal. Chandler's aggrieved entitlement is endorsed by the show as his entitlement easily reads as concern rather than entitlement, however, he does not consider that a boob job might not be for his sake but for hers. Joey's entitlement on the other hand is criticized by the show through the laugh track.

Objectification through patriarchal power dynamics is seldom illustrated during the show, however, there at times metaphors for this overarching dynamic. In "The One with the Dirty Girl", Chandler has acquired a new pen with an assumed illustration of a woman. While the audience cannot see the illustration on the pen, Chandler describes it clearly: "Look what I got. See? She's fully dressed, right? And then you click it and… she's naked. And then you click it

again and she's dressed. She's a business woman. She's walking down the street, she's window shopping and… she's naked" (00:17:49). The laugh track highlights that the joke is centered on how happy Chandler is of his new pen since it includes a woman he can undress as he pleases. It has childish undertones similar to a young teenage boy who steals playboy magazines and hides them under his bed. Rachel who is sitting beside him does not react to him but only smiles. It is a metaphor of how men objectify women to the point that they become literal objects that they can buy and do with as they please. Chandler's delight in engaging with the power dynamic adheres to hegemonic masculinity standards, and Rachel's passiveness submits her to the same dynamic.

Another example of the show's main female cast becoming objectified by other characters on the show is in the episode "The One Where Monica Sings". In this episode, Monica goes with Phoebe to her boyfriend's piano bar and gets encouraged by Phoebe to go sing on stage. While she sings, the audience who is primarily men, cheers her on and the confidence boost gives her the courage to keep singing on stage. Phoebe, on the other hand, realizes her shirt is see-through and everyone can see her breasts since she is not wearing a bra. Furthermore, no one tells her that her clothes are sheer until Chandler shows up and tells her because her singing skills are mediocre. While Monica does not care that the men in the room only cheer for her because they can see her breasts through her shirt once she is told, the point is that they objectify her and do not care that she is singing; they see her body and nothing else. She is not praised for her abilities but her body.

The power dynamic is also present in women of higher social status such as seen in the episode "The One with the Ballroom Dancing". Ross finds out that Chandler has a gym membership despite that he never attends the gym. When Chandler says he cannot quit the gym, Ross suggests going with him. When Chandler expresses that he wants to cancel his

membership, they meet Maria who is dressed in a revealing bodysuit as seen in image 10 to help convince the men to stay at the gym.

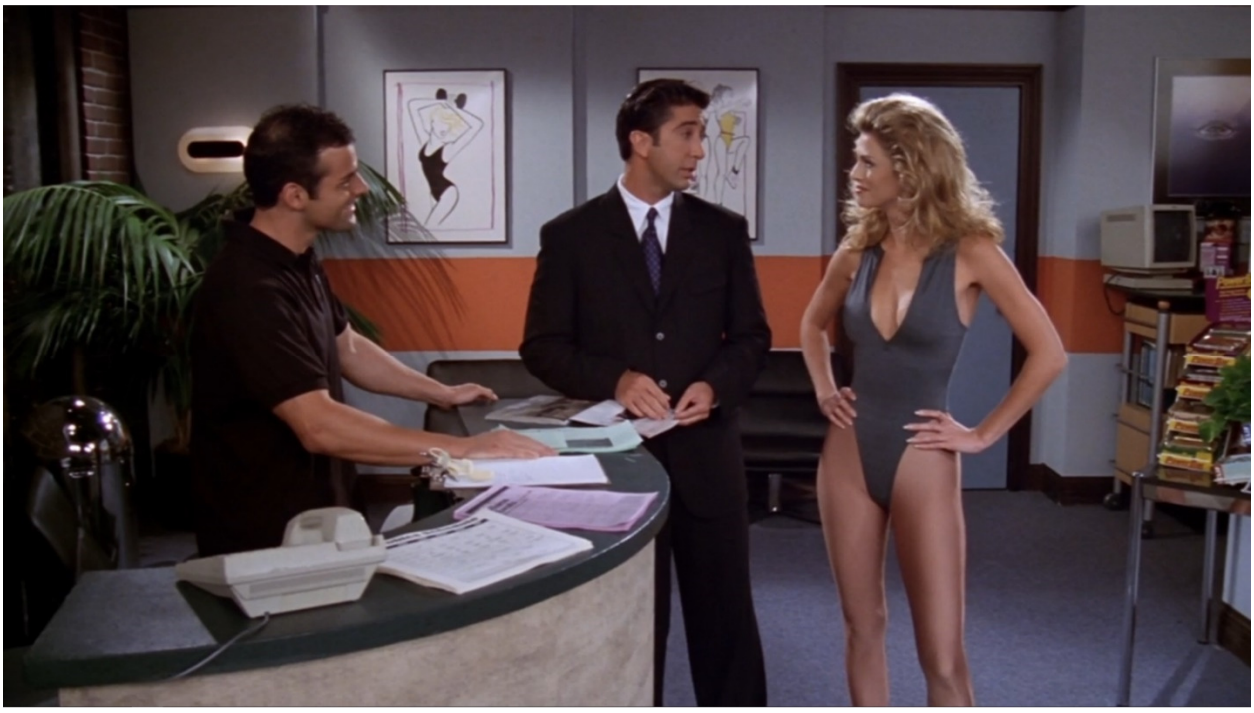

Image 10: Ross at the gym with Maria in a revealing bodysuit ("The One with the Ballroom Dancing," 00:08:35)

The choice to use women as 'the reason to stay', objectifies them as well. This is highlighted by her seemingly only working there to stand around to wait for customers to want to quit the gym. Especially the use of revealing clothing to appear convincing objectifies her since her appeal is not who she is but what her body looks like. This objectification repeats itself later at the bank where a woman also stands around and waits for people to quit the bank. This dynamic is more about the power she holds as an accountant rather than the way she looks since she is dressed professionally. Nevertheless, the show objectifies both women by making it seem like they have power over Ross and Chandler since they can prevent them from quitting simply by existing in their space. The power they hold is superficial; had they not been sexualized they

would not be of any interest to men. The objectification of women helps maintain a sense of distinct maleness to the male self-image (Bird 122).

Gender stereotypes might make it seem like objectification can be a two-way road where women objectify men as well. This is seen in the episode "The One with Ross' Teeth," Monica offers Chandler time with Joey after he has spent a significant amount of time with her during the day:

> **Monica:** "Yeah, go over to Joey's. Go over to Joey's and drink some beer and hammer on some drywall."
>
> **Chandler:** "You know that when guys hang out they don't just drink beer and hammer on drywall."
>
> **Monica:** "When girls hang out we don't have pillow fights in our underwear" (00:11:17).

In this exchange, Monica is corrected by Chandler in perpetrating unhealthy stereotypes about men who comply with hegemonic masculinity. He refers to traits that would imply a sporty man drinking a masculine coded drink such as beer, which are traits that Chandler's character does not inhabit. The comeback to Chandler's attempt at correcting a harmful gender stereotype is to present a similar women's stereotype that is harmful. However, Monica's attempt leaves Chandler flabbergasted as seen in image 11, and Monica quickly corrects herself and ensures

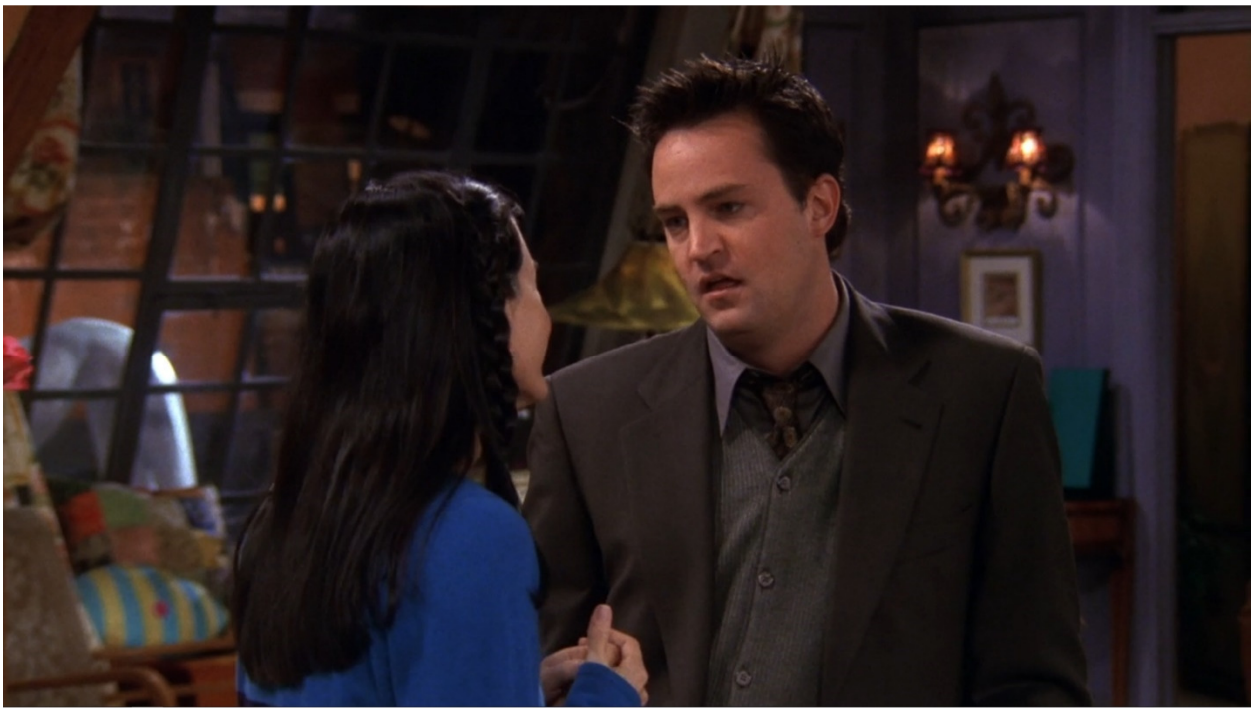

Image 11: Chandler's reaction to being told that women do not have pillow fights in their underwear (“The One with Ross’s Teeth,” 00:11:19).

