

**Masculinities in the
television series 'Friends'**
A different kind of male friendship?

A dissertation submitted to the University of Manchester
for the degree of MA (Econ)
in the Faculty of Economic and Social Studies

Manchester, September 2000

by
Vegard Iglebæk

Women's Studies Centre
Department of Sociology

Abstract

This dissertation discusses friendships between men in the Northern American television series *Friends* and focuses upon two of the male characters, Joey Tribbiani and Chandler Bing. *Friends* shows six twenty-something men and women, sharing two flats in the middle of New York's Manhattan. Even though the series can be interpreted as conveying heterosexual values aimed towards a younger, mainstream audience, I argue that the relation between two of the men, being flatmates, is possibly representing different models of male friendships than usually seen in these kind of series. Personal disclosure and intimacy among heterosexual, Northern-European and American men tend to be restricted to specific arenas and situations, such as blissful moments at the football pitch or in situations of external crisis. Joey and Chandler's constant negotiating of degrees of intimacy is among the plots in the series. However, their relation stands out from the crowd compared to other series' narratives of relations between men.

Joey and Chandler can be interpreted as widening the degree of acceptable personal disclosure, rather than being threatened by it. One might claim that they are opening up spaces for new ways of doing heterosexual masculinities, struggling to define modes of acceptable communication in their strictly heterosexual context. I am scrutinising a few scenes from selected episodes, discussing these issues from a sociological point of view, informed by cultural theory.

My main question is whether *Friends* is just another television series handing over conventional sexual and social identities, or whether we actually are witnessing new attempts to expand male, heterosexual behaviour for personal disclosure with other men, without worrying too much about homosexuality.

Acknowledgements

Due to encouragement from my fellow students in the MA course of Women's Studies, I decided to develop my idea of analysing the television series *Friends*. I am grateful to them. The process of working out this dissertation has been fruitful and interesting, much because of stimulating supervision from David H. J. Morgan and Vicki Robinson.

Fellow student Yasmine D'Alessandro is however the person I am most indebted to, because she has shown enthusiasm and a remarkable critical insight into the issues we have discussed during the process of this dissertation. She has truly inspired my academic curiosity.

I also want to thank Ron Peek for reading drafts and giving crucial feedback, and David Gauntlett for good ideas. Anne Morrow provided me with a key for the Williamson's building and let me use the video player of Greater Sociology.

Declaration

This is to certify that no portion of the work referred to in the dissertation has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institution of learning.

Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Declaration	iv
Introduction	1
Chapter 1 Methodology and motivation for researching ‘Friends’	3
Chapter 2 Homosociality and homoeroticism	11
The politics of homosociality.....	12
Homoeroticism – why and how	16
Homoeroticism – fashion or fact?.....	21
Chapter 3 Male intimacy	23
The goodbye scene: male intimacy standpoint	23
The context of their friendship.....	25
Blinded by male intimacy?	27
Cultural ideologies of gender	29
The power of popular culture.....	31
Conclusion	34
Literature	36
Appendix 1.....	42

Introduction

This dissertation discusses the friendship between two of the male protagonists in the Northern American situation comedy *Friends*: Joey Tribbiani (Matt LeBlanc) is an aspiring actor and Chandler Bing (Matthew Perry) works as a data processor. They are roommates in a bachelor flat in New York's Manhattan. These are the two characters I shall focus upon. However they socialise within a context of four other friends. Monica Geller (Courteney Cox) and Rachel Karen Green (Jennifer Aniston) share a similar flat across the corridor on their same floor. Respectively they work as a cook and as a sales agent in various clothing shops. Ross Geller (David Schwimmer) is Monica's brother and is the only one with higher education, holding a PhD in palaeontology. He has an apartment of his own, while Phoebe Buffay (Lisa Kudrow), the sixth member of the group, lives with her grandmother. The series depicts them as six twenty-something, white, middleclass men and women, and has had a tremendous popularity globally since its initial airing in the United States in 1994. Apart from Ross and Chandler, the rest of the cast tends to wander restlessly between jobs. This is the setting for the period I am discussing in this dissertation, mainly the second season, aired in 1995 and 1996 in the United States, one year later in the United Kingdom.

For a long time I was in doubt of what the point of claiming a gender perspective on two fictional, male characters in a mainstream, Northern American television series, was. After a while I realised that I was worrying about whether I could justify that my dissertation was 'proper' feminist writing. Then I came across Lynne Pearce (1995) claiming '[P]atriarchy is no longer the monolithic white elephant we can blame for all our ills. For today's feminist reader everything, everywhere, is almost oppressively subtle, complex and contradictory.' (Pearce 1995:86) In this dissertation I have focused on the friendship between Joey and Chandler in an attempt to tease out the contradictory meanings embedded in friendships between men. I am curious whether Joey and Chandler are representing different models of male friendships.

The first chapter discusses my methodology and motivation for delving into their relationship. For example, what is the purpose of studying a television series? After all, it is only fiction, and what has that has to do with sociology? The second chapter explores the contradictory manners in which one may read their friendship. I shall point out the heterosexual components of homosociality. Then I explore the potential of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's concept of homosocial desire as representing a continuum of interest towards other men that exceeds boundaries of heterosexuality and homosexuality. In other words, this continuum blurs the conventional separation between the platonic and the sexual within interests in same-sex persons. Mark Simpson (1993) has adopted Sedgwick's framework onto popular culture and queered what appears to be heterosexual through the concept of

homoeroticism. I shall locate homosexuality within this conceptual debate, as well as within Joey and Chandler's relation.

The third chapter presents an attempt to analyse their friendship as representing potentially different (and perhaps new) models of doing heterosexual masculinities, being men and making close friends with other men. Finally, I will look into the potential of popular culture as a communicator of different models for friendships between men.

