

“The One with Ross’s Fat Sister” : a critical discourse analytic study of
fatphobia in the TV show *Friends*

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Abstract

Research shows that visual media plays a part in reinforcing the internalization of the thin body ideal, the idealization of an extremely thin body, which can then result in the devaluation of bodies that do not fit the body ideal. This can lead to fatphobia, the social stigma of obesity. In this thesis, my aim is to examine how the TV show *Friends* (1994–2004) uses humor, language and character representation to oppress and degrade fat people and reinforce fatphobia, and how fatphobia in *Friends* is constructed through language. I will refer to fat feminist theory while using critical discourse analysis to analyze the dialogue, non-verbal communication and characters in *Friends*. My main research materials will be pre-written transcripts of selected episodes of *Friends*. I will combine the analysis of both the transcripts and the audiovisual material from the episodes. I will discuss my findings in reference to the superiority theory of laughter as well as Albert Bandura's social learning theory and the concept of observational learning through models. The findings show that *Friends* uses humor and jokes to oppress and degrade fat people and reinforce fatphobia. This is done by enforcing hurtful stereotypes, positioning fat characters as comic scapegoats, positioning fat characters as inferior to the viewers using the superiority theory of laughter, using fat characters as models of failure and creating drastic contrast and comparison between thin and fat people. Furthermore, it can be argued that *Friends* influences viewers and reinforces hatred towards fat people and thus contributes to fatphobia in society.

Tiivistelmä

Tutkimusten mukaan medialla on merkittävä rooli laihuuden ihannoinnissa ja idealisoinnissa. Laihuuden ihannointi voi johtaa siihen, ettei kehoja, jotka eivät sovi kehoihanteeseen, pidetä enää arvokkaina. Tämä voi pahimmillaan johtaa 'fatfobiaan', lihavuuspelkoon, eli lihaviin ihmisiin kohdistuvaan syrjintään, kielteisiin ennakkoluuloihin sekä perusteettomiin, negatiivisiin asenteisiin. Tavoitteeni on tutkia, miten TV-sarja *Frendit* (1994–2004) käyttää huumoria, kieltä ja hahmoja luodakseen ja tukeakseen haitallisia stereotypioita ja ennakkoluuloja lihavia ihmisiä kohtaan, vahvistaakseen lihavien ihmisten kohtaamaa syrjintää, sekä heikentääkseen heidän asemaansa yhteiskunnassa. Käytän kehofeminististä teoriaa sekä kriittistä diskurssianalyysiä analysoidessani *Frendit*-sarjan jaksojen dialogia, kehonkieltä ja hahmoja. Pääasiallinen tutkimusmateriaalini on puhtaaksi kirjoitetut transkriptiot valituista *Frendit*-jaksoista, joita analysoin yhdessä jaksojen audiovisuaalisen materiaalin kanssa. Tarkastelen analyysiäni naurun paremmusteoriaan sekä Albert Banduran kehittämän sosiaalisen oppimisen teoriaan viitaten. Tulokset osoittavat, että *Frendit* käyttää huumoria ja vitsejä vahvistaakseen fatfobiaa vahvistamalla haitallisia stereotypioita, luomalla lihavien ihmisten painoon liittyvää komiikkaa, luomalla illuusion katsojista ylempi- ja lihavista hahmoista alempiarvoisina, käyttämällä lihavia hahmoja epäonnistumisen malleina sekä asettamalla lihavat ja laihat henkilöhahmot vastakkain vertaillakseen heitä keskenään, vain ylistääkseen laihoja henkilöhahmoja ja halventaakseen lihavia henkilöhahmoja. Voidaan siis väittää, että *Frendit* käyttää vaikutusvaltaansa katsojiinsa lisäämällä ennakkoluuloja ja negatiivisia asenteita lihavia ihmisiä kohtaan, siten edistäen fatfobiaa yhteiskunnassa.

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1. Introduction

The Eurocentric beauty standard has emphasized thinness and petite size for decades. According to a study by Nichter and Nichter (1991, pp. 260-261), ethnographic interviews with adolescent girls showed the majority of the participants perceived their 'ideal girl' as "being 5'7", 110 pounds, a size 5, with long blonde hair and big blue eyes". Another common trait of an ideal girl is that she "eats whatever she wants and never gains weight" (ibid.). Many studies have shown that this ideal body image is reinforced by many social influences, such as family, peers and schools (Smolak & Levine 1996; Thompson & Stice, 2001), but according to Groesz et al. (2002), the mass media, especially visual media, like television, is the number one most aggressive and influential reinforcer of this narrative.

This standard of beauty is harmful because it is unattainable to most people. Some people are naturally thin and fit the beauty standard, but due to genetics and the physiology of weight regulation, only a few people can shape their bodies into the idealized thin shape. This essentially unattainable ideal of beauty can cause severe body image concerns, self-esteem issues and depression. The results of a study by Polivy and Herman (1999) revealed that participants who attempted to diet and lose weight became more depressed and their self-images and self-esteem remained well below those who did not attempt to diet. In another study conducted by Harrison et al. (2006, p. 252), female participants were shown slides depicting images of slender female models from visual mass media. The participants were offered food and their behavior was observed. The results showed that women who were exposed to ideal-body images with text related to dieting, ate less than others, and the researchers concluded that if a woman was exposed to the ideal-body media such as television programming, "she may be moved to abstain from eating several times a day even when she is hungry, resulting in significant weight loss over time". These results therefore suggest that being exposed to the harmful ideal of beauty can also result in disordered eating.

All different types of media are reflections of their own time. They preserve the atmosphere, ideologies and attitudes of their age and reflect the mainstream culture. Looking back at conventional mainstream entertainment can give us important information about the past and the ability to reflect on the development of our society. The media of interest in this study is an

American TV sitcom *Friends*, which aired from 1994 to 2004 and has had a major impact on mainstream culture. *Friends* has been celebrated for its humor and comedy throughout the history of the show, but looking back, today's critical viewers realize some of the jokes were seriously problematic. *Friends* has successfully dealt with some taboo subjects, such as same-sex marriage and surrogacy, but marginalized groups, like fat people, were unfortunately the laughing stock more often than not.