Chandler that women do engage in the stereotype. Chandler’s reaction is a joke on the idea that men cannot handle the idea of women not confining themselves to men’s imagined life of them. It leaves Chandler entitled to his own fantasy about women even if this fantasy is harmful and sexualizing while Monica, a woman, is not allowed to believe harmful stereotypes about men.

Romantic and sexual attention from women is a key point to hegemonic masculinity since it gains status and admiration particularly in the eyes of other men. By ensuring men are the ones acting upon women it reaffirms both that heterosexuality as the ideal and sex is an expression of power and control. Sexual prowess for hegemonic masculinity is an expression of power over women and an exclusion of homosexual men as women should be the ones acted upon and men should be the one acting (Whitehead 158).

Throughout the series, sexual prowess is a topic brought up between the three guys. Joey’s frequent sexual encounters with women both intimidates the other guys and is something

they praise him for and envy. In the episode “The One with All the Candy”, Ross and Joey both find interest in a new girl moving to the city and both hope to win her over. While Ross is worried about her dating another guy, Joey is confident: “I’m dating this girl who’s also seeing another guy. But I’m not too worried about it,” to which Ross replies: “You shouldn’t be. Believe me, I wouldn’t want to be the guy who’s up against you. I mean that doofus is going to lose” (00:09:51). The competitive nature of dating is made clear by how Ross backs up Joey. This is both done through reassuring Joey that his competitor is less competent but also that Ross himself sees himself as a lesser competitor in comparison to Joey.

When they realize, they are attempting to date the same girl, they try to establish some internal rules for example by setting a spending amount to make the competition “fair”. Ross only agrees to this because Joey threatens to: “do what I have to do when I go on dates.” (00:11:23). He knows Joey is socially superior to him when it comes to dating, but Joey knows Ross has the advantage of a full-time job and more money. It is an interesting display of hegemonic masculinity traits in action since the competition is not about how the girl they are dating feels but about them proving who is better at picking her up. Ensuring that the other plays fair aids their own chance of winning but also ensures the other’s masculinity is not damaged by the competition. Nevertheless, they treat her as an object that must be earned through a fair competition; she is the price.

Another example of this is in “The One Where Old Yeller Dies,” where sexualization of women is utilized by Monica to get Chandler and Joey over to eat: “What am I wearing? Actually, nothing but rubber gloves” (00:02:14). This sentence causes Chandler and Joey to rush through the door well knowing their female friend is naked. Although Monica utilizes this sexualization, she objectifies herself as well. This heavy sexualization of female characters

through male characters' reactions, comments, or interactions with them adds a metacommentary on an assumed general acceptance of the audience's expected stereotypes and their acceptance of such.

To reiterate earlier mentions, the show was aired during the 1990s where the LGBTQ+ community was fighting hard to be treated equally to the heteronormative population and expressions of gay and lesbian spaces in TV shows were sparse and when represented was done in harmful ways (Haight). While the show attempted to be progressive and in many ways were progressive at the time it aired, it still included some harmful stereotypes about homosexual men and women. In the episode "The One Where the Nana Dies Twice", one of the plotlines is focused on Chandler and how people mistakenly think he is gay. It starts out with a conversation between him and a co-worker:

**Co-worker:** "Do you want a date Saturday?"

**Chandler:** "Yes, please."

**Co-worker:** "He is cute. He's funny. He's—

**Chandler:** "He's a he?"

**Co-worker:** "Well, yeah. Oh, God. I just…" (00:00:34).

Chandler's surprise to be offered a date with another man is the peak of the joke during this conversation. While Chandler does not react with disgust or fear but rather surprise and insecurity, it speaks more about the characters' fears of being perceived as gay than it speaks about the show's portrayal of gay men. However, he is quickly straightened by his friends when he asks them for clarity:

**Rachel:** "Yeah. When I first met you, I thought maybe, possibly, you might be."

**Chandler:** "You did?"

> **Rachel:** "Then you spent Phoebe's birthday party talking to my breasts, so then I figured maybe not" (00:01:57).

The sexualization of Rachel is framed as a positive thing as it clears him of the queerness he so deeply fears. This joke feeds into the idea that heterosexual men are allowed to objectify women to secure their own sexuality. It feeds into the stereotype that men define themselves by not being a woman, and it also partially feeds into an idea that men must consume themselves with women to qualify as a true man. This is in spite of research finding that the main reason boys lose their friends as they grow up is because they learn women are supposed to be their emotional caretakers and they should sacrifice their friends in order to get a romantic relationship (Way 2011, 220).

The power dynamic that men use to objectify women is minimized when the goal of sexual satisfaction is removed. As described during the section of The Fear of Being Queer, the alienation of homosexual women works through making them an 'other' to even heterosexual women. However, since women are part of the masculinization of men by embodying all the traits men deny each other through hegemonic masculinity (Butler 2007, 72), lacking heterosexual women can make masculinity seem lesser.

In the episode "The One with the Lesbian Wedding," Joey comments: "It just seems so futile. All these women and… nothing. I feel like superman without my powers, you know?" (00:17:08) when he attends the wedding. He would usually spend his time attempting to pick up women but since all the women at the wedding are lesbians, or at least assumed to be he cannot acquire any sex partners. Commenting this adds to the confirmation of his own heterosexuality since his disappointment about the lack sexual opportunities. Chandler later comments: "Well, now you understand how I feel every single day, okay? The world is my lesbian wedding"

(00:17:30). This comment serves to point out to the audience that Chandler is not as successful with women as he wants to be hence, he does not meet hegemonic masculinity expectations.

A traditional role for a character often enforces certain traits and expectations on them that align specifically to their gender because it reinforces the polar genders. While there are many nuanced ways of approaching traditional roles for both male and female characters, enforcing them can be harmful as it reduces both men and women to stereotypes that are rigid and restrictive. In the episode "The One Where Underdog Gets away", the six main characters are celebrating Thanksgiving together after several different incidents leave them to celebrate with each other rather than with family. While Monica's character is praised as a cook and aspires to be a chef herself, this episode particularly features Monica in the role of a traditional housewife. While Phoebe helps her cook for Thanksgiving, neither Joey, Chandler nor Ross is helping but simply sits around the dining table.

While Ross sits around the kitchen table and watches Monica prepare food, he sighs loudly, and Monica asks what bothers him.

**Ross:** "I don't know. It's just not the same without Mom in the kitchen."

**Monica:** "Alright, that's it. Get out of my way and stop annoying me."

**Ross:** "Oh that's closer!" (00:11:18).

Ross is only happy when Monica also looks and acts their mother since it better aligns with the tradition of the holiday. While this bothers Monica, he does not seem to understand why this would bother her. This pattern repeats throughout the episode with Ross constantly reminding Monica that she is not acting exactly the way their mother did. For example, when he tries to taste the food without asking, Monica gently slaps his hand, and he reacts with: "Okay, mom never hit" (00:12:26) in a condescending tone. He fails to realize that he stepped over a boundary

and Monica did not want him to taste the food, and instead scolds her for not reacting the same way their mother would do. Later, when the food burns because they were locked out of the apartment, Ross comments: “This doesn’t smell like Mom’s” (00:18:15), instead of helping Monica with the food or attempt to comfort her. Ross’ desire to have Monica reenact their mother’s way of doing things is aggrieved entitlement passed down through generations; he wants Monica to be their mother because the tradition of the holidays demand a certain way of doing things. It is a comment on how society reinforces some stereotypes about people in the honor of tradition while other stereotypes are rejected and recreated.

While Monica is presented with a need to control especially in regard to her home and her food, she tries to meet everyone’s expectations for a day that is full of tradition. This includes both Chandler and Ross asking her to prepare food in a different way than she usually would. For example, Joey pleads her to make Tater Tots: “But my mom always makes them. It’s like a tradition. You get a little piece of turkey on your fork, a little cranberry sauce, and a Tot!” (00:12:03), and when he gets his way, he and Ross celebrate through hand gestures. The criticism she faces from her desire to cook food in a way she prefers is amplified but not limited to this episode, for example she bakes a birthday flan for Rachel rather than a traditional birthday cake (“The One with Two Parties”: 00:08:35).