Chapter 1 Methodology and motivation for researching 'Friends'

This chapter attempts to explain my motivation and background for linking gender issues and *Friends*. I am using a pro-feminist framework, endeavouring to locate myself in my writing and asking whether *Friends* can be seen as political. I raise questions of why we should take popular culture seriously, as well as discuss it as a source for critique and how this affects distinctions between fiction and theory. I also discuss why I have chosen some sequences instead of others what I have left out and how this affects the dissertation. Finally, writings on masculinities carried out by men are problematic from a feminist point of view. I discuss the aspects of this, and why I believe my study perhaps avoids some traps male writers often fall into.

I am using the popular television series *Friends* as a case study because I believe the it presents new models for men's socialisation and interaction with their male friends on a level of male intimacy. As a 26 year old, heterosexual man, socialising with other men closely, I do not identify myself with the majority of the sociological writings on what constitutes friendships between men. Writers seem to put relations between men into somewhat rigid and oppositional categories: men are either incapable of showing emotions, are homophobic and heterosexist, or they are oppressing homosexual interests in other men. I discuss these two views as respectively homosociality and homoeroticism in the next chapter. I felt a need to challenge this polarisation and look for the possibilities of alternative perspectives. Watching *Friends* made me recognise similarities in the way I see myself and several of my male friends attempting to deal with the people we regularly socialise with.

By contrast, there has been an increasing interest in women's friendships in recent years, triggered by various factors. The increase of women's social independence and mobility has made researchers ask how this may impact on personal relations to other men and women. Pat O'Connor (1992) and Marianne Gullestad (1984; 1996) are only a couple of writers investigating the multiple webs of relations that spin around women's relations.

There are several methodological clarifications I would like to discuss concerning this dissertation. First, I am working within a pro-feminist framework and carrying out critical studies of men, as opposed to the more Northern American version of 'men's studies'. I prefer labelling myself 'pro-feminist' rather than 'feminist' because being a man claiming feminist perspectives seems problematic due to the history of women's oppression in patriarchal capitalism (See Introduction in Hearn & Morgan 1990). The term 'feminist' is still closely connected to 'woman'. The continuation of academic 'malestream' is apparent in the belief that a feminist course can turn a man into a feminist. Therefore I am more comfortable with claiming a pro-feminist stance. I believe my research is pro-feminist because the majority of

the literature I am referring to throughout this dissertation is feminist and my focus in it is partly a product of this year's MA programme in Women's Studies in Manchester. Of course, you may ask, 'what's in a name?' My intention of doing the course was to critically delve into how feminism deals with men and poses questions that are easily overlooked by other parts of academia regarding men and power. My dissertation is possibly ignoring that the crew is simply promoting another updated and more sophisticated version of hegemonic masculinity. Sharon Bird (1996), citing Robert Connell (1987), understands the concept of hegemonic masculinity as 'the maintenance of practices that institutionalizes men's dominance over women' and 'is constructed in relation to woman and to subordinate masculinities' (Bird 1996:120) Hanke (1990) criticises *thirtysomething*, a similar American television series broadcast prior to *Friends*, for concealing hegemonic masculinity in its seemingly self-reflective ideology of the 'new man'. Even though *thirtysomething* may have presented new images of men and women in the late eighties and early nineties, the male cast

represents a negotiated version of hegemonic masculinity that is able to express and contain elements of liberal feminist ideology while remaining complicit with dominant gender ideology. (Hanke 1990:231)

Secondly, I enjoy the series and I had been watching it for a couple of years before I decided to write a dissertation on it, linking it to gender imagery. I believe the series has a political aspect with significance for larger amounts of its male audience. Since I am positively engaged with the text I am analysing, my analysis may easily slip into a positive description of how men can and have changed their way of behaviour and thinking during the last decades. As of my background and the fact that I am enjoying the series, it makes the danger of me too quickly presenting glorifying interpretations of the series, instead of carrying out a thoroughly critical one. I fear of entering the same traps I believe John MacInnes does in *The End of Masculinity* (1998). He argues the following:

In order to pursue sexual equality, we should not seek to change men's private identities. We should demand their public support for sexual equality in material and ideological terms. (MacInnes 1998:144)

His claim is optimistic. I suspect MacInnes of wishfully thinking that men will voluntarily support something they seldom think of (gender inequality). The reason why is simply that gender inequality usually does not affect men directly due to the simple fact of their sex. Similarly, *Friends* may thrill me in displaying ways I believe men can be positively engage with each other as friends, establishing new, constructive patterns of social behaviour. There

is though a danger of repeating MacInnes. I may overlook the fact that identity politics are crucial in changing the social, gendered matrix in society. While MacInnes naïvely ‘demands’ men to support something that barely strikes them, at least I propose that Joey and Chandler represent some scripts of being men that possibly parts of the audience recognise from their own imagination.

Analysing *Friends* makes one encounter some complicated, methodological issues. I have tried to adapt a primarily feminist, sociological perspective informed by cultural theory when studying the friendship between these two men. In this regard, the power of television is profound on gender identity and ways we conceptualise personal relations. Michael Kimmel claims that ‘images of gender in the media become texts on normative behaviour, one of many cultural shards we use to construct notions of masculinity.’ (Kimmel 1987, cited in Spangler 1992:93) Moreover, using a popular television series as a point of departure, opens up for a discussion of what kind of material sociology should engage with. Ann Game tries to untangle the tensions between social reality and representation in *Undoing the Social* (Game 1991). She claims that a *reading* of texts, which my extracts from the series are, should be more concerned with *how* one might understand the text, than *what* it is. The latter presupposes the existence of something real and consistent, while the former invites contradicting practices of interpretations. Thus, representation signifies fiction, however without any of them becoming irrelevant for a sociological discourse, because they are all interconnected.