The way *Friends* represents non-hegemonic bodies has been subject to criticism for decades. The representation of fatness in *Friends* is extremely harmful, the most memorable example of all being Fat Monica, the younger version of one of the main characters, who is a caricature of a fat person. *Friends'* cast is not very body inclusive, since the main cast mainly consists of thin people who fit the beauty standard, and thus can be argued to have been reinforcing the internalization of a thin media ideal. Several studies have shown that increased exposure to TV shows like *Friends* has been linked to body image issues amongst young girls (Bissell & Zhou, 2004; Fouts & Burggraf, 1999; Greenwood, 2009).

In this thesis, my aim is to examine how *Friends* uses humor, language and character representation to oppress and degrade fat people and reinforce fatphobia, and how fatphobia in *Friends* is constructed through language. Fatphobia refers to the social stigma of obesity, broadly defined as bias targeted at overweight and obese people because of their weight. Fatphobia is a matter of social inequality, and this thesis aims to highlight the significance of this issue. I will refer to fat feminist theory while using critical discourse analysis to analyze the dialogue, non-verbal communication and characters in *Friends*.

2. Theoretical and methodological background

This section introduces fat feminism as the theoretical framework of this thesis and critical discourse analysis as the method of analysis. Since critical discourse analysis is not a specific direction of research, it does not have a unitary theoretical framework. However, by grounding it in the fat feminist theory, I am able to examine the discourse surrounding fat bodies as well as the way fat characters are represented in *Friends*.

2.1. Fat feminism

Fat feminism is a feminist movement which intersects misogyny and sexism with anti-fat bias. The origins of fat feminism date back to the late 1960s, and it is commonly viewed as a product of third-wave feminism. After the first fat feminist work, Susie Orbach's self-help book, *Fat is a Feminist Issue* (1978), feminist researchers, Fikkan and Rothblum began to draw attention to issues related to fat women, who are subjugated to bias, discrimination and abuse only because they are fat women. Fat feminism recognizes and criticizes the discrimination against non-skinny bodies and the gendered nature of weight preoccupation. According to Fikkan and Rothblum (2012, p. 575), these issues are rooted in "the social constraints placed on women's autonomy and patriarchal devaluation of all things feminine", including fat bodies. Bound Alberti (2021) argues that the gendering of women's appetites and consumption of food, in particular, has been linked to discourses on womanhood that have at their core a relationship between morality, sexual control and desire and in particular, having negative effects on them.

There have been many studies addressing the severity of fatphobia. Hayran et al. (2013, p. 149) conducted a study where they examined attitudes towards obese people among a sample of university students in Turkey. The researchers used the short form of the fatphobia scale, which is a questionnaire consisting of 14 pairs of adjectives used to negatively describe fat people. Each pair is then scored on a 1-5 scale, thus determining the participants beliefs and feelings towards fat people. Among the highest scoring adjectives were expressions such as "slow", "insecure", and "no willpower". The results of their questionnaire showed that fatphobia is very common among university students, especially among female students. Needless to say, fatphobia leads to hurtful bias towards fat people; the more people believe these stereotypes and have these negative attitudes, the more fat people are oppressed in society.

2.2. Critical discourse analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a problem-oriented discourse analytical approach with a primary focus on the way social-power abuse and inequality are enacted, reproduced, legitimated, and resisted by discourse. In other words, CDA examines the way power abuse of one group over others is conducted through language. The aim of CDA is to understand, expose, and ultimately challenge social inequality. The origins of CDA date back to the end of the 1970s

to when its current focus on language and discourse was initiated by critical linguistics. (Van Dijk, 2001, p. 464) CDA is a combination of linguistic analysis of text and multimodal analysis of the different semiotic modes, such as language, visual images, body language, music and sound effects as well as their articulation (Fairclough, 2013, p. 7). Critical discourse analysis differs from discourse analysis by connecting the study of mere discourse structures to societal problems and political issues.

According to Fairclough and Wodak (1997), discourse is socially constitutive as well as socially conditioned, meaning it can help produce and reproduce unequal power relations through the ways in which they represent things and position people. In unequal power relations, people in dominant social groups have the power and the ability to control the acts and minds of other people who represent the dominated group. The power of said dominant groups can be integrated in the society's laws, rules, norms and habits, and thus take the form of hegemony (Van Dijk, 2001, p. 469). Hegemony is a notion developed by Antonio Gramsci in his work *Prison Writings*. According to Gramsci, hegemony is the "cultural, moral and ideological" leadership of a group over other, subaltern groups (de Orellana, 2015, para. 3).

The social phenomenon of focus in this thesis is fatphobia, the social stigma of obesity. In general, non-skinny bodies are considered non-hegemonic, meaning they are viewed as inferior to skinny bodies. In this thesis, I will be using fat feminist theory as the theory of power and combine it with critical discourse analysis in order to analyze the ways in which discourse is internalized in power and power is internalized in discourse. The main focus of the analysis is character analysis, along with analysis of the character's dialogue, word choices and phrases. In other words, I aim to analyze the dialectical relations between discourse and power; the discourse and semiotic modes of *Friends* and the representation of non-hegemonic bodies.

3. Research materials

My main research materials will be pre-written transcripts of selected episodes of *Friends*. In my analysis, I will combine the analysis of both the transcripts and the audiovisual material from the episodes. In this section, I will first introduce the series in general as well as present my source for the pre-written transcripts.

3.1. Friends

Friends is an American sitcom, created by David Crane and Marta Kauffman. The show was produced by Bright/Kauffman/Crane productions in association with Warner Bros. It aired on NBC from September 22nd, 1994 to May 6th, 2004, for ten seasons altogether, including a total of 236 episodes. *Friends* was recorded in front of a studio audience and the audience's laughter and reactions are included in the scenes. The show engaged a huge audience and has been celebrated for its significant cultural impact. *Friends* has later been subject to lots of scholarly analysis and studies, the topics ranging from humor strategies and social gender norms to body image issues.

The main characters of the show are six friends in their twenties living in New York: Ross Geller (David Schwimmer), Monica Geller (Courtney Cox), Rachel Green (Jennifer Aniston), Chandler Bing (Matthew Perry), Joey Tribbiani (Matt LeBlanc), and Phoebe Buffay (Lisa Kudrow). Monica went to high school with Rachel, and growing up, Rachel was a snobby, popular girl and Monica was her weird fat friend. Monica's younger self appears in the series as Fat Monica. Later Monica lost most of her weight, but even years after high school, Fat Monica is constantly the butt of the joke. Later in the series, Monica and Chandler fall in love and get married.

Friends was created and shot from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s and is of course a reflection of its own time. *Friends* is a comedy series known and loved for its humor. However, looking back, today's viewers take notice of the show's questionable and slightly problematic jokes.