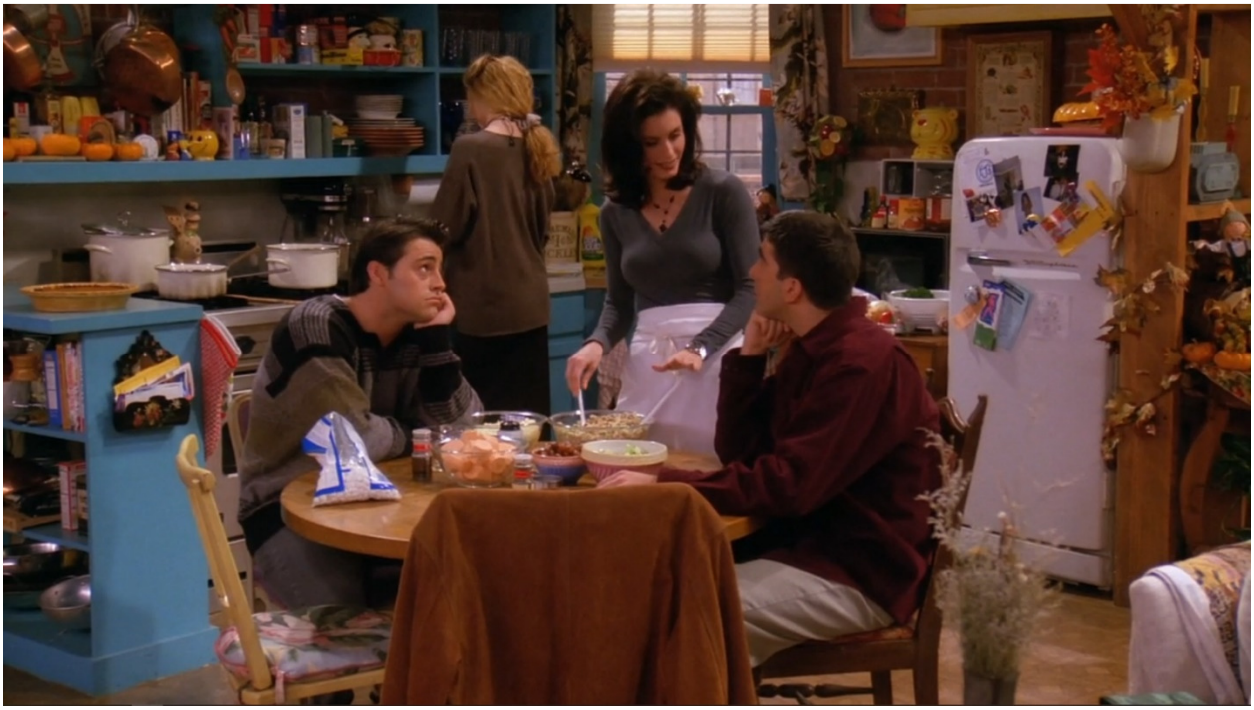

Image 12: Monica speaking to Ross and Joey during food preparation for Thanksgiving ("The One Where Underdog Gets Away," 00:12:15).

The mise-en-scène after Joey asks her to cook Tater Tots for Thanksgiving also frames Monica as the traditional housewife of the friend group. The body language of both is similar to the way two young boys would look at their mother after begging for something they would want. This is done by having both sit down which forces them to look up at her when she speaks. It creates a child-like expression that both rest their head on their hand and look up at her. She is placed in the middle of the shot where she is the only one visibly preparing food since the audience cannot see what Phoebe is doing in the background, which puts the full attention on Monica. Immediately after Monica gives her verdict that she will cook what they asked for, both Ross and Joey whisper 'yes' (00:12:18) much in the same way boys would do when begging their mother for permission for something. This is amplified by Joey and Ross giving each other

a secret hand gesture right before Ross leaves the room which is best described by looking at image 13:

There is an argument to be made that this behavior is tied to the traditional expectations of Thanksgiving which the show frames as women cooking and men enjoying their time in other ways such as watching TV in "The One with the Football". This otherness of women is created

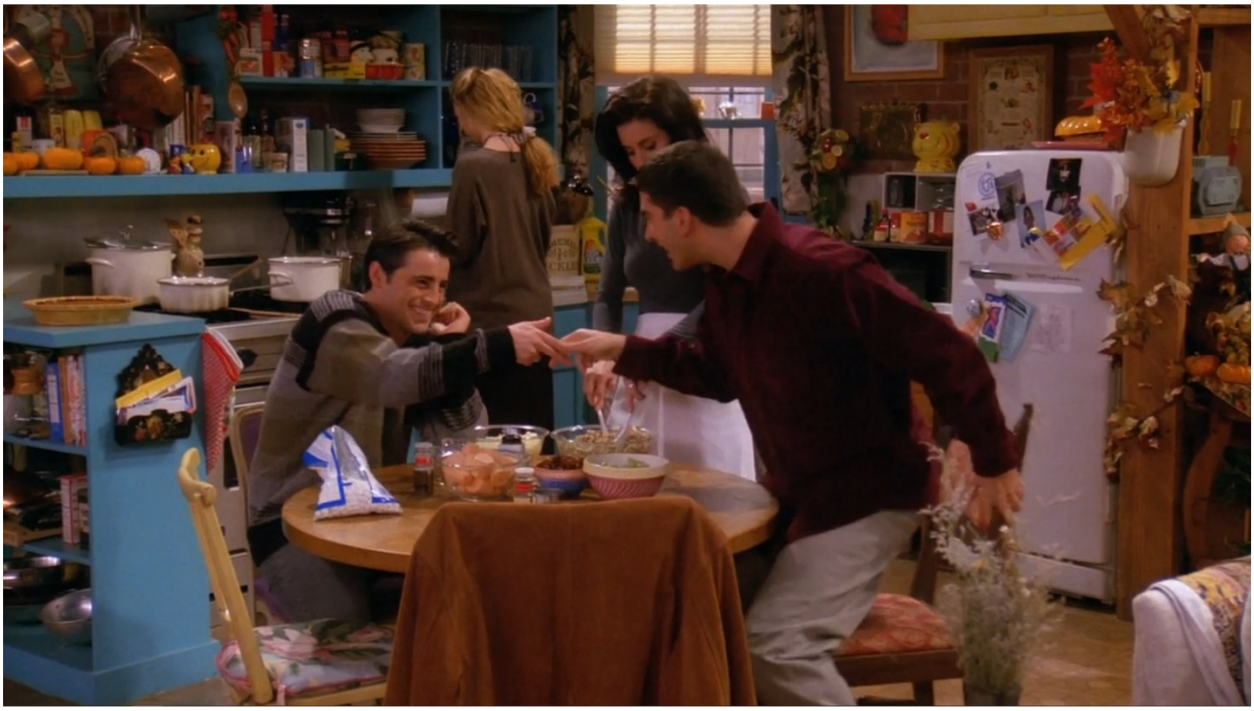

Image 13: Joey and Ross making a handshake/hand gesture ("The One Where Underdog Gets Away," 00:12:18).

through a series of interactions between the characters on the show. In this episode Phoebe calls out the guys for watching football while the women cook:

> **Phoebe:** "Hey, it's your Thanksgiving too. You know, instead of watching football, you could help."
>
> **Joey, Ross, and Chandler**: "We know" (00:00:13).

The enforced traditionality of the scene is laughed at by the laugh track, however, it suggests the audience should find it funny that the guys completely disregard Phoebe rather than let go of the traditions and help in the kitchen. This is partially due to the nature of an indirect question since

at face value, there is no question. Phoebe simply asks if they are aware of their ability to help out, and the guys agree that they know. The context makes it an indirect question for help and to participate in the activity of cooking, something that will benefit all of them. It reinforces the practice of certain masculine norms such as disregarding when women ask for help when it does not benefit them to help. It also paints a picture-perfect example of complicit masculinity that they are watching sports while not playing themselves (R. W. Connell 2005, 79).

It is a display of aggrieved entitlement that they assume household activities are not expected of them during traditional holidays. They assume that they have the right to watch sport when they want to even if the women are cooking and could use their help. Kimmel brings up a similar example of this entitlement in his book *Angry White Men* where a man describes that he physically attacked his wife because she had not cooked dinner for him when he expected her to (188-189). While they do not engage in any physical aggression towards Phoebe, their reply to her is indifferent to her request.

This traditional female role is repeated when they play sports together in the same episode just mentioned. The characters agree to play rugby and split into two groups with Monica, Phoebe, and Joey on one team, and Rachel, Ross, and Chandler on another. Rachel is treated as an unfit player since she is not used to playing sports and does not understand the rules, and is told to "go very long" (00:07:20) which excludes her from the game and feeds into the idea that girls cannot play sports games. Phoebe is allowed to participate but is repeatedly shown as an inefficient player compared to the three male characters such as her attempted of tackling Ross (00:13:08), and later lifting her top, exposing her breasts, to distract the guys (00:17:29). Monica, on the other hand, is shown as competitive and capable of playing the game including tackling Chandler (00:12:27), to the point she expresses traits not otherwise associated

with a femininity. She is aggressive and loud towards Ross and asserts control over her team, something that she is otherwise denied by hegemonic masculinity.