Does *Friends* represent reality? Regarding this specific question, choosing a television series makes my task easier: *Friends* is fiction, it is a television series. The six characters are not living together in real life. Jillian Sandell (1996, 1998) claims that this series, and film more generally, works as a cultural fantasy where sexuality and gendered relations are lived out in other ways than real life enable. Game (ibid), on the other hand, argues that fiction is theory. Since theory derives from interpreting real life or the texts mediating it, the distinctions between reality, theory and fiction turn harder to maintain. Constructing fiction (or theory) is therefore never an isolated process, but shaped by the current moral, cultural and socio-geographical space surrounding it. This makes *Friends* relevant for searching for questions and answers on how I believe some men are dealing with same-sex friendships.

Thirdly, on what basis did I do my selection of gendered moments from the series? I have chosen the main sequences from the second season, screened in the United States during 1995/1996, while one year later in the United Kingdom. The second season seemed to be a period when Joey and Chandler were displayed as particularly close friends. The context also contained the following events: Chandler was continuously breaking up and getting together again with his girlfriend (who he claimed he hated because of her laughter, yet could not

avoid sleeping with), while Joey appeared as he was dependent upon Chandler to an even greater degree than in later seasons. This season was two years prior to Chandler entering a lasting relationship with Monica, one of the female protagonists in the series. The two men were displayed as spending a lot of time together compared to later seasons. Therefore Joey and Chandler may reflect an already recorded pattern of friendships among men: they tend to be vital to the social lives of single men, while heterosexual men in steady relationships with female partners invest to a lesser degree in their friendships with men.

I have chosen the specific scenes because they open up for multiple readings in constructive, self-contradicting manners. I support my interpretations by using sequences from other seasons and I am concerned with the quality of the friendship in these given examples. My analysis leaves out most of the series' thematic span during the years it has been aired due to lack of space in this text. The series' six years production naturally leaves space for contradicting aspects. That does not necessarily weaken my argument. Life itself is full of contradictions, and any account trying to come to terms with social interaction is bound to take this into account. Feminist autobiographical writing has shown that there is no such thing as a coherent account of a person's life and social relations, and this works out in fiction as well as in real life. (Morgan 1992; Stanley 1992)

The series also has a history, six years is a lot in the world of Hollywood, increasing fame and media capitalism. The show's scripts are produced in time and space. They take shape not only by lines being conceived in the script-writers' heads, but are shaped by money and the ever changing state of political correctness, to mention but two factors. This may be illustrated by the development of the series during the first two seasons. During that period there were major speculations both in the series' story lines and in American popular media around whether Chandler was gay. Elaine Showalter comments in 1996 that she 'will be there for Chandler' even if he turns out to be gay (People Weekly 1996). This journalist was not the only one actually suspecting that Chandler might come out of his closet one day. Theoretically this issue may trigger questions like 'is Chandler *really* gay?', and it possibly works on a similar level to another of the continuing story lines in the series: whether Ross and Rachel will be friends or lovers. They are continuously flirting, turning into lovers and splitting up throughout the series' progress. Some would call it the art of play and rewind as soaps and television series do this to attract the viewers and keep them watching (Walters 1999). In the case of this dissertation it is raising fundamental issues on men's relations and masculine identities, because Chandler seems to be an interesting case of ambiguous sexuality. Scriptwriters can write jokes and masculine anxiety into Chandler's character. In addition, it stimulates our imagination of what kind of masculine identity Chandler actually is carrying out, as well as how the others relate to this. Reading *Friends*, and television series more widely, as representing blueprints of un/acceptable, heterosexual, masculine behaviour,

one is patrolling the border of sexual politics.¹ Nevertheless, the series is yet to make Chandler appear as a homosexual. This may be due to commercial interests; owners well aware of that then, in 1995-96, the series was rapidly reaching a mainstream audience worldwide, and viewers were not necessarily ready for a gay main character.

Fourthly, why have I not chosen some of the female protagonists, or Ross, the third male as the focus of my analysis? Where do they all fit into the picture? I believe that Joey and Chandler's relation does not work in a vacuum. The sequences are coloured by the other members of the cast's presence or absence in the way that Joey and Chandler's behaviour signifies different meanings whatever the situation is. For example, Ross is the only person in the group carrying out some kind of academic career, working in a university department on palaeontology, and he also lives on his own. Joey and Chandler would not have the same effect as 'best buddies' if it were not for him. Then they would simply be buddies. He is not their best friend, he is, together with Phoebe, the show's two wanderers, travelling between the two 'best friends', Rachel and Monica, Joey and Chandler. Ross is the third guy they can mingle with and he appears to be slightly more grown up. They embody different notions of masculine virtues and therefore fit together. Ross is the sensible and future oriented one, Chandler is socially nervous, applying irony and jokes as a strategy of coping, and Joey is simply straight forward, honest, slightly stupid and disorganised. The girls make important contexts for the men's behaviour. Quite often, though, I have the impression that they work rather as 'human furniture' and scenery, rather than driving the plots forward. Their static personalities are more 'interesting', and the airhead Phoebe and Rachel 'the pretty one' (my definitions), and Monica (labelled a high maintenance person by her friends in Episode 612), seldom challenge any ways that one may perceive women being in disturbingly traditional terms. From my point of view this represents a lack of intelligent, feminist and groundbreaking script writing for the women's roles. In every episode there are men only sequences. In comparison, there are few women only scenes.² Once the boys decide to go to an ice hockey match and the girls have a girls' night at home. (Episode 204) They end up drinking and chatting in a way that completely leaves out any new ways of imagining women's friendships. In this regard, the series is gender conservative. It offers few, if any, new female, identity imageries (Sandell 1998).

My choice of naming my dissertation 'masculinities' opens up another question regarding 'what's in a name'. Jeff Hearn 1996) rhetorically asks 'Is masculinity dead?'

