

RACHEL GREEN, *FRIENDS* AND BEYOND:  
HOW THE CHARACTER CONNECTED WITH VIEWERS AND WHY JENNIFER ANISTON WILL ALWAYS BE KNOWN AS RACHEL FROM *FRIENDS*.

Elinor Thomas.

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## Abstract

This dissertation explores the way in which a successful television show can elevate a fictional character into becoming an aspirational figure. This analysis focuses on the character of Rachel Green within the television series *Friends*, discussing the theory behind why viewers feel they can connect with her, and how they look to her as being a relatable personality. The discussion will include an in-depth look into the character, analysing her personality, fashion and development through the series which has contributed towards her being viewed as somebody to aspire to. I will examine the relationship between the actress, Jennifer Aniston, and the character in order to understand why the two continue to be compared, looking specifically into how the media have played a role in connecting the two.

The theory of identification will be applied in order to understand why viewers feel they are able to relate to a fictional character, along with this, different episodes and image stills from the series will be analysed to decipher what qualities made the character somebody to aspire to. Extensive research into relevant novels and scholarship will support my topic and provide clarity into the effect Aniston has had from being such a successful character.

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## Introduction

The purpose of this dissertation is to make a cultural analysis of the character of Rachel Green within the American comedy television series *Friends*. I will discuss the development of the character and her position within the show, analysing specific imagery and scenes of the show in order to discover how she has impacted viewers and the media. I will look deeper into the relationship between the television character and the wider world, discussing how the media have created a blurred line between the actress and the fictional character she plays.

Chapter one will focus on the context of the TV series *Friends* and the character structure within it. I will focus on the success and influence it has had and continues to have on popular culture from the 1990's to the current day. I will examine how the show has given each character stereotypical traits in order to appeal to a wide audience, specifically looking into the stereotype behind Rachel Green and how she captured the zeitgeist of the 1990's.

Chapter two will be an in-depth look into the Rachel character, discussing how her materialistic personality positioned her within the friendship group. To help discuss this in further detail I will investigate deeper into her attributes and qualities, looking at how these allow her to be perceived to viewers as being relatable and aspirational. Imagery of her outfits, in addition to TV episode analysis will help support my findings as her fashion played a pivotal role alongside the character and it is this combination that captured the viewers' attention. During my discussion on the relatability and aspirational aspect of Rachel and how this affected viewers, research undertaken by Cynthia Hoffner and Joanne Cantor will be employed in order to examine how viewers can become attached to a fictional character. I will

also use the method of Identification to support this discussion as this will provide an insight into why viewers felt inspired to emulate the character.

Chapter three will include a cultural analysis of the Rachel Green character, making a wider discussion of Jennifer Aniston, the actress that portrays her. I will examine how Aniston's perceived similarity to the Rachel character is discussed within popular culture, using an article titled '*Can Jennifer Aniston ever really lose Rachel from Friends?*' written by The Telegraph's Anne Bilson to determine how the popularity of the Rachel character has effected how Anniston is portrayed within the media. I will look deeper into how the media has played a pivotal role in comparing the character and the actress, encouraging the public to take an interest in Aniston through discussing her personal life in place of her work, within popular culture articles.

Within my investigation I will discuss relevant research undertaken by a range of academic professors and authors as this will allow me to draw out debates and highlight the prime issues within the field of my topic. The use of film and imagery analysis, an email discussion about my chosen topic with Academic Alice Leppert, along with author perspectives will help to furthermore support my research and discussion.

## Chapter 1 – The Context of the TV Series *Friends*

Created by David Crane and Marta Kauffman in the year 1994, *Friends*, an American romantic-comedy television series based in the centre of New York, follows the lives of 6 friends all in their 20s (IMDB.com,2018). Premiering on the American National Broadcasting Channel (NBC) late 1994, *Friends* quickly became popular, with the Nielson Ratings Archive (Ginsburg, n.d.) giving it an average number of 20.7 million views throughout its decade-long broadcast.