Phoebe's performance of femininity during this scene caters to a hegemonic masculinity understanding of women rather than an empowerment of women. It feeds into a stereotype that women cannot play sports and that if they do, they have to objectify themselves to win the game. Whitehead describes: "She does not cognitively choose to sexually objectify herself; she has internalised the options and subconsciously accepted to comply with the demands made by males with power over her, and by implication, power over her sexuality" (159). Even if Phoebe decides to lift her top without being asked to do so, the act itself objectifies her.

Aggrieved entitlement puts men in a certain position to expect women to be acting for them rather for themselves. Often, men do not feel they have power over women because they view other men as having more power over women: "Men often theorize from that second hierarchy, more painfully aware of the power they don't have and that other men do" (M. Kimmel 2012, 185). Thus, their entitlement can come from a place of expecting that women act for them; and they have a right to enforce certain behaviors and expectations on women.

In the episode "The One in Vegas", following Phoebe's example, Rachel decides to walk around naked in her own home as an experiment of self-expression. Ross lives in the apartment building opposite of the one Monica and Rachel live in, and he can see into their apartment from his apartment. He realizes Rachel is walking around naked and in his inner dialogue, he concludes she is naked just for him: "That's Rachel naked. I can't be looking at that… unless she wants me to be looking at that. She knows I'm home. She knows I can see her. What kind of game is she playing? I think maybe someone's lonely tonight" (00:08:40). His expectation that she is teasing him for the sake of getting him to have sex with her is aggrieved entitlement.

Rachel has not spoken about or shown interested in sex with him up to this point; the whole sexual game is something he imagines because she is a woman, and he wants to have sex with her. But instead of making it seem like he is forcing that on her, he tries to make it so that she is asking for it. While the show frames Ross' thinking as a joke and not something that men should think since he is rejected, it still shows it as a normal and expected part of masculinity.

This is further emphasized in the episode "The One with a Chick and a Duck," Rachel needs Ross' help to change as she has bruised her ribs and cannot change herself. When she asks him to turn around, Ross reacts with surprise when she does not want him to see her naked. He reacts by teasing her:

**Ross:** "Rach, you know, I can see you naked anytime I want."

**Rachel:** "What?"

**Ross:** "All I have to do is close my eyes. See? Woohoo."

Rachel: "Ross, stop that! Come on. I don't want you to think about me like that anymore."

**Ross:** "Uh, sorry. Nothing you can do about it. It's one of my rights as the ex-boyfriend" (00:14:32).

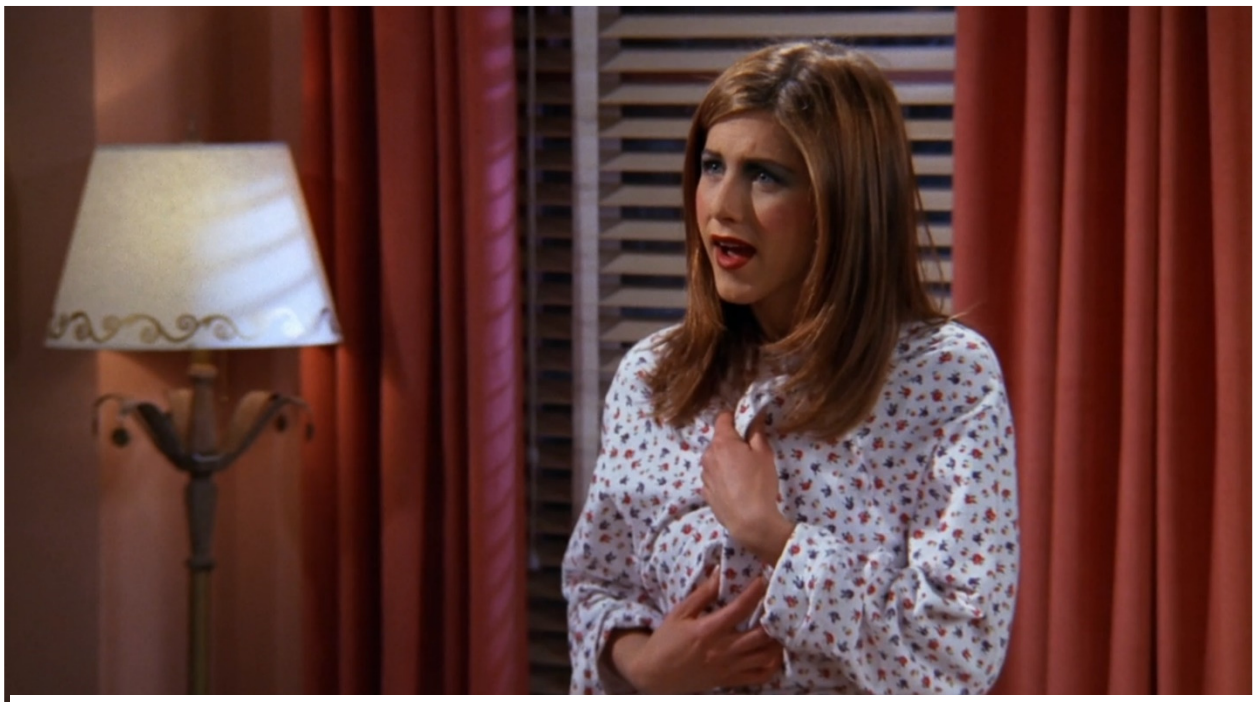

Image 14: Rachel grabbing her clothes tighter when Ross teases that he can see her naked anytime he wants ("The One with a Chick and a Duck," 00:14:09).

As seen in image 14, Rachel reacts by grabbing her clothes tighter and acting disgusted by Ross' teasing. The fact that she feels uncomfortable with Ross teasing that he can imagine her naked at any time and he continues to tease her with it, speaks of Ross' entitlement. The power dynamic is clear here: They are no longer dating but Ross feels he 'has the right' to imagine her naked whenever he wants since he has already seen her naked. It does not matter how she feels about it, she just has to accept it. Even when she agrees to undress in front of him, he continues to sexualize her by teasing her. It leans on the aggrieved entitlement that men have the right to comment on women's bodies simply because those bodies belong to them according to hegemonic masculinity; without women's bodies, they cannot conceptualize themselves as masculine.

*Emotional Detachment*

This section will continue to define the characteristics of toxic masculinity as outlined by Sharon Bird, specifically 'emotional detachment', and how this applies to the three male leads' behavior in the series. I will focus on the interactions between the characters and analyse whether their interactions reinforce hegemonic ideals of masculinity through lack of expressing feelings and withholding emotions. Towards the end I briefly touch on Bird's definition of competition between men. This is because the section is so short that it could not justify its own heading as the show does not have many instances of competitiveness.

Stoic behaviors are praised by hegemonic masculinity as signs of self-control, and assertiveness, competitiveness, and domination are traits considered to be expressions of control from within and in social interactions. Bird suggests that homosocial groups offer feedback and reinforcements for men to develop their self-concept of masculinity. Without this, men risk social disadvantages and possible punishments such as becoming excluded from the social group, loss of self-esteem in reflection of how other men view them. This behavior is also seen in marginalized groups (Bird 127-128). As Connell suggests, few men may actually have internalized expectations of stoic behavior and adhere to them, while Bird suggests that men must at least have the concept internalized in order to understand and acknowledge the standards to which they are held accountable to (122). As Way noted, adolescent boys experience a significant loss as they go through high school where most boys go from emotionally open to emotionally closed by the time, they reach adolescence (Way 2013, 209).

The three male leads on the show did not as such exhibit emotional detachment to a strong degree. In fact, the show often attempts to negotiate with the idea that men are supposed to embody stoicism. While the characters on the show poke fun at each whenever they become

too sensitive or express too much femininity, they do not as such discourage each other from emotions either. The foundation of the show is rather rocky regarding this particular characteristic, nevertheless, there are some noteworthy examples where the show frames emotional vulnerability as negative, and others where the show embraces it.

Emotional vulnerability is both praised and rejected during the show. Research has found that men would like to express their vulnerable feelings and affection more than they are currently able to but negative connotations with femininity and the fear of social punishment prevent them from doing so (Migliaccio 228). The show's main male characters do not seem to carry this burden as heavily as hegemonic masculinity would have wished upon them perhaps because they are friends, and the show centralizes on their interactions and everyday life. They seek advice from each other rather than gender specific peers. For example, in the episode "The One with Ross's New Girlfriend," Joey is the one to comfort and encourage Rachel to tell Ross how she feels about him despite having no gain in sight (00:15:18).