3.2. Transcripts

The transcripts used in this thesis are from a website called Lives in a Box¹, the name being a reference to a joke in the *Friends* series. The website is a *Friends* fan site, with a lot of fan-made content related to the show, including full scripts for all the episodes in the series. The scripts are not original scripts used in the show, but are transcribed by fans. The front-page credits Eric Aasen, whereas the transcripts all credit different people as transcribers. The original episodes were written by different professional screenwriters who are credited as well.

¹ <https://www.livesinabox.com/friends/scripts.shtml>

The transcripts consist of the original dialogue of each *Friends* episode in written form, including notes about the actors' actions, expressions, and tone. Some transcripts include lines and scenes that have been later cut from the show. Italics indicate that the scene is set in a throwback, and bold indicates intonation. In each extract, the season and episode number are indicated in the extract title. For clarity, I have made some additions to the transcripts, for example included notions of audience reactions, such as the laugh track (“**LAUGHTER**”) and further comments about the actors' actions, appearance and the scene. Because several different people have contributed to writing the transcripts without any established guidelines for writing, I edited the texts to make them coherent. To avoid confusion, I edited the transcript so that every time Fat Monica (Cox in a fat suit) appears on screen, she is addressed as Fat Monica, and the skinny version of the main character Monica is addressed as Monica.

I revised the audiovisual material from all ten seasons of *Friends* while writing this thesis for the purpose of paying close attention to detail. I first picked out all scenes or episodes with mentions of fatness or fat characters. After determining the subsections I aim to divide my analysis in, I narrowed the data down to a handful of extracts. I prioritized those in which Fat Monica appears in order to analyze her character in different ways. The reason I chose to use transcripts is their accessibility, and because it is easier to search the transcript database with keywords to find relevant scenes for my study. It is therefore easier to compare the transcripts to the audiovisual material to collect notes for my analysis.

4. Analysis

In this section, I will combine critical discourse analysis and fat feminist theory to examine the way humor is used in *Friends* to degrade and oppress fat people and reinforce fatphobia. The analytic section is split into three subsections. Sections 4.1. and 4.2. introduce two different stereotypes related to fat people and how these stereotypes are present in *Friends*. Section 4.3. compares the representations of Fat Monica and skinny Monica.

The character of special interest in this analysis is Fat Monica. She is the main character Monica back in high school when she used to be fat. She is seen in a few flashbacks during the series. Fat Monica is portrayed by Courtney Cox in a fat suit, and the use of a fat suit instead of an actual fat

actress has resulted in a distorted portrayal of the body and the face of a fat person. Despite the two characters being the same, Fat Monica has a different mannerism when compared to skinny Monica, and Fat Monica's character is associated with more negative traits. This negative change in character is caused only by the increase in weight.

At its core, fat feminism aims to eliminate biases experienced by fat people. These biases include prejudice as well as negative and untruthful stereotypes which reinforce stigma, prejudice, and discrimination against fat people in real life. I aim to carry out this study by identifying, analyzing and arguing against these stereotypes appearing in *Friends*.

4.1. Fatness as an automatic indication of an unhealthy lifestyle

One misconception related to fat people is that fat people are all indefinitely and fundamentally unhealthy, and that all fat people have unhealthy lifestyles. For example, a study by Puhl, Wharton, and Heuer (2009, p. 441) showed that overall healthy fat people face prejudice from dietetics students merely based on their weight: participants were shown mock health profiles of four overall healthy patients, the profiles differing only in sex (male or female) or weight-related data (weight, BMI, and percentage body fat). The data in the profiles reflected generally healthy adults, nothing being indicative of poor lifestyle habits. The results showed that students who viewed patient profiles of overweight patients, evaluated their diet quality and health status to be poorer despite the nutritional and health information being identical across each patient profile. The majority of the students in the study also agreed that obese individuals “have poor self-control, lack endurance, and have low self-esteem”, “tend to overeat and are unattractive, slow, insecure, and inactive”. These results suggest that health profession students make automatic assumptions about fat people having poorer diets and overall worse health, even when provided with information indicating that they have relatively healthy lifestyles.

Even health professionals have negative stereotypes about fat people: Schwartz et al. (2003) used the Implicit Attitudes Test and questionnaires to assess explicit attitudes, personal experiences with obesity, and demographic characteristics amongst researchers and clinicians attending an international obesity conference. The participants associated the stereotypes lazy, stupid, and worthless with obese people. Considering the sample consisted of professionals who treat and

study obesity and should understand that obesity can be caused by genetic and environmental factors – rather than being simply a function of individual behavior – it can be argued that the social stigma of obesity, fatphobia, is so strong that even those most knowledgeable about the human body infer that fat people have blameworthy behavioral characteristics that contribute to their size.

According to Tischner and Malson (2012, p. 50), current discourses incorrectly represent body weight “as a consequence of lifestyle, equating ‘fatness’ with ‘disease’ and ‘thinness’ with ‘health’”. Therefore, fat people are stereotypically presumed to be lazy and not willing to follow a healthy lifestyle. Tischner and Malson (2012, p. 51) argue that generally accepted views on the relationship between weight and health “have been contested by a range of critical researchers and others who have argued that the view that excess weight is caused by inactivity and poor diet and that excess weight results per se in ill-health is poorly evidenced and often based on flawed research”.

Despite the fact that researchers and activists have established certain stereotypes about fat people to be harmful, they continue to be present in the media. *Friends* reinforce these negative narratives through Fat Monica’s character. She is first introduced in Extract 1, when the main characters are watching an old home video of Rachel and Monica getting ready for their prom.

Extract 1, 14x02, *The One With the Prom Video*:

[Scene: Monica and Rachel’s living room, the main characters are watching a home video. The home video is a throwback, meaning the characters are younger.]

01 **Mrs. Geller:** *Did you get a shot of Monica? Where's Monica?*

02 **Fat Monica:** *Over here dad. [he pans over and we see a torso taking up the whole screen]*

03 **Mr. Geller:** *Wait, how do you zoom out? [zooms out and the audience sees an extremely overweight Monica, Cox in a fat suit, eating a big sandwich] There she is. **LAUGHTER***

[In the living room everyone is amused by Fat Monica’s appearance]

04 **Joey:** Some girl ate Monica! ****LAUGHTER****

05 **Monica:** Shut up, the camera adds ten pounds!

06 **Chandler:** Ahh, so how many cameras are actually **on** you? ****LAUGHTER****

[...]