It is focused around six main characters, roommates Joey Tribbiani and Chandler Bing, quirky masseuse Pheobe Buffay, siblings Ross and Monica Geller and her best friend from school, Rachel Green. Each series showcases their daily lives and the trials and tribulations that come with work, family life, friendship and relationships. Each of the six characters has a shared history which has laid the base to their friendship and these become known as past flashbacks are staggered throughout each series. Every character has a definitive personality, making each one interesting and different. Joey Tribbiani, played by Matt Le Blanc is a dim-witted, struggling actor whose two biggest interests are food and women. Sharing an apartment with Joey is the sarcastic joker of the group, Chandler Bing, played by Mathew Perry. Both bachelors live across the hall from Courteney Cox who portrays the character, Monica Geller. Monica, the OCD neat freak of the group is a culinary chef who is sub-letting the apartment from her grandmother and living alone before being reunited with her best friend from school, Rachel, within the Pilot episode. During this we are introduced to Rachel Green, a rather materialistic character whose interests lie heavily in fashion. As the series evolves, Rachel and Monica's brother, Ross Geller, begin their on-off relationship which plays a constant part throughout each series of the show. Ross Geller, played by David Schwimmer is an

intelligent yet awkward character whose clumsiness is often the cause of his comedy. The last of the six characters is Pheobe Buffay, portrayed by Lisa Kudrow. Pheobe is known as the spiritual one of the group due to her quirky and eccentric personality.

There is a small selection of locations used to lay a base to the show and these locations primarily include the New York apartment block where Joey and Chandler share an apartment across the hall from Monica and Rachel, Central Perk, the Greenwich Village coffee shop and Ross' apartment which is located not far from Monica and Rachel's. These all become a familiar site to viewers as they become the background to many episodes.

After its NBC debut on September 22<sup>nd</sup> 1994, (HISTORY, 2009), *Friends* continues to be broadcasted worldwide on a daily basis. The show's large popularity allowed filming to carry on for a decade after its debut, before creators decided to end it after its tenth series. The last episode was aired in the USA on May 6<sup>th</sup> 2004 with an estimated 52.4 million viewers tuning in to watch the final episode.

(IMDB.com,2018). It is estimated that 9.64 million people within the UK have watched the final series while it was broadcasted on the UK's distributing channel, Channel 4, making it the highest rating programme of 2004 for that channel.

(IMDB.com,2018).



*Friends* has managed to withhold its cultural status as viewing figures continue to increase, largely thanks to Netflix' recent reboot of the show. This is proven below (Figure 1) as it has been ranked by Netflix members as their number 1 SVoD programme during 2018.

Rank	Programme	Genre	Sub Genre	Commission Type	Service	Origin	Total Streams
1	Friends	Comedy	Sitcom	Acquisition	Netflix	USA	1985
2	The Grand Tour	Entertainment	Magazine	Original	Amazon	UK	911
3	The Crown	Drama	History	Original	Netflix	UK	651
4	Stranger Things	Drama	Sci-Fi/Fantasy	Original	Netflix	USA	628
5	Peaky Blinders	Drama	Crime	Acquisition	Netflix	UK	519
6	Black Mirror	Drama	Sci-Fi/Fantasy	Original	Netflix	UK	504
7	The Big Bang Theory	Comedy	Sitcom	Acquisition	Netflix	USA	485
8	Brooklyn Nine-Nine	Comedy	Sitcom	Acquisition	Netflix	USA	369
9	The Good Place	Comedy	Sci-Fi/Fantasy	Original	Netflix	USA	343
10	Vikings	Drama	History & War	Acquisition	Amazon	Ireland/Canada	335
11	Lucifer	Drama	Sci-Fi/Fantasy	Acquisition	Amazon	USA	330
12	Altered Carbon	Drama	Sci-Fi/Fantasy	Original	Netflix	USA	312
13	Orange is the New Black	Drama	Comedy	Original	Netflix	USA	310
14	Designated Survivor	Drama	Thriller	Original	Netflix	USA	302
15	Grey's Anatomy	Drama	Medical	Acquisition	NOW TV	USA	298
16	Breaking Bad	Drama	Crime	Acquisition	Netflix	USA	290
17	Homeland	Drama	Crime	Acquisition	Netflix	USA	288
18	Paw Patrol	Animation	Children's	Acquisition	Netflix	Canada	278
19	Riverdale	Drama	Mystery	Acquisition	NOW TV	USA	256
20	Peppa Pig	Animation	Children's	Acquisition	Netflix/Amazon	UK	244

Figure 1: Top 20 SVoD programmes in the UK, 2018.

Source: (OfCom, 2018. *Top 20 SVoD programmes in the UK, 2018.*. [image] Available at: [https://www.ofcom.org.uk/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0014/116006/media-nations-2018-uk.pdf](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0014/116006/media-nations-2018-uk.pdf)

As the popularity behind the programme grew larger within the 1990's, so did its cultural impact on society. The influence provided by the show can be seen within the reaction to its opening sequence theme song, *I'll Be There* by The Rembrandts'. As a result of the show's high viewing figures, this song became frequently requested across radio stations forcing the band to record a full-length version of the original 40 second clip used within the series. As a result it remained on the Number 1 spot of the charts for 11 consecutive weeks. (The Independent, 2004).