Typically, hegemonic masculinity would dictate that men only engage with women emotionally if they are in a relationship with them or have the chance of getting sex since sexual prowess gains them social capital. And he does take the opportunity to point out his numerous sexual encounters: "Look, Rach, Rach, I've been with my share of women. In fact, I've been with a lot of people's share of women. But the point is, I've never felt about anyone the way Ross felt about you" (00:15:55). His humorous note on his sexual prowess serves to brag about it and show off pride but it also serves to give him some credibility in this scene. It gives the impression that while he has many relationships, he has not had any with emotional depth, and he praises her for having a deeper connection with Ross.

Emotional attachment and vulnerability with women are not traits Joey encompasses, but they are traits he expresses a desire for. This is expressed earlier in the series where he talks to Chandler about his worry about not falling in love after his father cheats on his mother: “I always figured when the right one comes along, I'd be able to be a standup guy and go the distance. Now I'm looking at my dad, thinking…” (“The One with the Boobies”; 00:13:09). Although Joey’s character is praised for his sexual prowess, he also wants to find someone whom he connects deeper with than just physically. Marriage is part of hegemonic masculinity since it establishes social capital to have a family in comparison to being single, and Joey fears he will not fit into this standard when he grows older. It reinforces the idea that while men should aim for sexual interactions with women, getting married and having children are also important aspects of hegemonic masculinity.

Intimacy on the show is treated with ambivalence, much like most of the other categories that has been mentioned so far. This is especially clear when it comes to platonic intimacy between the guys. In the episode: “The One with the Boobies”, Chandler and Joey are sleeping

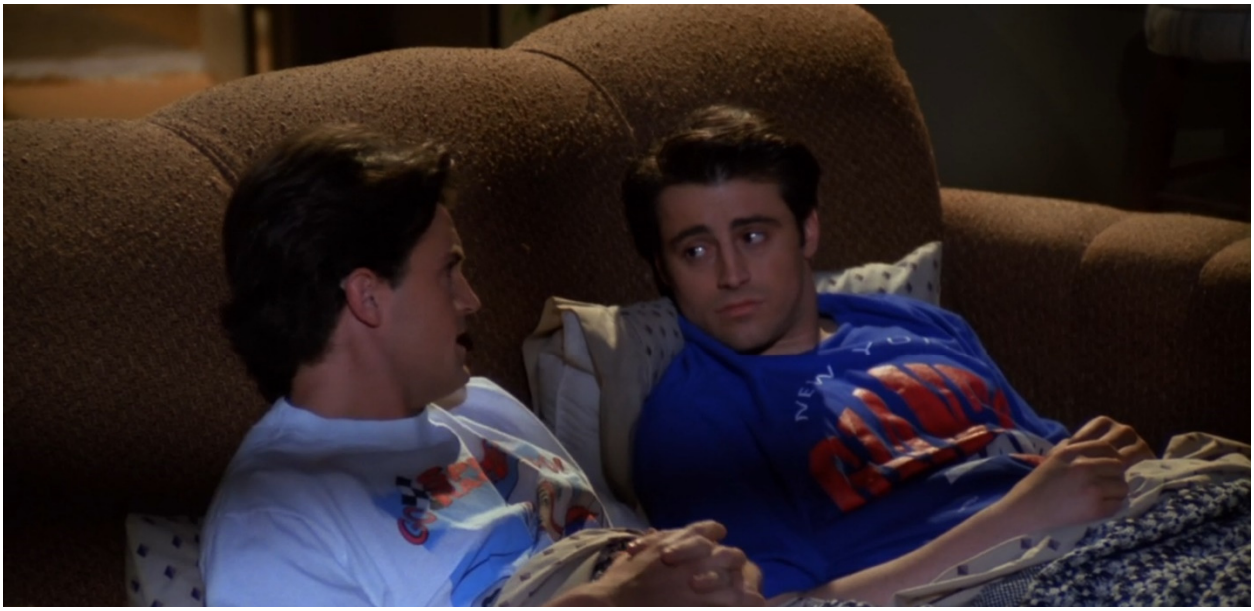

Image 15: Chandler and Joey sitting on a couch which has been converted to a bed with blankets, talking together (“The One with the Boobies,” 00:13:32).

together on the couch because Joey's parents are visiting and cannot sleep in the same room due to his father cheating on his mother. After a vulnerable discussion about intimacy and Joey's desire to one day marry instead of only having one-night stands, Chandler comforts him by reminding him things he has done differently in comparison to his father. The mise-en-scène of the scene frames the discussion as a pillow talk scene between a couple. This is enhanced by their topic of choice; not only are they sharing a bed together, but they are also talking about intimate things and expressing vulnerability with each other. After this conversation, Joey thanks Chandler and leans onto his shoulder as if he would want to cuddle with him to which Chandler quickly remarks: "Get off" (00:13:44), marking the end of the vulnerability.

Joey's attempt to lean on Chandler's shoulder crosses the line of how intimate the two of them can be in the situation. Chandler's rejection helps establish them both as heterosexual since their topic of choice was too intimate for two men to discuss; Joey's insecurity of his own future is a deviance from emotional detachment, and Chandler's comfort is a deviation from the fear of femininity since emotional work is considered women's work (Way 2011, 213). While the scene is a portrayal of vulnerability in masculinity and sets an example of how to reestablish oneself after it, it still perpetrates hegemonic masculinity because it portrays that if men engage in vulnerable conversations with each other, they must reestablish their heterosexuality afterwards.

A similar scene happens in “The One with the Nap Partners” where Joey and Ross fall asleep together on the couch after watching a movie together. In this instance, Ross is framed as the more feminine of the two as he takes the position of the woman while Joey remains framed

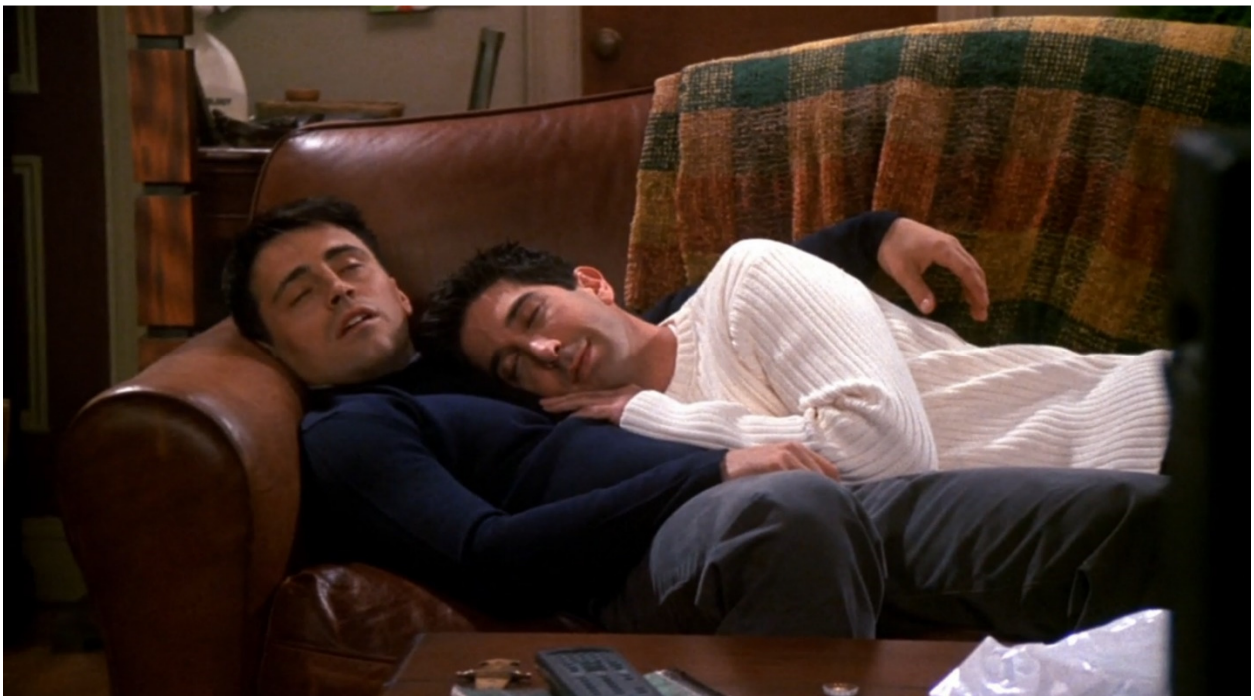

Image 16: Joey and Ross sleeping together on a couch (“The One with the Nap Partners,” 00:04:34).

as masculine due to his body language as seen in image 16. When they wake up and realize they are napping together, they react with disgust and horror to highlight that their intimacy is forbidden.

It frames napping together as too intimate for heterosexual men to do together. The show also focuses on this and frames it as if it was a sexual encounter which can be seen by their mutual shame: “We fell asleep. That is all” (00:04:48). They treat the situation with the same shame related to a drunken sexual encounter. The laugh track serves to enforce this shame as well since it enhances the characters’ behavior toward each other.

Later, when Joey wants to bring up that they napped together, Ross rejects that it happened or that he liked it.