[Fat Monica running over to Rachel, still holding her sandwich, giving her a hug]

07 **Fat Monica:** *Oops.*

08 **Young Rachel:** *What?*

09 **Fat Monica:** *Shoot, I think I got mayonnaise on you.*

10 **Young Rachel:** *Oh, that's OK, it's just the shoulder, it's not my dress.* ****LAUGHTER****

The first time Fat Monica is ever introduced to viewers, she is physically “too big” for the viewfinder of her father’s camera, and Mr. Geller struggles to zoom out of Fat Monica and continue filming. This is an insinuation that Fat Monica’s size is too large for normal activities and complicates her family’s life. Fat Monica is pictured eating a sandwich when she is getting ready for prom, which will become habitual for her character. Not only that, but she also is a messy eater, as she does not let go of her sandwich when she hugs Rachel, gets mayonnaise on her and almost ruins her prom dress. Monica’s friends and the audience react to Fat Monica’s appearance and clumsiness with laughter. Joey is quick to make jokes: “Some girl ate Monica!”, hinting Fat Monica is unrecognizable compared to older Monica and the size of two human beings. When Monica, slightly amused but clearly insecure, defends herself by saying: “Shut up, the camera adds ten pounds!”, Chandler replies “Ahh, so how many cameras are actually on you?”, mocking Fat Monica for being more than “ten pounds” overweight.

Extract 2 describes an alternative universe, where all the main characters’ lives are different. The main characters reflect on their lives and imagine how different their lives could have been if it were not for a significant change in their lives. For Chandler, it is pursuing his dream career as a comic writer, for Joey, it is being successful in his acting career and for Monica, it is not losing weight. This is reducing Fat Monica to her appearance and linking negative assumptions, such as being unsuccessful and being a failure, to being fat.

Extract 2, 15x06, *The One That Could've Been Part 1:*

[Scene: Fat Monica and Phoebe's kitchen, Fat Monica is eating breakfast as Chandler enters.]

01 **Chandler:** Who sold a story to **Archie** Comics?!

02 **Fat Monica:** Oh my God! That's great! Oh wow! ****LAUGHTER**** (Hugs him.) You're a published writer! I wish I had a present for you!

03 **Chandler:** Aww.

04 **Fat Monica:** Wait a minute! ****LAUGHTER**** (Quickly checks her pockets and pulls out...) My last **Kit-Kat** bar! ****LAUGHTER****

(Chandler tries to take it, but Fat Monica won't let go. He tugs harder, and she still doesn't budge.) ****LAUGHTER****

05 **Chandler:** You wanna share it?

06 **Fat Monica:** (in a high-pitched, squeaky voice) Okay! ****LAUGHTER****

In the beginning of Extract 2, when Chandler enters, Fat Monica is eating a large serving of food by herself. Fat Monica is stereotypically nearly always pictured eating, talking with her mouth full or preparing food. When Chandler announces his good news, Fat Monica is delighted and wants to offer her last Kit-Kat bar as a gift for Chandler. Fat Monica is portrayed to be obsessed with her sweets. For example, previously in the episode, Fat Monica heard Phoebe scream, and got upset because she thought Phoebe sat on her Kit-Kats and ruined them. When Chandler grabs the candy bar, Fat Monica refuses to let go, which is to imply that she wants all the food for herself. Only when Chandler offers to share the candy bar with Fat Monica, she squeaks in happiness and agrees. This once again, reinforces the stereotype of fat people being greedy and obsessed with food.

In Extract 3, we are once again in a different alternative universe, where the friends are older, but Monica is romantically involved with Joey, instead of Chandler. Monica is thin, but Joey is very

fat. This suggests that Monica's (former) unhealthy habits can be contagious, and her fatness and unhealthy lifestyle can transmit to those around her, making them fat as well.

Extract 3, 16x07, *The One With The Truth About London*:

[Scene: Monica and Fat Joey's, Monica is cooking.]

01 **Monica:** Honey! Dinner's ready!

(Fat Joey, LeBlanc in a fat suit, enters from the bedroom.) ****LAUGHTER****

02 **Fat Joey:** What's my little chef got for me tonight?

03 **Monica:** Your favorite!

04 **Joey:** Ho-ho-ho, (stops for a rest and leans against the fridge) fried stuff with cheese!

****LAUGHTER****

05 **Monica:** Yep! And lots of it! ****LAUGHTER****

06 **Fat Joey:** Thanks sweetheart. Give me a little sugar here. (It's hard for Fat Joey to move, and he groans while he talks. The two kiss.) ****LAUGHTER**** Okay. (Fat Joey sits down.)

07 **Monica:** Okay, in we go.

(Monica gets behind his chair and with the combination of him sliding the chair forward and her pushing with her legs they manage to get Joey up to the table and within reach of the food.)

08 **Fat Joey:** Here we go! Here we go! Here we go! ****LAUGHTER****

In this extract, the butt of the joke is not Fat Monica, but Fat Joey. Fat Joey is pictured walking across the room, out of breath after a short distance, visibly sweating, and he is welcomed with a laugh track. Fat Joey's mobility is very limited, he is physically so large that it takes two people to sit him down. In line 08, the repetition of "Here we go!" insinuates that pushing Fat Joey to the table takes a long time and many tries. His portrayal reinforces the hurtful stereotype that fat people are in poor physical condition and get exhausted fast. In line 02, Fat Joey calls Monica, his presumed partner, "my little chef", indicating the most important value she brings to him is

providing food. Line 02 also shows that according to Fat Joey, food is only “for” him, not to be enjoyed by the both of them. In line 06, when Fat Joey asks for a kiss, he asks for “a little sugar”. By replacing a fat person’s desire for intimacy with unhealthy food, this creates an image of a fat person who fantasizes about food rather than human relations. Fat Joey’s favorite food is “fried stuff with cheese, and lots of it”. This is an insinuation of a fat person’s everyday diet consisting of large amounts of unhealthy food.

Extract 4 is a throwback scene, with young Rachel and Fat Monica dancing at a college party a year after young Chandler hurt Fat Monica’s feelings. Fat Monica has expressed her insecurity about her weight due to Chandler’s fatphobic comments earlier in the series.

Extract 4, 11x10, *The One Where The Stripper Cries*:

[Scene: A college party. Young Chandler approaches Fat Monica and young Rachel.]

01 **Chandler**: So... you girls having fun?