¹ The social and cultural impact of television is claimed to be immense. Unfortunately, this dissertation does not allow going properly into the discussion. (See Carter, Branston and Allan 1998; Walters 1999; Marshment (1997)

² This has changed lately, though. In the sixth season housing constellation has changed radically for the first time: Monica and Chandler living together, Joey and Ross on their own, Phoebe and Rachel together.

claiming that during the nineties the concept of masculinity/masculinities has gradually lost its conceptual edges, having turned far too general. He questions its current analytical value because the terms obscure aspects of being a man, rather than enlightening them.³ He points out that it is methodologically unhealthy for theory to avoid discussing issues of how men, in this case same-sex relations among men, are connected in a wider social framework. This becomes problematic because attempts to theorise any aspect of what men do and think, quickly may develop into uncritical manners of descriptions or confession style of writing, rather than examining wider contexts of inter-gendered relations. Studies of women by feminists have always taken into account wider structures than only the women; society, men, patriarchy, and a wider web of meaning (see Hearn and Morgan, 1990). Unfortunately a lot of writers on masculinity theory fail to recognise that men construct their gender identity within a wider social context than in men only arenas (Hammond and Jablow 1987; Sherrod 1987; Bly 1991). This is something several critics have attacked (Robinson 1996; Fuchs 1992; Goldson 1995; Fregoso in Rogoff and van Leer 1993; Hearn 1998). This is informed by the way

minority positions do not live at the borders, nor are they appendages to a discussion of hegemonic masculinities. “Other” masculinities serve critically to inform and structure the whole analysis.’ (Rosa Linda Fregoso, cited by Irif Rogoff and David van Leer, *Theory and Society* 1993.)

In the case of Joey and Chandler, it is vital to tease out the significance of the other protagonists, as well as guest-stars, surroundings and scenery.

I have not left out the women in my analysis. They serve to heterosexualise the context of the close relationship between Joey and Chandler, thus enabling the latter ones a close association with each other avoiding their setting from turning sexually ambiguous. There are also various women that Joey and Chandler have affairs with. These in particular make us aware of that they are only friends and provide a heterosexual guarantee so that viewers avoid speculating too much about their sexual preferences. Nonetheless, in my analysis of *Friends* the main focus is on Joey and Chandler. This may cause problems since there is seldom reason to believe that the rest of the cast does not make definite impacts on the way we interpret the interaction between Joey and Chandler. Generally, their interplay is relying upon the others’ presence or absence.

³ Writers generally used ‘masculinity’ until the early nineties, while ‘masculinities’ is usually preferred nowadays, probably partly due to Connel’s *Gender Power* (1987).

The issue of difference is another crucial element within studies of gender and masculinities. Rogoff and van Leer (1993) reflect this:

[O]ne presupposition of ... “masculinities” as a label or a category of analysis is useful only in the grammatical plural. Yet even a vigilant awareness of the range and variety of identities under discussion is not always sufficient to ensure that a recognition of difference – sexual, cultural, racial – remains at the center rather than slipping off into the margins. (Rogoff and van Leer 1993:739)

Their critique of the lacking presence of sexual, cultural and racial aspects of theorising men is something I hope to draw attention to in this dissertation.

Sandell (1998) criticises the lack of difference in *Friends*, although she gives the series credit for dealing with homosexuality and lesbianism in a constructive manner. I will deal with the possibly positive outcomes of this towards the end of chapter 3. However, Sandell critiques the cast of being unable to handle difference on a wider scale. Race is more or less never an issue. Racial complexity is barely dealt with, at best as tokenism. When Ross brings back an oriental looking girlfriend from his travel to China, Rachel treats her as a foreigner, even though she turns out to be a native New Yorker (Episode 201). It could have been a joke, but it turns sour. After a couple of episodes she disappears. They are never able to deal with outsiders more generally on a long-term basis. At best, they stick around with white, middleclass New Yorkers as well.

I agree with Sandell’s general critique of lacking difference. However, when she points out that the representation of lesbians in the series is out of touch with reality because they are appearing as too heterosexual, I think she writes off alternative interpretations too quickly. On the contrary, it could be argued that *Friends* serves a valuable contribution when avoiding displaying a lesbian couple as butches. That is still, or perhaps increasingly, the mainstream mediation of lesbians in the media. Margaret Marshment (1997) raises a comparable issue: Should one describe the issues of sexuality according to the norm or the stereotype, and what serves best sexualities at the margins of society? ‘Lipstick lesbians’ or butches? I believe the producers of *Friends* chose the former alternative.

I am definitely personifying aspects of the prototypical man doing gender studies on men and masculinities, embodying several of the aspects that Rogoff and van Leer point out (here in relation to a conference ⁴):

⁴ *Unraveling Masculinities*, conference held at the University of California, Davis, in the Spring of 1991.

The focus of these papers is predominantly on white, middle-class origins of the discursive formations of masculinity as an object of study. (Rogoff and van Leer 1993:739)

No doubt, my dissertation fits this description. Rogoff and van Leer comment that it is not surprising that at the time of the conference, held in 1991, studies of masculinities had a long way to go. Academia is still one of the major producers and consumers of white, middleclass values and culture. Thus, it is not surprising that the growing interest in masculinities started among these people. Nonetheless, this is no excuse not to challenge these perspectives.

The cultural influence of myself is significant due to my Nordic middle class, white, male status. I am also enjoying the series, which I see as crucial in the way I have looked for open ended sequences while watching the episodes. This is positively significant for my reading. My Nordic background may be especially influential for this colours the way I may look less critically on men (regarding the issues of patriarchy and power). The studies of masculinities in the Nordic countries tend to focus more on constructive possibilities for change among men (Hearn 2000). Nordic feminism is liable to focus on gender equality and how governmental institutions stimulate this process in society emphasis (see Fehr, Rosenbeck and Jonasdottir 1998). The Nordic region's cultural and social aspects have stimulated a slightly different emphasis on masculinities than for example in the United Kingdom.