The large amount of attention behind the show made it IMDB's number one television show throughout the 1990's, as voted by popularity. (IMDB.com,2018).

It could be argued that the reason *Friends* attracted so many viewers is due to its focus upon the young adult lifestyle. Within John DellaContrada's article for the University of Buffalo, he refers to popular-culture expert Elayne Rapping's statement which claims that, "*Friends* will be remembered as the show that made America aware that being in your 20's is really being in the prime of life" (DellaContrada, 2004). This is a show primarily based upon the lives of these characters and due to its decade long run, viewers were able to build a connection as they witness the development of all six members of the group, growing from young adults of their 20's to full-time working adults. The focus upon youth within *Friends* resonates with the show's target demographic of 20-50 year olds, helping to build a stronger connection between its viewers and the characters on screen. Conversely, Rapping can be seen to contradict herself as cited within David P. Pierson's publication *A Show about Nothing: Seinfeld and the Modern Comedy of Manners*, by saying "these sitcoms about young urbanites with no apparent family or career responsibilities and with plenty of time to just hang out and talk, but without offering much in the way of compensation except celebrating the trivial." (Pierson, 2004).

This gives a sense that viewers shouldn't feel they can connect with the show as it is not an accurate representation of the everyday working adult life. However, it might be due to this exact reason that *Friends* drew a large audience as it offers escapism of the everyday routine.

The heavy focus on all six characters gave the show a platform for there to be a range of character types. As a result of this, *Friends* captures the zeitgeist as each character falls into a stereotype due to their different personalities and attributes. It is this variation of personality types that help to appeal to a broader audience. This increases the possibility that viewers will be able to resonate with at least one of the six, creating a stronger connection between the viewer and the show which will then result in viewer loyalty. Each character within *Friends* successfully represents the stereotype given to their role; Ross being the 'nerdy one', Chandler the 'sarcastic joker', Joey the 'womaniser', Pheobe the 'quirky hippie', Monica the 'clean freak', and Rachel the 'spoiled fashionista'. Each of these personality types plays a part in connecting with the show's range of viewers. As cited within Kelly Reed's, *Gender Stereotypes in the Sitcom Friends*, she refers to TIME writer James Poniewozik and his opinion on the influence a television programme can have on its audience. "In sitcoms particularly, it is important to identify how often stereotypes are portrayed because people see themselves through the show. Sitcoms are made to relate to the society." (Poniewozik, 2004). This is an accurate representation of *Friends* as its range of character types reached out to many viewers, making them feel as though they can identify with the show and the normal nature of the characters within it.

## Chapter 2 – Analysis of the Rachel Green Character.

All six characters are within the transitional life stage of their early twenties and therefore reflecting a very identifiable time of life. It can be seen to many that *Friends* plays a contributing role in reflecting similar life experiences during the moment when individuals approach adulthood and enter full-time work and responsibilities. Supporting this outlook on the series is Renee Ruth Peckham (2006) in her thesis *Audience Interpersonal Identification with the Television Series Friends as it is reflected in Avid Viewers within the Twixter Stage of Life*. Within this she addresses Kelman's (1961) theory of identification in relation to the series *Friends*, interviewing 14 women who demographically fit within the 18 to 25 age gap, also referred to as Twixterhood. "Producers are presented with the challenge of bonding the vast array of audience preferences through a single entertaining program by determining what a mass audience has in common." (Peckham, 2006, p.8). The creators of *Friends* have based the show around this decade of life in order to appeal to a large audience. Peckham reiterates her point by saying,

"Given the expansive audience a popular series such as *Friends* had over a ten-year period and continues to have in syndication, the premise is that this series, through its mass audience's identification with the characters in the series, has gradually contributed to the cultural paradigm that is Twixterhood." (Peckham, 2006, p.9).

The show's focus on this period of life has encouraged character identification, therefore making viewers feel as though they can relate strongly to them. As a result to this, the attention of many viewers was captured by the character of Rachel Green within *Friends*.

Rachel plays a large part within the show as she is an integral part of the group. Rachel is first seen to viewers during the Pilot episode, ('The One Where Monica Gets a New Roommate (Pilot)', 1994), where Monica introduces her to the other 5 members as her friend from school.

Throughout all 10 series Rachel is portrayed to be an identifiable character due to the 'All American Girl Next Door' character type that she portrays. This aspect of her character is portrayed within her innocent outlook on life, to which we see during the first episode. (Figure 2).