02 **Fat Monica**: For your information, **ass munch**, ****LAUGHTER**** I've lost four pounds. Maybe even five with all the dancing. ****LAUGHTER****

(A guy enters holding a pizza box)

03 **Pizza guy**: Somebody order a pizza?

04 **Fat Monica**: Oh, that’s me! ****LAUGHTER****

In Extract 4, Fat Monica is feeling insecure and when young Chandler confronts her, Fat Monica loses her temper and seems to aim to threaten forthcoming condescension with line 02. Monica’s choice of words (“ass munch”) is interesting, since “munch” means to chew, chomp, or refers to noisy eating overall. Name-calling using words related to eating or being fat is fatphobic, because it associates those things with the feelings of shame and humiliation.

With line 02, it appears Fat Monica is oblivious to the nature of weight-loss, and this results in laughter on behalf of the audience. The joke reaches its peak, when despite her weight-loss attempt, Fat Monica has ordered a pizza to the party. This, once again, reinforces the stereotype of fat people being constantly hungry, and having diets consisting of unhealthy food. Contrasting

Fat Monica's angry outburst in line 02, in line 04, Fat Monica's tone and wording are carefree and laid-back, with the line beginning with a nonchalant "Oh". This contrast in Fat Monica's mood is only because of food, since she got notably happier after becoming within sight of fast food.

In each four extracts so far, the fat character, either Fat Monica or Fat Joey, is portrayed either eating food, ordering food, or having food in their possession. This reinforces a stereotype of gluttony and unhealthy lifestyle among fat people. In Extract 1, in addition to the food related stereotype, Fat Monica is also messy and sloppy, which further enhances the negative image of fat people. In Extract 2, Fat Monica treats a candy bar like a prize, which, when associated with a fat character, is perceived as gluttony. Fat Monica is also presented as selfish when it comes to sharing her food, thus reinforcing a stereotype of a selfish and greedy fat person. In Extract 3, Fat Joey is presented as having extremely poor physique, which, when associated with a fat character, is usually perceived as laziness, inefficiency and weakness. In Extract 4, Fat Monica is portrayed as being clueless and stupid as well as lacking self-discipline. These are each very harmful stereotypes linking negative traits to being fat and thus portraying fat people as inferior.

4.2. Size, sexuality, love and romance

According to fat feminist researchers, fat people, especially fat women, begin facing anti-fat bias since early age, and said bias affects them even in their personal lives. Studies show that fat women are less likely to be dating and having sexual relations, when compared to people who fit the thin ideal (Pearce et al., 2002; Sheets & Ajmere, 2005; Wiederman & Hurst, 1998). It can be argued that this is due to fatphobia among peers: the results of a study by Regan (1996) show that participants perceived fat women as less sexually desirable and experienced, less sexually attractive, skilled, warm, and responsive, and less likely to feel sexual desire for others.

Due to this attitude towards fat women in the dating world, besides just reporting lower levels of dating in general, studies show that fat women's spouses tend to be from a lower socioeconomic group, for instance, having lower levels of education (Garn et al., 1989, pp. 236-237). Researchers explain this with "selective mating": men choose to date women who resemble those of their own socioeconomic group, meaning men of higher educational level tend to date

women with similar educational background and similar body type, whereas men of lower educational level tend to select women with higher educational background, but with the “worse” (fat) body type. This means that fat women are deemed less worthy in the dating market, and despite being highly educated and smart, just being heavier can bump women down in society’s hierarchy.

The reasons behind these attitudes may vary, but researchers are certain that harmful portrayals of fat people in the media plays a part in creating this prejudice. Greenberg et al. (2003) conclude that fat fictional characters are portrayed as having more negative characteristics than thin characters, are less often shown in positive interactions, such as romantic relationships, and are less likely to be judged as attractive. Fat female characters are the objects of humor almost twice as often as thinner female characters. According to media analyses by Frater and Mendoza (2009; 2009), when a fat woman is portrayed as a romantic lead in fiction, her weight is often as much of interest as any other aspect of the plot line, meaning fat women do not stand on their own as characters without a narrative related to the feature that differentiates them from thin characters – their weight. Making matters worse, the narrative related to weight and fatness is usually comical.

If these findings are true, and the attitudes towards real fat people are truly this heavily influenced by representation in the media, they may have concrete consequences. According to Greenberg et al. (2002, p. 1347), “such negative narratives and stereotypes accumulate over time and eventually result in real-world expectations that correspond to media presentations.” In other words, if fat women are continuously represented stereotypically in the media, the viewers of said media will begin to believe these stereotypes to be true. Greenberg and colleagues (ibid.) go on to argue that the under-representation of fat people and the nature of interactions for fat characters is a problem: if the mass media fail to represent or ignore a particular social group, such groups are deemed of lesser value and importance.

Extract 5 prefaces the same alternative universe as in Extract 2, where the main characters’ lives are different due to one choice in their past. The main characters have a conversation about how their life would differ from reality.

Extract 5, 15x06, *The One That Could've Been Part 1*:

[Scene: The coffee house.]

01 **Monica:** And what if I was still fat? (To Chandler) Well, you wouldn't be dating me, that's for sure.

The episode *The One That Could've Been Part 1* describes an alternative universe, where the main characters' lives are different due to a choice they would have made earlier in their lives. The other character's life-changing decisions relate to their careers, but Monica's quality of life is dependent on her size: in this alternative universe, Monica is Fat Monica, she is in her thirties and still fat. When Monica is wondering if her life would be different as Fat Monica, she turns to Chandler, her partner, and doubts he would want to pursue a relationship with her. It is thus established that no one, not even Monica herself, thinks that she would have been worthy of love due to her appearance, and her appearance only.

The alternative universe hinted towards in Extract 5 takes place in Extract 6: Fat Monica is in her thirties, does well in her job as a chef, yet has no sexual history, despite dating a man named Roger. While Roger is successful in his career as a doctor, the main characters judge him as weird and annoying. Chandler is portrayed as outgoing and funny, but not successful in his career. Fat Monica and Chandler, a couple in the "real world", are going to have sex for the first time in this alternative universe. Chandler has very little experience and Fat Monica has no sexual history. The situation is too awkward for both, until Fat Monica gets an idea.

Extract 6, 16x06, *The One that Could Have Been Part 2*

[Scene: Fat Monica's.]

01 **Fat Monica:** What if I turn out the lights? (Runs to shut them off.)

02 **Chandler:** Okay! **LAUGHTER**

(She turns out the lights and in the darkened room Chandler starts to moan.)