**Joey:** "That was the best nap I've ever had."

**Ross:** "I don't know what you're talking about" (00:08:29).

Ross is ashamed of the experience because it deviates from hegemonic masculinity, but Joey embraces deviance of hegemonic masculinity by admitting he liked their nap because platonic touch, especially intimate platonic touch between male friends, is considered too feminine and they risk becoming subordinated by other men. During the end credits, this is exactly what happens as they fall asleep together but wake up to Chandler, Monica, Phoebe, and Rachel watching them. When they wake up and realize they are being watched, Joey reacts:

**Joey:** "Dude, what the hell are you doing? God!"

**Ross:** "Excuse me" (00:20:50).

Joey's reaction and the words he chooses to leave the situation makes him the one acted upon rather than the one acting, which frames Ross as the one transgressing rather than both of them. The shame Ross expresses by whispering 'excuse me' as he takes his jacket and leaves highlights the transgression of hegemonic masculinity. The scene is framed similarly to if they had had sex since both activities are very intimate and the shame expressed is also similar. Furthermore, the laugh track which also cheers during this scene underlines that while the show does embrace certain vulnerable actions between friends, other actions are still considered too feminine to be framed as positive. By including the end credit scene, the show successfully restores both characters to complicit masculinities as they feel ashamed for sleeping together.

Emotional detachment for hegemonic masculinity stems from the stereotype that women are emotional, irrational and not in control of their emotions (Sweet 855). This is highlighted in

the show as well when Monica ends up crying in frustration during the episode "The One where Underdog Gets away" because her first Thanksgiving dinner is ruined due to things outside of her control. Chandler reacts to her vulnerability by saying: "Okay Monica, only dogs can hear you now, so… look, the door's open. Here we go" (00:17:52). His lack of empathy for her situation is funny because Monica's emotions are considered excessive and irrational. Chandler is not the only character who perpetrates this stereotype of women. In "The One with the Bullies," Monica is frustrated with her job opportunities and expresses her frustration. Instead of supporting her through her struggles, she is instead forced into the traditional stereotype of a housewife to break her vulnerability:

**Joey:** "Monica, relax. Go get a beer."

**Monica:** "I don't want a beer!"

**Joey:** "Who said it was for you?" (00:04:13).

Joey's lack of emotional support also makes him embody the aggrieved entitlement that he carries. While the humor is the absurdity of Joey's request for a beer rather than offering her comfort through a cold beverage, it heavily leans on the stereotype that men can expect women to bring them what they ask for. The power dynamic between men and women which aggrieved entitlement uses to make men feel like they have the right to order women around or harm them.

However, emotional vulnerability among the male characters is also met with humor from the other characters. In the episode "The One Where Chandler Can't Remember Which Sister," Chandler expresses feeling upset that he saw Janice with her husband, and he feels heartbroken because of that. Instead of expressing empathy, Joey takes the opportunity to reminiscence about his own experiences:

**Joey:** "Man I remember the first time I saw that girl Katherine after we broke up. She was just walking with her friend Donna, just laughing and talking… God, it killed me."

**Chandler:** "Yes, but you ended up having sex with both of them that afternoon."

**Joey:** "Sorry just… any excuse to tell that story" (00:03:01).

The choice to use humor to cover up Chandler's vulnerability is partially done to cheer him up and partially done to avoid emasculating him and the other men in the room. As masculinity is created and maintained in relation to women and in the presence of other men, Joey's choice to strengthen his own masculinity by bragging about sexual prowess shifts the focus from Chandler's feelings to the competition among them to have sex. It reinforces heteronormative standards of hegemonic masculinity through rejecting vulnerability in men.

Men whose marriage does not work out because their wife found out she is a lesbian or bisexual often experience less support than the women during the breakup and the time after (Buxton 24). They describe that they experience their own 'coming out' process as they processed their wives' sexuality in relation to their children and in relation to themselves (41-43). Ross too experiences a lack of emotional support from his peers especially in regards to his broken marriages. In "The One with George Stephanopoulos," Ross is sent to the emergency room after an injury. Throughout this episode, Ross has mourned his lost relationship to Susan and repeatedly reminded his friends of anything that reminds him of his first night with Carol. Chandler, exasperated asks: "What? What is it? That she left you? That she likes women? That she left you for a woman who likes women?" (00:17:01) to which Ross replies: "A little louder. I think there's a man on the 12$^{th}$ floor in a coma who didn't quite hear you" (00:17:03). Chandler's reaction to Ross is understandable with the context; Ross has spent a day out with his friends mourning his relationship and finding every reason to talk about it. However, Joey and

Chandler's reaction to Ross' mourning is to ridicule his need to talk about his ex-relationship. It is only after he admits the underlying issue that his friends express sympathy for him and acknowledge his feelings.

Vulnerability in a romantic relationship is expected for hegemonic masculinity. Adolescent men express that the reason they seek out a girlfriend and abandon friends is because girlfriends can do emotional work for them: "It's more of an emotional relationship with a female" (Way 2011, 213). While stoicism is associated with hegemonic masculinity and shows itself as early as the school years for boys (Oransky and Marecek), romantic relationships are the one place men are allowed to show some vulnerability.

In the episode: "The One Where Chandler Can't Cry," the main characters discuss Bambi, the cartoon movie by Disney, and Chandler admits he did not cry during it while everyone else in the room says they did. The reaction from his friends is opposite of what hegemonic masculinity would expect of them:

**Chandler:** "I guess I just never really cried. I'm not a crying kind of guy."

**Joey:** "Come on man, there's gotta be something that gets you choked up."

**Chandler:** "No. Look, I don't cry. It's not a big deal, okay?"

**Joey:** "No. It's not okay. It's not okay at all. You're dead inside" (00:05:33).

The negative reaction Chandler gets for his stoicism is the opposite of what hegemonic masculinity would dictate. Chandler's lack of emotional vulnerability would typically be praised by hegemonic masculinity but is not in this situation, and it becomes a negative thing because Joey also cried during Bambi. Joey's choice of words that he is 'dead inside' points to a possibility of too much stoicism between men and that Joey does not consider it a positive trait that Chandler is incapable of crying.

In reaction to his friends reacting to him with negativity when he admits that he does not cry by nature, is to attempt to make himself cry. The motivation likely lies in Joey's reaction more than the women's reaction since masculinity is formed in the presence with other men, and Joey is his best friend. But it partially also lies with Monica since he is in a romantic relationship with her and losing her approval would damage his relationship. Losing his relationship to her would damage his masculinity and thus make him lose social reputation. Monica finds him reading a book that she enjoys because it makes her emotional, and asks him why he reads it:

> **Monica:** "Why are you reading this stuff? You hate this kind of stuff."
>
> **Chandler:** "Yeah I know but I figured I'd give it a shot. Maybe one of those stories would make me cry. Then you wouldn't think I'm all dead inside" (00:12:36).

His attempt to remedy his lack of emotional vulnerability is surprising given that according to hegemonic masculinity, he is more masculine than his friends for not showing any emotional vulnerability. However, Monica's disapproval of his lack of emotions and hence coming off as cold is a risk to his relationship and for that reason he attempts to fix something that would otherwise gain him social capital. It goes to show that while the show often highlights hegemonic masculinity and emotional detachment as positive, there are times where the show encourages its audience to embrace vulnerability as part of masculinity as well.

Emotional attachment can also be used as a manipulative tactic and under the surface be emotional abuse. Gaslighting is a way to use a person's knowledge against them by dismissing their knowledge and calling them or their source crazy or wrong despite knowing that this knowledge might be factually true. It is a term that has gained public attention the last couple of years, and while psychologists have put much focus on this term, sociology points to this term as broader issue than just emotional manipulation: "gaslighting is effective when it is rooted in

social inequalities, especially gender and sexuality, and executed in power-laden intimate relationships" (Sweet 852). Furthermore, scholars propose that gaslighting as an abuse tactic draws from a greater imbalance than just intimacy between partners, but that it is intrinsically intertwined with gender and how femininity is constructed: "gaslighting is gendered due to the association of femininity with irrationality, which makes women more vulnerable to this form of abuse" (857).