('The One Where Monica Gets a New Roommate (Pilot)', 1994).



Figure 2: Jennifer Aniston, Courteney Cox, Lisa Kudrow and David Schwimmer in *Friends*. (1994).

Source: NBC Universal, Inc (1994). *Friends, The One Where Monica Gets a Roommate*. [image]  
Available at: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0583459/mediaviewer/rm1279187968>

The introduction of the Rachel Green character makes an impact instantly as she enters her first scene in her wedding dress having just jilted her fiancé at their wedding. During this scene, Rachel enters the coffee shop in a flustered manner looking for Monica. Analysing this scene from a production point of view makes it possible to see that the costume choice is perfectly appropriate as it is applicable to both the scene's narrative and Rachel's circumstances. Instantly, Rachel's characteristics are represented as she becomes the centre of attention. This is highlighted further due to the evident clash between the wedding dress and the set of the coffee shop. Rachel showcases a lot of confusion and doubt as she tries to explain her reasons behind leaving her husband-to-be and finding Monica, this could be looked at being a reflection of the characters uncertainty.

This episode provides a base introduction to the Rachel character and her vulnerability is soon represented to viewers. During the last scene of the episode, the 5 other members of the cast attempt to persuade Rachel to become more independent and get a job;

Monica: "Come on, you can't live off your parents your whole life."

Rachel: "I know that, that's why I was getting married."

*Friends* (1994), Series 1, Episode 1, Netflix (2017).

The reliance that Rachel demands emphasises the lack of confidence she has in her ability to provide for herself. Viewers can see this vulnerability and empathise with her.

Throughout the duration of all 10 series' of the show, it is possible to claim that the character of Rachel Green develops the most out of all 6. As the series unfolds,

Rachel is seen to no longer rely on her father's money, as seen within the first episode, and instead begins her first job as a waitress. Rachel begins her waitressing career at the Central Perk cafe, often seen as a meeting point for the *Friends* characters. The result of Rachel obtaining a 'normal' job helps to portray her characters relatability, yet through analysing further it could be argued that the purpose behind placing the character in such a conventional job is to emphasise her development as she becomes a professional woman within the fashion industry later on in the show. The contrast of this acts as a cliché, representing what is often a common factor seen within many television shows and movies, where a character must endure the typical 9 to 5 job before receiving their 'big break' and working within their aspired industry. This ironically creates an aspect of unrelatability, contributing to the 'American Dream' stereotype that the character is placed in as she moves from a job that she despises to a job she has dreamt of doing.

It is within the first and second series of the show in particular that Rachel Green draws viewers' attention due to the on/off relationship between the Ross and Rachel characters. This further enhances the connection between character and viewer as they are able to empathise with the storyline. The 'will they, won't they?' approach is often seen throughout TV and film as it captures and maintains viewer attention, making them want to continue watching in order to discover what will happen next. John Langer's 1981 article titled 'Television's Personality System' as cited in James Bennett's 'Television's Personalities: Stardom and the Small Screen' suggests that the attention and fame encouraged by television is one that is based on people appearing just-the-way-they-are, which inevitably contributes to the viewers feeling a sense of familiarity and empathy. (Bennett, J. 2010). Viewers become attached to the characters and their storylines as they portray realistic situations.

The 'girl next-door' portrayal that comes along with the Rachel Green character remains particularly evident throughout the early series' of *Friends* and this is portrayed through characteristics and choice of costume. The easy-going demeanour portrayed by the character is reflected in the casual styling of her costume. Rachel's fashion captured the attention of viewers throughout its decade long broadcast and continues to do so today as many magazine articles continue to publish guidelines on how to dress like the character. The reaction to the fashion outfits worn by Rachel increased continuously throughout all ten series' of the show, making not only the character but also certain scenes iconic purely due to the outfit that is worn. An example of this is the strapless yellow dress worn in series 5 of the show. (Figure 3).

The shows costume designer, Debra McGuire tells The Telegraph of a time when an outfit worn by Rachel caused a big reaction. "There was a strapless yellow dress that Rachel wore that I think I got thousands of emails over the years just about that dress." (Gladman, 2016).



Figure 3: Jennifer Aniston in *Friends*, 1999.

Source: NBC (1999). *Rachel Green Yellow Strapless Dress*. [image] Available at: <https://www.whowhatwear.co.uk/rachel-green-outfits/slide16>.