Some of the writings on men in the region tend to pay attention to the positive aspects of men and changing men. Nevertheless this perspective worries me. I am afraid of simply repeating the naïve, navel-gazing and sometimes essentialising men's literature especially published by some writers from the United States and the United Kingdom. I would argue that the writers below are examples of this: Sherrod 1987; Seidler 1989, 1997; Bly 1991.) This is still dangerous, as one may forget to pay attention to the more troubling aspects of men and their power. I try to solve this problem by showing how some of the jokes exchanged between the protagonists mostly work within a heterosexual framework. I also attempt to read Joey and Chandler as displaying non-heterosexual imagery through my second chapter on homosociality and homoeroticism. Even though readers may protest against locating them within a homosexual paradigm, and that my interpretation of them as being so, it gives space for realising how taken for granted heterosexuality may be, and secondly, how this possibly mutes expressions of male homosexuality within popular culture.

Chapter 2 Homosociality and homoeroticism

In this chapter I shall discuss the possibilities and outcomes of interpreting the friendship between Joey and Chandler within the frameworks of homosociality and homoeroticism respectively. My reason for doing so is that sociologists, and others dealing with friendships between men, tend to adopt either one of these perspectives when analysing male friendships. I shall discuss the concept of homosociality thoroughly, but first I will briefly summarise the main sequence from *Friends* which will be used for analysis. Then I will define and give a wider analysis of the concept of homosociality, showing its intrinsic heterosexual character and how it fits the material of Joey and Chandler. Thirdly, I introduce Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's concept of 'homosocial desire' which bridges homosociality and homoeroticism, and then bring in homoeroticism. The latter is basically a tool for queering heterosexual settings, and a discussion of it follows at this point. Finally, I investigate how this is valuable for my writing on heterosexual, male friendships, then in particular regarding issues of power.

The main sequence I have chosen is taken from an episode where Joey decides to move out of the apartment he is sharing with Chandler (Episode 216).⁵ His decision is partly caused by an argument they have after having been to an acquaintance's party. This friend is moving out and offers Joey his flat. At that time, Chandler suspects that Joey actually prefers to move, but he does not want to raise the issue directly. That would make him display emotions and a fear of revealing that he had invested possibly too much into their relationship as flatmates. Instead he asks whether Joey likes the current situation of the two of them living together. In the sequence, Joey realises that their preferences of living conditions are differing at the moment. He declares 'I'm 28 years old, I've never lived alone, and I'm finally at a place where I've got enough money that I don't need a roommate anymore.' (Joey to Chandler in episode 216.)

Towards the end of the episode everyone helps Joey to carry his goods downstairs, and Joey and Chandler are left on their own in the flat for a few minutes. They say goodbye and it all feels odd. They do not know how to part properly in a way that seems alright for both of them, and after some hesitation and awkward silence, one of them simply mutters 'bye, see you at the café', and Joey leaves, shutting the door behind him. For a few seconds Chandler is left standing in the middle of the flat, devastated, sad and lonely. Then Joey throws the door open, runs in again and embraces Chandler, giving him a big hug.

⁵ Episode 216, aired in the second season of the series, 1995 in the United States and 1996 in the United Kingdom.

The politics of homosociality

A conventional way of interpreting this scene is that two ‘buddies’ have been quarrelling, they are parting at last and the moment has come when they must say goodbye. As they leave, they slap each other’s backs, as mates do, and then part. A common framework for interpreting this kind of male relations is to read them as representing male, homosocial bonding, and David H. J. Morgan (1992) labels it ‘homosociality’. The concept of homosociality refers ‘specifically to the non-sexual attractions held by men (or women) for members of their own sex.’ (Bird 1996:121) Within this framework of interpretation, writers have acknowledged certain elements as vital to social interaction among men. Incapability of displaying emotions is one element, and some writers would claim that the scene as presented above reflects that this is typical of Northern Euro-American men (Goldson 1995; Fuchs 1992; Hammond and Jablow 1987; Sherrod 1987). Another aspect is homophobia. Sharon Bird, for instance, claims the term opposes itself to homosexuality, because it inherits a heterosexual flavour. Homophobia is used as an instrument for clarifying and negotiating sexual identities. Anyone enacting ambiguous, masculine behaviour is likely to be frowned at by other men within a given group, unless it includes gay men or a wider frame of acceptance. What is regarded as specifically ambiguous does of course depend on the context. Homophobic comments and jokes work as buffers to suspicions of homosexuality. Thirdly, socialising often needs a goal and it is activity focused (Fiske 1987), and men appear to be emotionally detached and objectifying women (Bird 1996). Failing to adapt to this set of (varying) rules in a social setting where stereotypical, homosocial bonding is taking place is likely to cause confusion and hesitation, possibly hostility and aggression at worst. Jane Goldson (1995) supports this, writing that the male homosocial bond is ‘achieved at the expense of people, specifically the homosexuals and the women’ (Goldson 1995:1). This way of conceptualising the eagerness of men to socialise with each other can also be found in studies of representation of masculinity on big screen, and is usually labelled as the ‘buddy genre’ (Goldson 1995; Murrie 1998; Simpson 1993; Fuchs 1992). That is, heterosexual male-male relations. It refers to two men depending upon each other in some way or another, and there are countless films that use a relation between two men as more or less its main narrative. Lynne C. Spangler, for instance, sums this up in her account of buddies mediated throughout forty years of American television series (Spangler 1992). Correspondingly, buddy relations are normally founded on socialising that is aim-orientated (such as sports) (Fiske 1987; Spangler 1992), and it is often homophobic and misogynistic, that is rejecting homosexual men and displaying disrespectful views on women (Bird 1996). Activity is an essential instrument for keeping problematic gazes that question the heterosexual elements of the situation or relation that two or several men are engaged in at a distance. John Fiske (1987) explains that activity becomes important for screen descriptions of interaction between

men because it removes the uncertainty that close relations between men easily raise. Given the mainstream descriptions of men's lacking ability of establishing disclosing, emotional relations with each other, space for emotional presence is seldom required or valued as necessary or valuable in itself. Through activity men may relate closely together, making their socialisation appear as a surplus product of their mission or task, and is therefore comprehended as 'safe'.