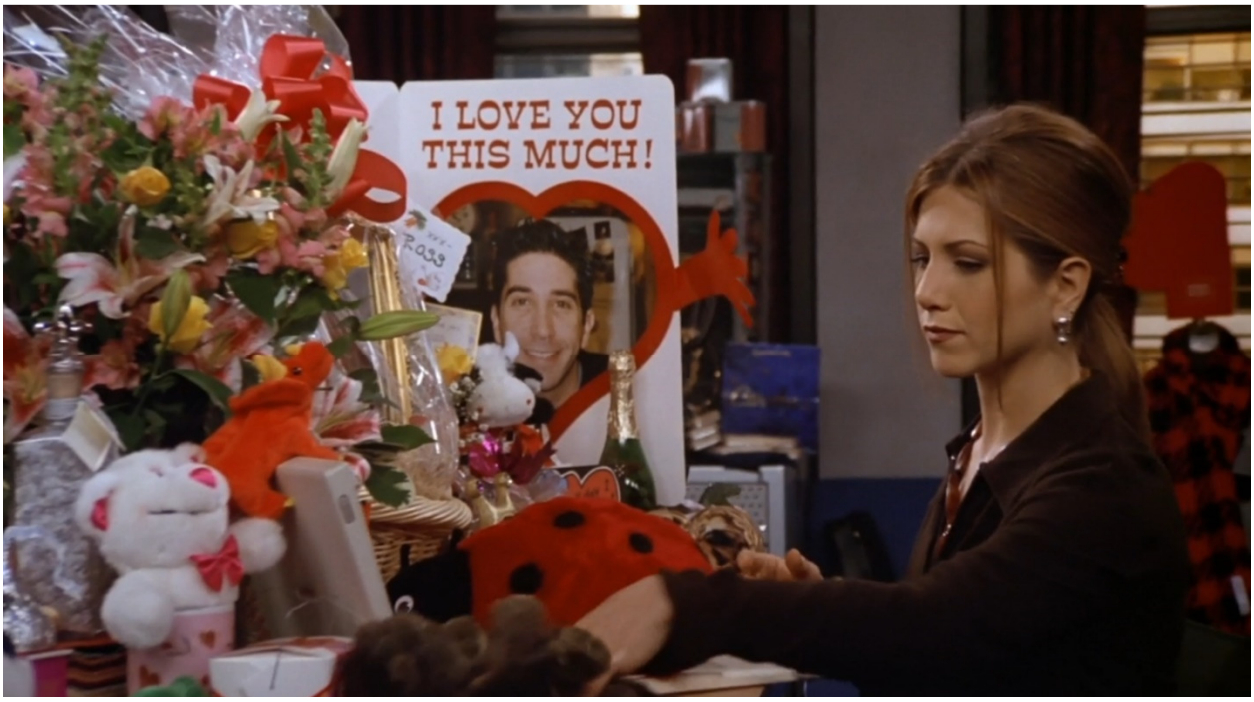

Image 17: Rachel sits at her desk with numerous plushies, flowers, and letters sent by Ross ("The One with All the Jealousy," 00:10:20).

On *Friends*, gaslighting is used sparingly. After all, it is a very dark to include emotional abuse as a theme in a series about being a young adult and the everyday life of six friends. However, there is a scene where aggrieved entitlement causes Ross to cross into the territory of emotional violence. In the episode "The One with All the Jealousy," Ross sends a number of gifts to Rachel's workplace including a 'love bug' and barber quartet. While this seems like a sweet gesture, the underlying cause of Ross' intense jealousy is due to Rachel's

new job and, primarily, her coworker, Mark. Rachel and Mark have a good friendship together and Rachel is happy about having found a coworker she gets along with. Ross' extensive number of gifts strongly underline these gifts are from him and sent as an act of love as seen in image 17.

Up until this point, Rachel believes Ross is expressing deep love for her rather than establishing his territory. On face value, this does seem to be exactly what he is doing. The mise-en-scène does not have anything that explicitly states that establishes that Ross is attempting to ensure Rachel's coworker knows he is her boyfriend. It is the excessiveness that establishes this; it interferes with her work and her ability to speak to her coworkers without reminding them she is in a relationship. Her coworker Mark says: "Wow, somebody wants people to know you have a boyfriend" (00:10:41) in a teasing tone. However, Rachel attempts to defend Ross until the

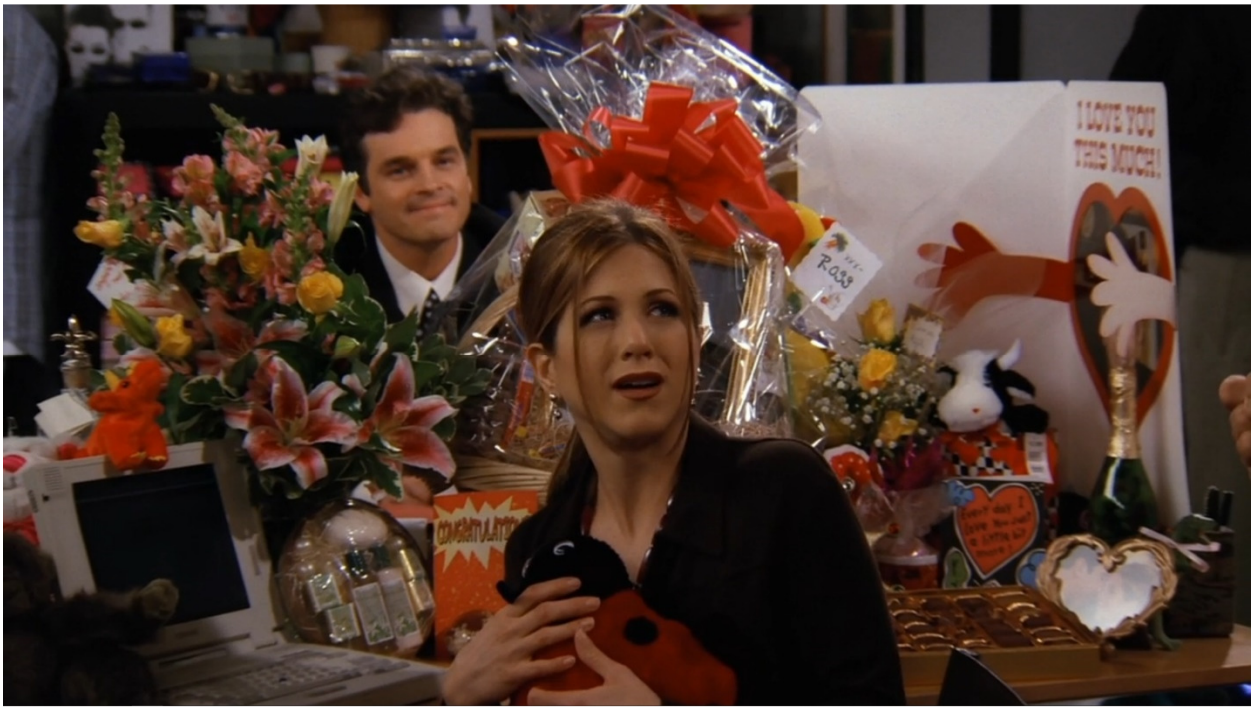


Image 18: Rachel looking at the barbershop quartet while trying to smile. In the background is Ross' numerous gifts and Mark, her coworker watching the quartet ("The One with All the Jealousy," 00:10:57).

barbershop quartet breaks the illusion for her. Her facial expression establishes she feels ashamed and struggles to find it endearing (00:10:59):

In the next scene, Rachel confronts Ross with his extensive gift giving behavior. Ross reaction is: “I’m hurt. I’m actually hurt that you would think I would send you any of those things out of anything other than love. Hurt. Hurt. Can’t a guy send a barbershop quartet to his girlfriend’s office anymore?” (00:11:32). At face value, Ross is genuinely hurt that Rachel misunderstood his intentions as harmful and obsessive. However, his tone of voice changes what his words mean. He uses sarcasm when he asks: “Can’t a guy send a barbershop quartet to his girlfriend’s office anymore?”, as the tone is not one of a genuine question. Rather, he speaks down to her in a passive-aggressive manner that frames her feelings about the situation as excessive and crazy. He indirectly asks: “How dare you think I am obsessive and controlling, can you not see it is just love?”. His rhetorical question is not asked to allow her to explain how she feels but rather asked to show how insane she is for not approving of his way of showing her love.

To reiterate the theory, aggrieved entitled men feel like victims (M. Kimmel 2013, 17), and the entitlement stems from a belief that they deserve to use violence to control women because they themselves are losing control (189). The mise-en-scène of the scene in Rachel’s office which shows that her desk is filled with gifts and a large picture of Ross, and her later confrontation with him suggests that Ross feels out of control. His excessive need to establish that he is in her life by writing his name and sending her pictures of himself speaks of a man who does not trust that Rachel would stay with him should someone else come by. To him, this insecurity allows him to overtake her space and assert dominance over her and over other potential men in her friend circle.

While the show could not allow physical violence without losing its PG rating, gaslighting is a form of violence. This is also show as Ross walks away from her when talking about how he feels. However, by emphasizing that he is hurt, his words paint a picture that suggests he is genuinely emotionally vulnerable with her. But this picture breaks when one looks at how he says it. There is repetition of how hurt he feels, and his tone of voice is aggressive rather than apologetic. He attempts to defend himself rather than apologize for his actions. By emphasizing his feelings, he weaponizes his feelings against her and at the same time he ridicules men who do express feelings. Weaponizing his feelings is part of the act of aggrieved entitlement that he uses against her; he turns the hurt she feels against her and makes her the villain of the situation by using sarcasm and passive aggression. The entitlement is part of the way he controls her and encloses her in his love with physical objects cutting her off from her coworkers both metaphorically and physically.