As the attention given to her costume developed, it became of more importance than the content of the scenes, making it occupy a large aspect of the character. Randee Dawn, as cited in Helen Warner's book *Fashion on Television: Identity and Celebrity Culture* suggested that during the year 2000 fashion designer's began to mass market their designs more than ever before. "They realise the best way to reach the greatest number of potential consumers is through television." (Warner, 2014). This reiterates the power that popular television shows, such as *Friends* had on the fashion industry at that time.

Similarly pointed out in the edited book 'Reading Sex and the City' by Kim Akass and Janet McCabe, as they discuss how fashion played a role alongside the character of Carrie Bradshaw. "Fashion is the fifth character." (Akass and McCabe, 2008, page 115). Here it is possible to understand the approach taken by the show's costume designer and stylist, Patricia Field, within episodes of *Sex and the City*, where her aim was to create a strong link between the displays of current fashion trends along with the popularity behind the show. The impression that the costume worn by characters throughout the show has its own presence, working separately alongside the narrative is an aspect that is able to be compared with the character of Rachel Green. (Akass and McCabe, 2008).

The costume worn throughout each series' of *Friends* has made the character synonymous for her style as it was character appropriate while also being continuously on trend during the years of filming. Her costume during the show continues to be loved by viewers today as they are now referred to by fans as iconic Rachel outfits, this is specifically mentioned within the Harper's Bazaar article *Rachel Green's Best 'Friends' Outfits*, "it's Jennifer Anniston's turn as Rachel Green that delivered the shows most iconic outfits." (O'Neill, 2018). O'Neill brings to light how

the character captured the essence of 90's fashion by donning a range of trendy outfits. "From minimal pantsuits to slinky slip dresses, a questionable use of double denim and a Vetements-esque love for trackpants and 'Dad' sneakers, Rachel Green remains one of our most-loved fictional style icons." (O'Neill, 2018) and therefore making her mark as one of television's best dressed characters of that decade. Numerous articles on how to dress like the character continue to be published 10 years after filming has ended, with journalists still naming her a fashion influence. "Rachel Green is perhaps the most fashionable character to have graced our television screens." ((Olpeka, Pentazi and Heller, 2018).

All outfits represent Rachel's character at the time, making them suitable for the scene that they are shown in. As the character develops throughout each series this is also reflected in her clothing, intertwining the two. By analysing the image stills taken from the early series' of *Friends* it is clear that the fashion worn by the character represents her youthfulness. Lots of relaxed denim dungarees, plain t-shirts and pyjamas reflect this, showcasing the ease and lack of thought behind assembling these outfits.

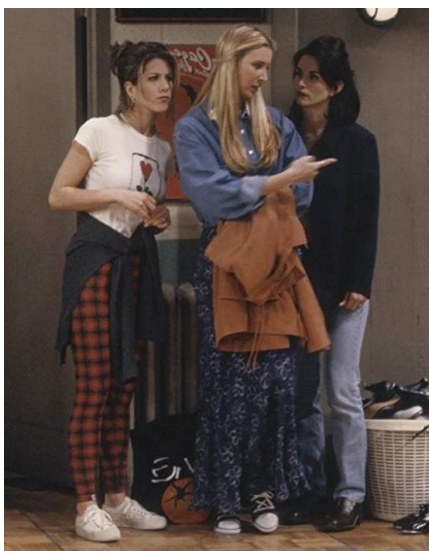


Figure 4: Jennifer Aniston, Lisa Kudrow and Courteney Cox in *Friends*, 1994.



Figure 5: Jennifer Aniston and Courteney Cox in *Friends*, 1994.

As the character develops she uses her passion and interest as a guide to help her achieve her desired career path. Viewers are then introduced to a new chapter within Rachel's life as she begins her career within the fashion industry. The character is placed in stereotypical situations by having to follow the 'work your way to the top' statement. This is shown during her time working as a waitress to then working as a coffee girl for a fashion company. The disinterest she has for this is a reflection of the character's work ethic, another attribute that viewers resonate with. Viewers witness the character building a career, contributing to their ability of empathy. On the contrary, it is once again that Rachel moves from being relatable to unrelatable as it is within the episode ('The One Where Chandler Can't Remember Which Sister', 1997) that Rachel is offered an unrealistic job offer. In this episode Rachel is seen sat at the counter of Monica's new place of work complaining about her new job at a fashion company, within minutes of her discussion with Monica, viewers are then introduced to a new character, Mark, who overhears Rachel's misery and immediately offers her the opportunity of an interview for a job at leading fashion department store, Bloomingdale's. This situation can be looked upon as the ideal and it is during this episode that one could argue that the feeling of relatability turns into a feeling of aspiration towards the character. Rachel is given what many wish to have, the opportunity to verbalise their woes and to then have somebody provide an improved alternative. This is another factor as to why viewers will look to the character as being somebody they aspire to be, contributing to the admiration felt towards her.