03 **Chandler:** (flirtatious) Oh yeah. **LAUGHTER**

04 **Fat Monica:** Chandler?

05 **Chandler:** (flirtatious) Yeah? ****LAUGHTER****

06 **Fat Monica:** That's the couch. ****LAUGHTER****

In Extract 6, Fat Monica is about to have the first sexual encounter of her life with Chandler. When the two attempt to engage in the dark, it is implied that Chandler is touching up the couch in a sexual manner, mistaking its cushions for Fat Monica's body. This scene suggests that fat people's bodies are similar to furniture with cushions, inseparable even, most likely ridiculing the fact that fat people's bodies can be soft. This supports not only the hurtful stereotype of fat people's physical form, but the stereotype that fat people do not have sex as much as thin people do, and the reason for it is their body and their fatness.

Extract 7, 19x09, *The One With Rachel's Dream*:

In Extract 7, Monica and Rachel sit down at the coffee house and discuss sexual fantasies.

[Scene: the coffee house.]

01 **Rachel:** Have you ever had any weird romantic dreams?

02 **Monica:** Let me think. Oh, when I was younger I used to dream that I got married to Mayor McCheese, and on our wedding night I ate his head. ****LAUGHTER****

In Extract 7, Monica thinks back to the time when she was younger, meaning when she was Fat Monica, and claims her romantic fantasy was related to food, rather than a human being. This paints the picture of an irrational, excessively greedy eater, a fat person who fantasizes about food rather than human relations, and once again reduces fat people down to only having needs related to hunger and gluttony rather than being sexual and allowed to feel sexual desire for others.

Each of the previous extracts create a negative narrative of a fat person not being worthy of love, desire or romance nor fit for dating. Beginning with a thin person's opinion about a fat person

not being enough for a relationship is especially concerning, when the viewers know this thin person has been fat in the past. This narrative is continued throughout the episode, with an example of selective dating. The two men that Fat Monica dates or has sex with can both be argued to be of lower socioeconomic status: Roger is successful in his career, but does not fit the social norms, seems odd and thus is not socially successful, whereas Chandler has a likeable character, but is not successful in his career. Fat Monica, however, is successful in her career and portrayed as more socially unacceptable than Roger. Yet, she is still involved with men of lower socioeconomic groups rather than those who fit that of her own. This implies that Fat Monica isn't deemed worthy of those of her own socioeconomic group because of her size and is thus "worthy" only for men who are in the lower socioeconomic group. In line with Frater (2009) and Mendoza's (2009) findings, the one time that Fat Monica is portrayed as a love interest in Extract 6, her weight is being used in a comedic narrative which distances her from actually having a romantic interaction. The portrayal in Extract 7 supports the findings by Regan (1996), and paints the picture of fat women as less likely to feel sexual desire for others, and replaces this desire with gluttony, which again reinforces hurtful stereotypes about the relationship between fat people and food, discussed in the previous chapter.

4.3. Fat Monica and skinny Monica

In this section I aim to compare the representations of Fat Monica and skinny Monica. Monica is played by Courtney Cox, an American actress; she is white, thin and fits the beauty standard, whereas Fat Monica is played by Cox in a fat suit. The use of the fat suit results in an unrealistic portrayal of the body and the face of a fat person. Despite being different versions of the same character and sharing the same identity, Fat Monica and skinny Monica share major differences in their looks, apparel, behavior and overall demeanor, and they can be evaluated as two completely different characters. In this thesis, when referring to Monica, I chose to capitalize the word Fat in Fat Monica, but not the word skinny in skinny Monica. This is because according to my interpretation, Fat Monica is a whole another character from the older, skinnier, more "normal" Monica. Not only does Fat Monica's character appear different on the screen, Fat Monica acts as a completely different character separate from the skinny version of Monica. Thin Monica is successful whereas Fat Monica is linked to more negative traits. The only thing that is different between these two characters is their weight.

Beginning with Extract 1, in the flashback Fat Monica is first introduced in, she is wearing a huge, unfit prom dress, which is very unflattering not only compared to young Rachel's pastel-colored off shoulder style dress, but to skinny Monica's look as well. Skinny Monica is wearing a skin-tight blouse, emphasizing her skinny form, thus reinforcing her new, thinner look as ideal. Fat Monica's character moves clumsily resulting in her nearly staining her friend's dress, whereas skinny Monica is known for being calm and collected. To further develop the contrast between the two, the viewers know that skinny Monica is a very neat person and obsessed with cleaning; presenting Fat Monica as messy links her to undesirable traits and thus makes her the lesser version of Monica. In Extract 2, line 06, Fat Monica squeals in an annoying, high-pitched voice, while skinny Monica has a deeper and calmer voice.

Thin Monica works as a head chef for years, but the fact that she works with food is never made fun of, whereas Fat Monica is constantly being ridiculed for either eating a lot, being a messy or a greedy eater, or appreciating food. In other words, all food has a negative implication when it is associated with a fat person but is neutral when associated with a thin person.

Extract 4 once again highlights the differences between Fat Monica's and skinny Monica's looks: in the flashback, Fat Monica is wearing an unflattering and baggy outfit, whereas skinny Monica is wearing a skintight black bachelorette party dress. Extract 6 focuses on the difference between Fat Monica's and skinny Monica's success when it comes to love and dating. Skinny Monica is in a long-term relationship with Chandler, but when she's Fat Monica, she does not have a long-term relationship with anyone, nor has she ever been a target of sexual desire. The only variable is Monica's weight, which means being fat is the only reason why she is not successful in her love life. Extract 7 goes on to invalidate Fat Monica's sexuality by linking her needs to food rather than human relations; meanwhile thin Monica can share her romantic and sexual fantasies freely.