This brief background makes it easier to establish that when using the concept of homosociality, I am referring to it as heterosexist, homophobic, goal and activity focused, and that it excludes women. I believe the concept is relevant for a discussion of Joey and Chandler's friendship because it raises several questions: what are the conditions for the intrinsic heterosexual nature of the term, and how does this affect theorising about Joey and Chandler's friendship? In Joey and Chandler's friendship suspicions of homosexuality are kept at bay by homophobic jokes. Ambiguous comments questioning the fragile state of their heterosexual identities are quickly made fun of or disapproved of. An example of this takes place when Ross and his sister Monica start arguing in Joey and Chandler's hotel room in London. Ross is about to get married for the second time, acts childishly, they quarrel, and Joey and Chandler take refuge in the bathroom (Episode 624). When Ross and Monica finally leave, Joey and Chandler exit the bathroom exchanging the following words:

Chandler: That was pretty intense huh?

Joey: Yeah. (...) Hey, I hope Ross didn't think that we just went in there because we were uncomfortable being out here!

Chandler: (glares at him) I hope he did!

This is of course a joke. The somewhat difficult point to grasp out of this brief extract lies in Chandler's body language. Through his bodily gestures (which cannot be seen in the script), he expresses lack of comfort as Joey by accident points out that Ross might think they went to the bathroom with other motives than leaving Monica and her brother discussing alone. Read: mutual sexual interest or activities. Chandler makes the remark, 'I hope he did!' to make clear his sexual stance, to avoid ideas of homosexuality, which is overall feared within the framework of Northern Euro-American, heterosexual masculinities and buddy scenarios (Joyrich 1996). The joke is one that is importantly carried out within a heterosexual discourse. It strengthens the notion that if two homosexual men enter a bathroom together, they are most likely going to have sex. This is an instance of homophobic heterosexual men preying on gay men, falling into long worn out stereotypes.

Bird argues that male homosocial bonding is characterised by competitiveness, emotional detachment and sexual objectification of women. But I think that Joey and

Chandler only partly fit into this description. There is little degree of competitiveness in their behaviour, while their dealing with emotional behaviour is slightly nervous. This is especially seen when they try to deal with joyful or problematic moments, which I shall deal more thoroughly with in chapter 3. The way they talk about women may be understood as objectifying from a certain perspective. During the second season, they often watched *Baywatch*, an American series about everyday life among a group of lifeguards on a Californian beach. The show was most famous for its beautiful female and male cast, dressed in swimming suits, and in particular Pamela Anderson's silicon breasts (wrapped in ditto textiles). Joey and Chandler were wildly fascinated by the show's introductory sequence: One of the actresses was filmed running in slow motion across the beach, her breasts bumping up and down, gaze firmly fixed on a situation out of bounds to us. Joey and Chandler's fascination with this woman was highly objectifying of female bodies and their sexual potential, luscious toys for the fantasies of male viewers.

However, Joey and Chandler overall appear in the show as two men interacting with women in a fairly sound manner. They crack jokes and hang out with their friends Ross, Monica, Rachel and Phoebe. The general display of the women in the show, however, is widely open for critique, because cross-sex interaction in *Friends* is very often based on men's conditions.⁶ Linzi Murrie (1998) and Goldson (1995) similarly claim that men's homosocial relations are widely based on excluding inferior masculinities and women from their bonding.⁷ The gendered cultural ideologies and models for 'proper' masculinities serve as influential structures within which men (and women) must position themselves (Murrie 1998; Gilmore 1991). This is what Robert W. Connell conceptualises as hegemonic masculinity, or more precisely 'the maintenance of practices that institutionalize men's dominance over women' and how it is 'constructed in relation to women and subordinate masculinities' (Connell 1987:185-6). Reading relations between men as reflecting homosociality, is to take for granted that they bond by activity and are goal focused (Fuchs 1992). The concept does not leave space for non-activity relations, and the depiction of Joey, Chandler and Ross is not particularly driven by activities. Their main socialising is based upon conversation, and related to some sort of personal feelings or what they think. This is,

⁶ Whether this has something to do in particular with Hollywood as a space for cultural production is a question that would require more attention and room than this text admits. Nonetheless, the 52 year old, British film director Mike Figgis recently expressed concerns with the way Hollywood tends to depict women: 'I find film in general very unhealthy towards women. It has become a laddish art form which controls women, particularly when it comes to sex scenes.' (The Independent 3rd September 2000)

⁷ In Murrie's case it meant that aborigines, gays and women were kept out from this particular social arena at the turn of the 19th Century's Australia.

according to critics of homosociality more likely to characterise women's friendships (O'Connor 1992).

Joey and Chandler temporarily display a great sense of emotionality when they are together, especially in the good bye scene sketched above. They are overtly searching out a language for emotional presence as I will discuss in the next chapter. According to Bird this is unlikely to happen in real life. Bird found that men changed their way of behaviour significantly when amongst themselves.⁸ Her respondents tended to increase their competition and trying to figure out their internal power hierarchy, echoing Connell's ideas of how male, heterosexual homosocial settings 'facilitate the perpetuation of hegemonic masculinity, on the one hand, but suppress non-hegemonic masculinity, on the other.' (Bird 1996:123) Joey and Chandler's behaviour turns out to be interesting because it reflects another kind of behaviour (as mates) than usually conveyed in sitcoms.