The combination of relatability and admiration can be perceived as a blurred mix when discussing Rachel Green as many viewers use these emotions to connect with her. Her relatability captures the attention of the viewer while the admiration prolongs

that attention, providing the viewer with the want to emulate her. Lucy Spangler's book *Television Women*, explores this further, looking into how it is possible to feel a larger impact from certain characters if one feels that they can relate or compare themselves to them in any way. Spangler considers two researchers, Cynthia Hoffner and Joanne Cantor and their discussion on how viewers engage with characters,

“they have implications for various components of attraction, such as liking, perceived similarity, and the desire to be like characters. These reactions, in turn, have shown to influence viewers' tendencies to identify with or take the perspective of characters, and to attend to and imitate their behaviours.” (Spangler, 2003).

Through exploring more research taken by Cynthia Hoffner I discovered her thoughts behind the report by Rosengren, Windahl, Hakansson and Johnsson-Smaragdi (1976) on Identification and how this has the power to attract and maintain a loyal viewer fan base. This report fits well within this discussion as *Friends* maintained large viewer ratings throughout its 10 year broadcast and this is largely due to it creating a loyal fan base. One form of Identification mentioned is as named 'wishful identification', this is a form appropriate for my chosen topic as many fashion influencers and viewers themselves used this form of identification during the 1990's, and continue to today, in order to embody the fashion of the Rachel Green character. Hoffner describes this response as,

“a psychological process through which an individual desires or attempts to become like another person. (V. Feilitzen & Linne. 1975; Hoffner, 1996). For example, Adams-Price and Greene (1990) found that the most common form of celebrity attachment

reported by adolescents was “identificatory attachment”, or the desire to be like or become the celebrity.” (Hoffner, 2005).

The fondness that viewers felt towards the Rachel Green character gave them a want to be like her. This is portrayed through the numerous articles on how to emulate her style, giving viewers the chance to feel they are embodying the character.

The form of ‘wishful identification’ can be seen throughout many aspects of the Rachel character, be it her fashion, her development and success within work or her romantic relationship with fellow on-screen character, Ross. After researching into Alice Leppert’s 2018 article, *Friends Forever: Sitcom Celebrity and Its Afterlives*, I received a more in-depth opinion by emailing her to discover why she felt the Rachel Green character in particular impacted so many. Her response was very informative as she expressed her interpretation,

“Rachel was influential for her 90’s fashion for a couple of reasons: 1) Her character was explicitly marked as ‘fashionable’, given her obsession with shopping and later her jobs in the fashion industry at Ralph Lauren, etc.” Leppert, A (2018).

This shows that it is therefore natural for viewers to look to Rachel’s costume within the series as her character is constantly linked to that industry.

“2) Aniston was/is very conventionally pretty – not exotically beautiful, but accessibly attractive. In other words, she wasn’t an intimidating figure, viewers could imagine they could look like her (and many did thanks to the famous haircut). 3) Relatedly, her character on the show is the most bland/average person – she’s not too high strung like Monica or kooky like Pheobe, thus she’s easy for people to write

themselves onto, because she doesn't have a ton of specifically identifiable characteristics. This makes it that much easier to emulate her style." Leppert, A (2018).

Through comparing the nature of the 3 female characters and reflecting on their different personalities, it is possible that viewers looked to Rachel as being the most identifiable due to her normal nature. As the character replicates a normal nature, fans feel a sense of familiarity.

Another factor impacting the viewers' connection is the identification given to the Rachel Green character by the audience themselves. Viewers identify her easy-going nature to be unthreatening and the sense of relatability within each series helps to fuel their interest in both the show and the character. The relationship between the audience and the character develops further during the later series of the show as the character enhances her 'role model' status by representing an element of feminism within Series Eight. In the episode *The One Where Rachel Has a Baby*, during a scene between Rachel and cast member Janice Litman, portrayed by Maggie Wheeler, Janice praises Rachel for her bravery, "Can I just say I really admire what you're doing... just raising her all alone." *Friends* (1994), Series 8, Episode 24, Netflix (2017).