The difference between Fat Monica and skinny Monica is most dramatic in an episode called *The One With All the Thanksgivings*, when the main characters reminisce on their worst Thanksgiving memories. By this point in the series, skinny Monica is romantically involved with

Chandler, who she has known for years since Chandler was roommates with her brother Ross in college. Despite Monica's resentment, Rachel tells everyone the story of a Thanksgiving dinner at Geller's house, where Fat Monica first meets young Chandler. In the flashback, Fat Monica is wearing an oversized sweater, and is pictured running to open the door for Rachel, out of breath after running a short distance, and the audience laughs at her. This reinforces the hurtful stereotype that fat people are in bad shape and get exhausted even after running down the stairs. Fat Monica has a crush on young Chandler, but he is not impressed by her, and despite her enthusiasm and kindness, he treats her with disrespect. This is clearly because he does not find her attractive due to her appearance. Because Chandler doesn't like Thanksgiving food, Fat Monica offers to make him macaroni and cheese, a stereotypical food related to an unhealthy diet. During the conversation, she is drinking a diet coke. After Chandler makes a joke, Fat Monica laughs and soda comes out of her nose. Embarrassed, she runs away, and the audience laughs. In this scene, Monica is again drinking something unhealthy and high in sugar and offers to cook an unhealthy dish. This is an insinuation of her everyday diet being unhealthy. She is also clumsy and awkward and messes up her chance to talk to her crush, which underlines her character as embarrassing and bad at social situations.

Extract 8 is from the same episode with the Thanksgiving dinner. This is once again a throwback scene, meaning the friends are younger, and – young Ross hasn't approached his crush, young Chandler is shallow and rude, and young Monica is Fat Monica. Ross and Chandler are talking and Monica happens to overhear their discussion:

Extract 8, 08x05, *The One With All the Thanksgivings*:

[Scene: a throwback scene. Young Ross and young Chandler talking.]

01 **Ross:** I'm gonna be out with her all night.

02 **Chandler:** Dude, don't do that to me!

(Fat Monica enters behind them.)

03 **Ross:** All right, it's cool you can stay here. My parents won't mind.

(Fat Monica suddenly gets very happy.)

04 **Chandler:** No, it's not that, I just don't want to be stuck here all night with your fat sister.

05 **Ross:** Hey! ****AUDIENCE STUNNED****

When Ross says he might be out all night and leave Chandler alone at their house, he gets offended and replies: “I just don't want to be stuck here all night with your fat sister.” This is a blatantly fatphobic comment, as Chandler reduces Fat Monica to only her appearance, and because she doesn’t fit the thin ideal, he deems her as unworthy of spending time with. Chandler chooses to use the word “stuck” when talking about staying in the house with Fat Monica – this kind of language creates a stereotypical image about an overly fat person physically trapped, unable to move due to their fat form.

In the next flashback scene one year later, it is revealed that due to Chandler’s offensive comment, Fat Monica lost weight through obsessive dieting and exercise. She appears significantly thinner, wearing a skin-tight low-cut dress that embraces her skinny body and contrasts her look in the sweater the year before, and according to the beauty standard, is remarkably more attractive than before. Now, Chandler finds her desirable and in turn is attracted to her. Later it is revealed that Fat Monica shaped her body only to get revenge on Chandler, meaning she didn’t make the change for her own health and well-being, but due to fatphobic comments and to appear desirable in Chandler's eyes. Thin Monica is thus reinforced as the ideal because Chandler finds her desirable. This not only reinforces disordered eating, but also suggests that fat people are not worthy of love and desire as they are, and need to reach unrealistic results to be perceived as attractive by others. This scene underscores the importance of low weight for desirable women and implies that Monica’s character has infinitely more value only once she’s lost weight. In these two flashbacks, Fat Monica is contrasted to skinny Monica who is now visibly thinner, fits the beauty standard and is suddenly not socially awkward anymore and thus is able to impress her crush. This suggests that skinny people are more successful than fat people only because of their weight. This narrative indicates that a woman needs to be thin in order to be found attractive by the opposite sex, and the only way to elicit approval is by achieving a low weight or thin shape. These findings are in line with those of Fikkan and Rothblum (2012, p. 585) – according to them, the media contributes to the marginalization of fat women by “making fat women’s weight the most salient characteristic

about them as people and a target for remedy (through weight loss), pity, or comedy.” Fat Monica’s weight is in fact the most salient characteristic in her, and it is both the target of remedy and comedy more than once.

Fat Monica and skinny Monica are drastically different in terms of their looks and attire, behavior, the way they speak, their apparent values and lifestyles, their social success, love life and sexuality, and Fat Monica is the lesser version of Monica in all these examples, because she is always linked to more negative traits: she dresses in unflattering clothes, she is clumsy, messy, and unattractive, she eats excessive amounts of junk food, she places greater value on food than other people and she is not seen as desirable. Considering Fat Monica and skinny Monica are supposed to be the same person, only differing in weight, the difference in the character’s overall success can only be explained by the changing variable, the fatness. It is thus indicated that Fat Monica’s fatness is the only variable making her inferior.

5. Discussion

In this section I will discuss my findings in reference to the superiority theory of laughter as well as discuss the significance of skinny Monica and Fat Monica in reference to Albert Bandura’s social learning theory and the concept of observational learning through models.

5.1. The superiority theory of laughter

According to the superiority theory of laughter, feelings of superiority are the center of humor and comic amusement (Lintott, 2016, p. 347). In other words, another person's misfortunes assert the viewer’s superiority, and that is considered funny. In fact, as stated by David Monro (1988, p. 349), “according to any superiority theory of humor, the laughter always looks down on whatever he laughs at, and so judges it inferior by some standard”. The superiority theory of laughter is traced back to Aristotle’s *Poetics*, according to which comedy “aims at representing men as worse” (1942, p. 5), and is “an imitation of characters of a lower type” (1942, p. 7). However, that is not to say characters in comedies are necessarily bad or evil, but simply ugly, ridiculous and laughable.

According to Amy Gullage (2014, p. 182), the reason why Fat Monica is always laughed at can be explained by the superiority theory of laughter: “people laugh when they encounter a person or situation in which they feel intellectually, morally, or physically superior”. In other words, Fat Monica’s character creates comedy mainly because her ridiculousness makes the viewers position themselves above her character. Moreover, because Fat Monica is so often reduced to only her appearance or weight, it can be argued that the sole reason she creates comedy is because she is fat. This again sends the subliminal message of all viewers being entitled to positioning themselves above all fat people and further reinforcing bias towards fat people.

5.2. Social learning theory

Television programs have a significant influence on viewers, especially adolescent female viewers, who tend to look up to the characters they see on television. Therefore, these characters, actual and realistic or not, become role models. Albert Bandura (1994, pp. 270-271) developed the social learning theory and introduced the concept of observational learning through models in the symbolic environment of the mass media: “Humans have evolved an advanced capacity for observational learning that enables them to expand their knowledge and skills rapidly through information conveyed by the rich variety of models. Indeed, virtually all behavioral, cognitive, and affective learning from direct experience can be achieved vicariously by observing people’s actions and its consequences for them”. In other words, by observing someone else’s actions and behavior, and determining whether they succeeded or not, the observer can learn which behavior is good or bad and thus is able control their own behavior in a similar context to achieve success. In the case of television programs, seeing a fictional character behave a certain way and getting either rewarded or punished for their actions as the plot develops, is sending the viewer a subliminal message as of what to do and what not to do in real life. This applies to looks and attire as well.