In contrast, John Fiske (1987) argues that for example *Miami Vice* illustrates how activity and lack of male intimacy is due to the way the male characters are restricted to specific homosocial arenas. When there are external goals and problems to be solved demanding firm action, the situation is less laden with anxiety. He writes:

The closeness of the ensuing relationship does not ... threaten masculine independence, and the justification of this intimacy by the external goal means that the relationship can contain homosexual desire and pleasure without either the guilt or the unmaning that typify representations of homosexual in the heterosexual ideology. (Fiske 1987:213)

When the strenuous situation is solved, problems occur. Fiske's claims that the depiction of men's avoidance of intimacy within the buddy genre places them in a terrible isolation, hence the need for goal-oriented, non-threatening male socialising. There are usually desperate attempts to bay off suspicions of homosexuality. Referring to women or making homophobic comments in objectifying manners are normal ways of dealing with this. Fuchs explains that film and series '[E]mpathically heterosexualise their homosocial protagonists (through off-screen ex-wives or girl friends who die on-screen) while settling other differences.' (Fuchs 1992:196) This is how potentially homoerotic relations are usually settled. Therefore homophobia is such an important part of homosocial male bonding. In its conceptualised form, homosociality turns out to be compulsorily heterosexual, because that is the only setting

⁸ During 1992 Bird (1996) carried out eight in-depth interviews and four follow-up interviews with new respondents in a small northwestern city in the United States. She also did a brief fieldwork.

where men may display emotions without worrying too much about other men questioning their sexual identity (Fuchs 1992; Simpson 1993). In excluding homosexuality, it consequently becomes heterosexist and homophobic.

Homoeroticism – why and how

What reason do I, as a reader, have to believe the correctness of the taken for granted heterosexual gaze that controls my interpretation of Joey and Chandler's relationship? Should it, on the contrary, not rather make me question the sexual interest anyone may have in the same-sex, in this case between Joey and Chandler? (Or is it my own interest in them: am I discussing their relation as a part of identifying myself with them?) Mark Simpson's argument that men watching action heroes on screen are simply projecting a covert, homosexual interest in attractive and handsome men may as well be right. This brings us to homoeroticism.

The reason why the situations are not usually interpreted as male gay desire for bodies of other men, is because it is masked by action. Ignoring this aspect is close to failing to acknowledge the existence of multiple sexualities, tuning into the conventional and dangerously ignorant mode of polarising heterosexuality and homosexuality.⁹ Theories of homosociality, as I have discussed, emphasise that men prefer each other's company instead of women's. Therefore Joey and Chandler fit well into aspects of the defining principles of homosociality. Their varying use of homophobic jokes also makes them familiar within the conventional stream of buddy relations. On the other hand, the elements of activity and emotional detachment are partly absent from their relationship, because they are both more communicative than normally found in these series. (This will be discussed more thoroughly in chapter 3.)

This may have a twofold consequence: first, introducing Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's use of 'homosocial desire' as a concept for male-male socialising opens up for new readings of Joey and Chandler's friendship, and I shall discuss this in the following section. Secondly, it leads to the concept of homoeroticism, altering homosociality upside down, which is closely related to the idea of queering heterosexuality.

⁹ A recent example: the film *Boys Don't Cry* (1999), based on a true story, describes a young woman in a sexual identity crisis dressing up as a man. She falls in love with another girl. They start a love affair, but after a while the girl's friends figure out that the person they believe is their friend's new *boyfriend* is actually a woman. The truth is too shocking, and the film (based upon a real life story) ends with one of the men killing her. Would the story have been screened if the young woman had still been alive? Is it not easier to deal with death and sorrow, than with the other's radical difference? (see Simpson 1993:229-52)

Martti Nissinen (1998) explains homoeroticism as ‘...men’s and women’s mutual erotic interaction also on the level of roles and practices, even without a thought of homosexual orientation.’ (Nissinen 1998:17) Nissinen doubts that the concept of homoeroticism is useful in analysing heterosexual settings and he explains why homosociality may work better when conceptualising assumed heterosexual men. However, he gives the concept of homosociality a quite different flavour than the writers mentioned above: ‘Erotic expressions of sexuality may or may not be included in homosociability, which encompasses also different sexual identities.’ (Nissinen 1998:17) He questions the non-sexual content of homosociality, and thereby implies my question: why should homoeroticism and homosociality be distinguished?

The main argument for using the concept of homoeroticism is that it is very difficult to differentiate between ‘liking’ and ‘desiring’. According to Robert K. Martin (1986) the term homosocial is ‘a linguistic monster’ (Martin 1986:13). Ideally, he claims, ‘homosexual interest’ may be a more correct way of phrasing men’s mutual interest in each other, independently of what interest one is considering. He explains that the intentional meaning of the term as it was established during the second half of the nineteenth century, was completely different from contemporary comprehension of it. The term itself meant all-male, all-female or same-sex, and distinguished explicitly between desire and practice. Unfortunately, we have become too focused upon the genital component of the term, which was categorised underneath ‘practice’. ‘Homosexual’ was never intended to rely fundamentally upon the latter, and that is why we need to reconsider the terms we use. When the conceptual difference between homosociality and homosexuality is drawn at the background of the middle of the 19th century in the Anglo-Saxon world, his argument makes sense. The term ‘homosexuality’ was invented at that time and the context of male friendships were somewhat different back then compared to now. At that time the existence of intimate male friendships presumably was more widespread because socialising between knew greater degrees of intimacy.¹⁰

Perhaps Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in her book *Between Men* (1992) presents a more adaptable framework for this particular discussion of Joey and Chandler. Her concept ‘homosocial desire’ understands men’s same-sex relations as a continuum between the misperceived poles of homosexuality and heterosexuality.¹¹ She claims that there is no need

¹⁰ See Karen Hansen (1992) and Alan Sinfield (1994) for a wider discussion of the historical variation within the social regulation of intimacy within friendships between men.