This series portrays a combination of Rachel's character attributes, reverting back to her vulnerability which was present during Series One, in addition to strength and bravery as she falls pregnant with Ross' baby and decides to proceed with the pregnancy although they are not in a romantic relationship. The representation of femininity and womanhood during this section of the show was primarily portrayed by the Rachel Green character and this was noticed by many viewers. The audience

was now becoming more aware of the characters values, with less emphasis on her material side and larger focus on the more meaningful aspects. The development brought on by her choice to embody a single mother added another dimension to the character which wasn't seen before. It is during the episode ('The One Where Rachel Goes Back to Work', 2003) that this aspect of her reaches its peak.

Within this episode we see Rachel return to her place of work at Ralph Lauren with her daughter Emma, only to find that male colleague, Gavin played by Dermot Mulroney, has filled her position. Although disguised with suitable comedy, the underlining message within the episode remains very evident as it's possible to see that Rachel feels the need to end her maternity leave 2 weeks early in order to restrict Gavin from taking her job. (Figure 6). The female viewers of the show in particular will be able to empathise with the character during this series as the show represents a real life decision that working mother's face. This is a further reasoning which contributes to the viewers' connection to the character.



Figure 6: Jennifer Aniston, Dermot Mulroney and Steve Ireland in *Friends*. (1994).

Source: NBCUniversal Media, LLC (2013). *Friends*, 1994. [image] Available at: <http://gettyimages.com>

### Chapter 3 – Cultural Analysis of the Rachel Green Character alongside Jennifer Aniston

As the popularity behind the show *Friends* grew larger during its decade of filming, the actors that represented the 6 'friends' grew in popularity alongside it. The show was being broadcasted daily and as a result, the characters and the actors that played them became household names. Viewers invested in the characters and their storylines each day, bridging the gap between viewer and show as individuals thought of it to be so easy to connect to. Reinforcing this is NBC News article writer Matt Lauer as he describes his interpretation of the show, "It was just like real friends, just like real life." (Lauer, 2004).

Although each of the six cast members found great success through the show, it could be argued that the actress portraying Rachel Green, Jennifer Aniston, became "perhaps even more famous than her co-stars." (Etingoff, 2013) as Kim Etingoff claims in her book *Jennifer Aniston: From Friends to Film*. The reasons behind providing Aniston with this title are numerous, from being named as the world's most powerful celebrity by US magazine Forbes in 2003 after earning \$35 million in 2002, (News.bbc.co.uk, 2003), to her career transition from television actress to Hollywood movie star. A transition which is not looked upon as an easy one as David Crane, co-creator of *Friends*, is cited within Murray Pomerance's *Shining in Shadows: Movie Stars of the 2000's*, "There needs to be some *special* element to make people want to pay money to see people they've been getting every Thursday night for nothing." (Pomerance, 2012). Aniston's career remained to be successful after *Friends* as she featured in large-budget Hollywood movies such as *Bruce Almighty* [2003], *The Break-Up* [2006], and *Marley & Me* [2008].



Aniston's continual connection to Rachel Green could be looked upon as a hindrance in regards to career development as she remains to be compared to her character on the show. As seen in Anne Bilson's article *Can Jennifer Aniston ever really lose Rachel from Friends?* For *The Telegraph*, this is reiterated,

“for her millions of loyal fans, Aniston will always be the character she played on Friends. Rachel Green is funny but not too funny, pretty but not too pretty, sexy but not too sexy, scatterbrained but not too scatterbrained – someone who came into their homes every week for 10 years, someone they know.” (Billson, 2015).

The relatable attribute given to the Rachel Green character in order to connect with viewers has filtered into the true portrayal of the actress as this is what many perceive to be a representation of her real personality. Langer's (1981) theory supports this as his observation that television produces 'personalities' proves accurate when discussing Aniston and her connection with the Rachel Green character.

As Aniston's career has evolved, she has portrayed characters that have been far from her former *Friends* one. Her depiction of Claire Bennett in the movie *Cake* [2014] is an example of this and it could be argued that this is her attempt to move away from her former *Friends* character by fulfilling roles that many would not perceive to be typical for her. However this is contradicted within Murray Pommerance's *Shinning in the Shadows: Movie Stars of the 2000's*, with a reference to Aniston's appearance on *Good Morning America*. “Every inch the movie star and still the girl next door” is how Diane Sawyer introduced the actress, summarising the perception of the star and how she has managed to combine the qualities of a Hollywood actress along with a normal girl. (Pomerance, 2012).

Pommerance suggests that,

“in spite of – or ultimately overriding- the above extraordinary successes, ordinariness *is* Aniston’s distinctiveness. Interviews and features across the decade thus emphasize Aniston’s “refreshing” and unusual “good girl”-ness, her comfort as “one of us”, and her down-to-earth normalcy.” (Pommerance, 2012, page 57).