In *Friends*, each main character is a model to the viewers: their image, characteristics and behavior determine how successful they are in life. In general, the main characters are each models of success; they all succeed in their careers, maintain a good friendship with all their friends, almost all of them pursue long-term romantic relationships and are attractive, smart and lovable. Young female viewers of the show are therefore encouraged to identify themselves with

the images and characteristics of the main characters, Monica, Rachel and Phoebe. They are all portrayed as successful in their personal lives as well as attractive, more particularly representing the thin body ideal. Their characters are in strong contrast with the character of Fat Monica. She is significantly bigger in size than the older Monica, and she is portrayed as an awkward, clumsy and insecure fool who is constantly hungry and speaks in a high-pitched, squeaky noise. Due to this hurtful and stereotypical portrayal of a fat person, female viewers are encouraged to distance themselves from the characteristics of Fat Monica. These kinds of models in *Friends* influence viewers and reinforce many of the negative assumptions about each social group; for example, Fat Monica's character being constantly laughed at implies that all fat people everywhere should be ridiculed.

Fat Monica acts as a completely different character separate from the skinny version of Monica. Thin Monica is successful and in a long-term relationship, whereas Fat Monica didn't achieve those things and is linked to more negative traits. The only thing that is different between these two characters is their weight. Therefore Monica and Fat Monica both act as models: the viewers observe and take notes of their "development" to learn what is determined as good or bad. The differences between the two is clear throughout the series, but especially in the comparison of alternative developments in *The One That Could've Been*. The episode straightforwardly implies that had Fat Monica never lost her weight, she would have never fallen in love or become happy. This sends a message that achieving the ideal body is crucial to be happy in life, successful and worthy of love, and because of their weight and appearance, fat people are never going to be able to achieve those things.

Fouts and Burggraf (1999, p. 475) also applied the social learning theory to a content analysis of *Friends*. According to their results, popular characters model thinness and receive vicarious positive reinforcement, while fat characters receive punishment in the form of negative fat commentary. This increases the internalization of the thin ideal. These types of weight-related messages in the media provide viewers with information as to what is and is not acceptable, as well as "motivation and inhibition, respectively, for engaging in modeled behavior".

6. Conclusion

Fat Monica is an over-exaggerated caricature of a fat person. She represents nearly every hurtful and false stereotype of a fat person there is, ranging from having an unhealthy lifestyle, being stupid and lacking self-discipline to not being worthy of love or desire. Each time Fat Monica is laughed at by the audience, it sends the viewers a message that her behavior or general demeanor is not appropriate and deserving of ridicule, and that derogatory comments on fat female bodies is socially acceptable behavior. Fat Monica is portrayed as undesirable to men, as well as laughed at or humiliated, and due to said portrayal, fatness is then linked to undesirable traits such as unattractiveness, sloppiness, and stupidity.

According to Sellnow and Ziniel (2007), the visual messages conveyed by and about the female characters on *Friends* reinforce the hegemonic ideals of the standard body and an ideal female body image that is excessively thin, because *Friends* offers only one female body image, the excessively thin image, as ideal. To make matters worse, the thin ideal is reinforced on behalf of “portrayals of fatness as an undesirable trait” (Harrison, 2000, p. 121), by creating contrast between Monica and Fat Monica, Fat Monica always portrayed as the lesser version of Monica. Where Fat Monica is messy, sloppy, and speaks in a high, squeaky voice, thin Monica is neat, collected and speaks in a calmer voice. Fat Monica doesn’t have a happy, long term relationship, whereas thin Monica marries the man of her dreams. Skinny Monica receives a lot of positive reinforcement and desire from the male characters, while the one time Fat Monica is portrayed as a love interest, her weight is being used for comic amusement.

What makes Fat Monica’s character especially hurtful is the way she functions as the comic relief and a “sacrificed scapegoat who helps preserve the social order through laughter, humiliation, and embarrassment” (Sellnow & Ziniel, 2007, p. 67). This can be explained by the superiority theory of laughter: because of Fat Monica’s negative and hurtful portrayal, her misery and inferiority assert the viewer’s superiority, meaning the viewers position themselves above Fat Monica, and feel entitled to laugh at her. This reduces Fat Monica’s and thus all fat people’s worth below that of the viewer’s. By applying the social learning theory, it can be concluded that Fat Monica also functions as a model of failure. In other words, popular thin characters receive praise for their looks and are overall successful, and viewers are encouraged to imitate their

characteristics and aspire to be like them, whereas Fat Monica is portrayed having more negative traits and receiving punishment for them, therefore viewers perceive Fat Monica, and all fat characters, as inferior.

Himes and Thompson (2007) conclude that commentary and humor in entertainment media contributes to the shaping of norms and beliefs about weight through the promotion of the thin ideal: thin female characters are promoted as the model of success and as the ideal to be imitated, whereas fat characters are presented as models of failure and thus viewers are encouraged to distance themselves from their stereotypical characteristics.

Therefore, *Friends* uses humor and jokes to oppress and degrade fat people and reinforce fatphobia by enforcing hurtful stereotypes, positioning fat characters as comic scapegoats, reducing fat people below viewers with the superiority theory of laughter, using fat characters as models of failure and creating drastic contrast and comparison between thin and fat people. By doing this, *Friends* influences viewers, reinforces hatred towards fat people, and thus contributes to fatphobia in society. *Friends* and other influential shows alike, hold massive impact on television viewers, and light comedy and jokes become hurtful in the long run.

The findings from my research are consistently replicated across other studies, both content analyses of *Friends*, but fat feminist studies too. Therefore I find my findings reliable. However, my sample of extracts is limited, and not randomized, which might affect the reliability. For potential future research, I encourage others to delve further into critical analysis of media, and further study the impact of seemingly harmless forms of media, such as mainstream music and the film industry, and their effect on important societal issues, such as racial discrimination and gender inequality. It would be interesting to see a comparison between *Friends* and more modern sitcoms, or analysis of a fat male character. As my research is limited on white characters only, fat characters of other races and ethnicities could be a potential focus of a feminist intersectionality study.

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