Rachel's reaction to Ross is to emphasize that she has done her work on the situation: "Look, I know what's going on here, okay? Mark explained it all to me. He said this is what you guys do." In this situation, she becomes the voice of reason. She has handled the situation empirically and asked her colleague what is going on. Her intention is not to hurt Ross but to point out that his actions have hurt her, and she wants him to apologize and admit he is attempting to establish dominance over her. Ross reacts by saying: "Yeah, well, if Mark said that, then Mark's an idiot" (00:11:58). This reply establishes that Rachel's experience of the situation is wrong, and that Mark is trying to fool her into thinking otherwise. This sentence is where the gaslighting truly shines through. He tries to establish that Rachel cannot trust Mark because he lies to her, something the audience has been shown earlier is wrong.

The show's ambivalent focus on this joke makes it hard to see what exactly it is the audience is supposed to laugh at. The laugh track sets the focus of the jokes throughout the show, and it provides the best clues. The question is: Is it laughing of Ross and his obsessive and controlling behavior, or is it laughing at Rachel who finds him obsessive and controlling? When Rachel brings up that he: "might as well have come in and peed all around my desk" (00:11:42), the laugh track emphasizes that Ross' action, at least when illustrated by Rachel this way, is laughable. But whether the laugh track is played because of Ross' behavior towards her or if it is because Rachel compared it to peeing is hard to discern. When Ross replies: "I would never do that" (00:11:46), the laugh track plays again but is it laughing at Ross denying what he has done, or is it laughing at Rachel's comparison?

The laugh track is played when Ross emphasizes how hurt he is hence the audience should find his behavior so absurd that it is humoristic. It suggests the show puts emphasis on sympathy for Rachel, and frames Ross' behavior as negative and controlling. This is further supported by the laugh track playing right after the barbershop quartet finishes singing, and by Chandler's joke in a later scene: "Why don't you send her a lovebug? Oh no you already did that" (00:12:16). The show is not on Ross' side of this situation, and thus, the show does not seem to support this instance of toxic masculinity. It critiques toxic masculinity and Ross' abusive behavior and aggrieved entitlement.

In relation to aggrieved entitlement is competition which is also part of the Bird's outline of toxic masculinity. Competition is part of a hierarchy established between masculinities that exist within a society wherein the ideals of such hierarchy are established and dominated by hegemonic masculinity that is local in nature (Connell and Messerschmidt 847). As hegemonic masculinity automatically establishes lesser masculinities than itself such as complicit,

subordinated, or marginalized masculinities, competition is a natural part of this hierarchy. It allows members of the hierarchy to negotiate status and power over the others and it creates a dynamic hierarchy of masculinity with negative social consequences if its members cannot meet the expected ideals of hegemonic masculinity (848).

Establishing one's own masculinity is part of the reason why competition is such an integrated part of the hierarchy. As masculinity is not naturally part of one but given by others and maintained in the view of other masculine members. The friendship between the male characters rests upon a foundation of mutual trust and very little competition. While they do compete, it does not seem to heighten their social status among the social group but rather gain outside social status such as getting a girlfriend or having sex. However, physical prowess or the lack thereof is often a theme of jokes in the series. For example, Ross is made the joke when he complains about sport:

> **Ross:** "I don't know what the big deal is, I'm man enough to play this sport"
>
> **Joey:** "You aren't even man enough to order the channel that carries the sport"
>
> (00:08:19, "The One with All the Rugby").

Ross is not regarded as one to play sports, and this is true throughout the series. He feels intimidated by Emily's friends because they play rugby, and he sees them as a challenge to his own masculinity. This challenge does not seize to disappear for Ross as he notes in "The One with the Male Nanny":

> **Ross:** "As a kid I wasn't the athlete I am now"
>
> **Rachel: "**Ha!"
>
> **Ross:** "I play squash!" (00:29:01).

The joke centers around Ross attempting to adhere to hegemonic masculinity standards around sportiness and physical prowess, one that Ross simply fails to meet repeatedly throughout the episodes. He tries to impress a girl with his back muscles by noting that: "I guess, ahem, the more muscles you have the more they can spasm out of control" ("The One with the Cheap Wedding Dress", 00:15:48), and in another episode he feels threatened by Rachel and Phoebe who decide to take self-defense classes, so they feel safer around other men. The episode focuses on Ross who attempts to scare them into defending themselves against him, and he goes as far as to attend the self-defense class himself only to ask how he, as the attacker, would handle a woman defending herself:

> **Ross:** "I tried attacking two women. Did not work."
>
> **Instructor:** "What?"
>
> **Ross:** "No, I mean, it's okay. They're my friends. In fact, I was married to one of them"
>
> **Instructor:** "So let me get this straight. You attacked your ex-wife?
>
> **Ross:** "No. No, no. I tried. But I couldn't. That's why I'm here. Maybe we could attack them together" (00:19:06).

The humor bases itself on the absurdity that Ross feels his masculinity is threatened by two women to the point that he attends a self-defense class to ask the instructor on how to beat them. His portrayal of physical prowess is at risk, and his reaction to this is born out of aggrieved entitlement. While the instructor believes Ross means greater physical harm to his friends than Ross thinks he expresses, the show still mocks Ross' belief that he has a right to seek out tools to undermine women to empower his masculinity.

# CONCLUSION

The construction of masculinity in popular media on linear tv as well as streaming platforms such as YouTube, Netflix, HBO Max, Discovery+, and others have received much scholarly attention the past few decades (Cuklanz and Erol 545). Among those constructions are stereotypes of different masculinities and femininities, and those constructions may influence the collective stereotype of genders. Like many other television programs, *Friends* (1994-2004) is a sitcom that thrived during its prime time and received a second prime time on Netflix and later HBO Max in 2018. Its popularity on TV and streaming services warrants attention to its representation of gender, and this thesis set out to explore exactly that.

The thesis set out to analyze the representation of masculinity in *Friends* and looked for whether it is one intertwined with toxic masculinity. It argued that the show hides harmful representations of masculinity in plain sight through humor, and while it masquerades as a show with positive representations, it embraces hegemonic masculinity and enforces gender stereotypes.

Complicit masculinity is a masculinity most men inhabit since hegemonic masculinity is embodied by few in real life. In many ways, hegemonic masculinity is an ideal rather than a reality, however, this does not make it any less powerful in its dictation of the power dynamics between men and women. Gender stereotypes affect the expectation people have of others and of the world, including behavior, expected interactions, and how relationships are formed. This is problematic because polar genders restrict healthier alternatives. However, “we still script gender for boys and girls in remarkably consistent and restrictive ways, and we continue to posit the existence of only two genders” (Halberstam 118), and *Friends* did not raise the question of polar genders. However, for a show created and aired in the 1990’s, the show was progressive and inclusive on many aspects of gender such as having a same-sex couple appear semi-frequently

during the first seasons, include a wedding between same-sex, and combat the idea that lesbianism is a choice rather than a sexuality.

The show portrays its main characters Ross, Chandler, and Joey as young men who live in New York while they try to navigate through life. It steers clear of diving into hypermasculine portrayals such as seen in other Hollywood movies. However, traditionality still colors their behavior and while they do not embody the more aggressive aspects of hegemonic masculinity, they comply with many aspects of hegemonic masculinity.

While each of the three male characters enforce different aspects of hegemonic masculinity, they all embody complicit masculinity. This is seen through all three of them perpetrating hegemonic masculinity such as Ross being blind to his own aggrieved entitlement, his subordination of his girlfriend(s), ex-wives, and crushes, and his need for control over his children's gender. Or as seen through Joey who objectifies women and bases his understanding on them based on sex appeal, all the while he lacks intelligence and awareness of himself and of the complex world, he lives in, so his objectification is excused in the eyes of the show, and Chandler whose fear of femininity in other men that he often points out feminine traits in other men.

The show's compliance to discriminatory norms of masculinity is intentional, however, it remains critical of the hegemonic masculinity ideals it portrays through its complicit characters. The laugh track played after each joke informs the viewer that while the male characters portray toxic traits, this is exactly what the audience should be laughing at. Other times, the show embraces intimacy for its male characters and allows them to explore what men are missing out on if they comply with hegemonic masculinity.

Noticeably, the show lacked competitiveness in its male characters and exchanged it for support and connectivity between them. While it is not absent entirely, the characters more often compete with a general sense of masculinity or with supporting characters rather than with each other. The few times the characters engage in competitive behavior with each other it is due to jealousy, and the show's intention with their competitiveness is often to ridicule them for their engagement in it.

The show was progressive at the time it aired for including the LGBTQ+ community through Susan and Carol as a lesbian couple, and through Chandler's father who is a trans woman. However, the show received significant backlash for this inclusion during its second prime time in 2018. While the thesis did not explore the show's problematic portrayal of its one transgender character, Chandler's father, this is something that could be further analyzed in another project as the show fetishizes her and repeatedly has Chandler misgender her. It also fails to create a distinction between transgenderness and drag as a performance.

Another reason for the show's backlash in 2018 was due to its lack of presentation for people of color (Schwind and Knox 176). While this thesis did not explore race as a point of analysis, the whitewashing, and the fetishizing of women of color are not something that went unnoticed. This thesis simply did not have space to write about the lack of racial presentation and its treatment of the few people of color who appear during the show, but it is something that needs further attention in the academic field. The intersectionality between masculinity and race allows for a look into how black men create and maintain their masculinity as marginalized.

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