The relationship that viewers have built with Rachel Green portrays a connection that Aniston can’t remove herself from. A contributing factor to this is the media’s portrayal of the actress. It could be perceived that the media has taken advantage of the relationship between the public and the actress in order to receive reaction. It is most commonly found that media articles will focus on the actress’ personal life rather than her career; this is reinforced by *Forbes* journalist Frances Bridges.

“Her divorce from Brad Pitt was written about for over a decade, twice the length of their marriage. Her relationship status is relentlessly reported, and she is asked more often about the state of her marriage to actor/writer Justin Theroux and their plans to have children than about her movies.” (Bridges, 2016).

Aniston’s 10 years as the ‘girl-next-door’ character has resulted in the media producing articles about her appearance, health or relationship status in lieu of her work.

Writing in, *In the Limelight and Under the Microscope: Forms and Functions of Female Celebrity*, Holmes and Negra (2011) explain that,

“the problem of distinguishing between performance as impersonation, in which actors subordinate themselves to a role, and performance as personification, in which actors appear to play themselves.” (Holmes and Negra, 2011).

Aniston's perceived familiarity as Rachel has led to the media producing articles that refer to her as somebody that the public have a close association with as opposed to the Hollywood actress she is. Susan Berridge supports this opinion and refers to the *Friends* episode *The One Where They All Turn Thirty* to highlight this further. In *From the Woman Who 'Had It All' to the Tragic, Ageing Spinster: The Shifting Star Persona of Jennifer Aniston*, Berridge (2015) refers to the disjuncture between Rachel's life and Aniston's during 2001, in which the episode was aired, due to their contrast. As Rachel turned 30 and proclaimed her anxieties of not having a husband or children, Aniston was newly married to A-List actor Brad Pitt. Berridge continues by comparing the reverse which then happens as Rachel receives her "happy ending" during the show's final episode as she is reunited with Ross, the father of her baby (2004), while Aniston was due to separate from Pitt amidst rumours of his affair with actress Angelina Jolie. (Berridge, 2015).

"Accordingly, her star image suddenly and dramatically shifted from the girl to aspire to, to the doomed and ageing singleton" (Berridge, 2015).

The shifting perception on Aniston became prominent as the media no longer portrayed her as an inspiration but instead somebody to pity. It could be argued that the media feel they can publish such personal elements about the actress due to the approachable demeanour that she represents. Langer's (1981) theory on *Television's Personality System* can once again demonstrate the reasons behind why the public and the media feel they are able to have this outlook on the actress. "the television personality stays the same; once a character, always a character" (Langer, 1981). Aniston's decade long portrayal of Rachel Green has resulted in her absorbing the character, making it difficult for the public or the media to differentiate between the two.

“In television fiction it is the characters themselves that maintain a high public profile and are retained as memorable identities. The actors who ‘play’ them are virtually invisible and anonymous.” (Langer, 1981).

The continual connection the public feel towards the *Friends* character along with the media’s portrayal has resulted in Rachel Green becoming almost as real as Aniston.

## Conclusion

The success and popularity behind the television show *Friends* has resulted in it becoming a cultural phenomenon. Its influence remains to have an impact on popular culture and its characters continue to please a large audience range with the informal script on everyday topics that viewers still feel they are able to relate to today, 10 years after filming has ended.

The development of the Rachel Green character remains evident throughout each series and the reaction from viewers helps to support the importance of her role within the show. From studying the theory of Identification and understanding the reasons behind why viewers feel they can relate to certain characters, this has made it clear to me as to why Rachel has had the effect she has on both viewers and the media. From discovering the different forms of portrayal that come with being a television personality and a film star, and how viewers interpret an actor differently depending on which they appear in has given me a clear understanding behind why Jennifer Aniston remains to be known as the 'girl-next-door' character from *Friends*. Studying the connection that viewers feel towards the actress and the character she portrays has made it evident that a range of elements have contributed towards her becoming an image in society. A combination of how the character captured the zeitgeist of the time, the normal nature she portrayed in addition to her fashion-conscious costume, which acted as a nod to the 90's style at the time, has each played a role in creating an aspirational figure. The media's constant comparison between Aniston and Rachel is no longer a positive one as Aniston's personal life is scrutinised for not reflecting a similar one of her former *Friends* character. The way in which the media struggle to differentiate between the life of the actress and her former character shows the impact that she has created.

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