¹¹ Joyrich (1996); Goldson (1995); Simpson (1993); Sinfield (1994); the list goes on of writers quoting Sedgwick (1992). However, most of the writers, including myself, generally quote from her introduction, as the rest of her book applies more specifically to literature studies.

to polarise homosexuality and homosociality. There is rather a continuum linking them. Sedgwick writes:

“Homosocial” is a word occasionally used in history and the social sciences, where it describes social bonds between persons of the same sex; it is a neologism, obviously formed by analogy with “homosexual,” and just as obviously meant to be distinguished from “homosexual.” In fact, it is applied to such activities as “male bonding”, which may, as in our society, be characterised by intense homophobia, fear and hatred of homosexuality. To draw the “homosocial” back into the orbit of “desire,” of the potentially erotic, then, is to hypothesize the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual – a continuum whose, visibility, for men, in our society, is radically disrupted. (Sedgwick 1992:1-2)

Sedgwick questions homosocial desire and its heterosexual bias, and thereby challenges the compulsory heterosexual gaze. Simpson (1993) has questioned this as it has been ascribed onto many settings and protagonists where certain sexual identities are taken for granted instead of opening up for multiple readings of the material. Sedgwick’s conceptualising and re-interpretations triggered theorising on men’s relations. Her use of homosocial desire has for instance been transformed into the concept of homoeroticism, and already mentioned Nissinen (1998), along with Mark Simpson (1993) are but few that have continued Sedgwick’s turn.¹²

Considering this alternative sexual labelling, is the scene where Joey and Chandler are parting an expression of a potential love for each other, exceeding regular friendships? The scene itself does not indicate that, but some situations preceding the moments of separation may indicate some ambiguity. Their dispute is coloured by accusations within the same episode that Joey never expresses that he ‘loves’ the apartment he is sharing with Chandler (which could be seen as a metaphor for not loving Chandler). They are also discuss who is the rightful owner of various goods. Their disputes occur more like a heterosexual couple splitting up, disagreeing about material goods and the less likeable aspects of their lover. Their friendship may be more ambiguous than it seems. This can be seen when we attempt to stretch the concept of homosocial desire. The series recounts other occasions where Joey gives Chandler presents of symbolic value. He gave him a golden bracelet, inscribed with ‘my best bud’ (Episode 214), Joey bought two big leather chairs and a wide-screen

¹² Leslie Fiedler was even earlier, as he reinterpreted American fiction in his *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960) (see Horrocks 1995). He showed that Northern American fiction was full of intimate men’s relations, arguing that men had often made efforts to avoid women rather than joining, loving and marrying them.

television for the flat (Episode 215), as well as a baby chicken (Episode 321). Having received the bracelet, Chandler reacted to it in a way that simulated the repulsion of gay camp from a hysterical heterosexual standpoint, labelling it a 'woman repeller'. He was uncertain how to deal with the situation of being given a gift he was not keen on wearing. Chandler felt it made him look gay. This was reflected later in the episode when a woman was flirting with him in the group's regular hangout, Central Perk. She then suddenly noticed his bracelet and abruptly walked off, finding him either gay or tacky.

These accounts indicate something other than simply a stereotypical friendship between two men, and who do not appear to be conformist men. In the United Kingdom at least, it is not regarded as normal when men give each other these sorts of presents, and probably not in the United States either. This does not necessarily signify that men would not like to show that they care for each other. Nevertheless, there is little space for such emotionally overt details in the everyday lives of heterosexual men. Emotional outbursts indicate something special about another person, it alters power balances, as already mentioned in Bird's notion of male competitiveness. Joey giving Chandler presents makes Chandler uncomfortable because it sends ambiguous signals. When Joey buys two leather chairs and a wide screen television for their flat, it turns out less problematic. Watching television is a rather neutral situation for two male friends, while a golden bracelet becomes fussy. Chandler is also the one feeling uncomfortable in these gendered moments. This may indicate that Joey is the one who is most secure of his sexual identity, and therefore does not see any problems in giving presents to people he cares for.

I told a fellow student about Joey's gifts to Chandler, and she spontaneously reacted 'Of course, the bracelet is an engagement present, proving Joey's love, and the chairs and television are marriage presents, contributing to the material state of the household. The chicken is their first child, conceived by Joey.'¹³ Then she laughed because it was a more than slightly subverted interpretation of their relationship. One might disagree completely with this somewhat 'taken out of the air' analysis. Nevertheless, it points us to a central issue of how differently people read texts. Joey and Chandler's relationship opens up for contradicting interpretations. It may seem absurd to claim that Joey and Chandler are actually gay. Nonetheless, my aim is to highlight the unexpected angles regarding what is possible (and justifiable) to read into texts. The purpose for doing so is perhaps illustrated better through the example below, where Joey and Chandler poke fun at traditional gender patterns among heterosexual couples and the consequences of having children.

¹³ Some episodes later they got a duck, making them into a nuclear family, having a boy and a girl (chicken and duck).

One day Chandler skips work because somebody needs to do childcare for the chicken during the day since the chicken is ill. In the afternoon Joey walks in, says hello and is about to go off with some friends a few minutes later. They end up having a discussion about what is work: child rearing or work outside the home? Chandler states ‘we’ve been fighting a lot more since we got the chick’. They are also ironically copying a scenario of the ‘harmonious nuclear family’ as the two of them are giving the baby chicken a bath towards the end of the episode. Of course, this can all be seen as ordinary sitcom jokes and irony. Subverting these accounts from a homoerotic perspective, a reasonable question is what stops us from reading Joey and Chandler as gay? Our perspectives may be heterosexually biased, which make the jokes only work within the taken for granted framework of heterosexuality, while homosexuality is laughed at, thus once again pushed into the margins of mainstream culture.

Why should I attempt to do such a potentially subverted reading? Simpson (1993) and Sedgwick’s (1992) aims are to queer heterosexual views and approaches. Accepting the heterosexual ‘script’ of behaviour that depictions of male homosocial orders present, is dangerous. That is because, as Linzi Murrie states, it

functions to control gendered power relations through the strategies of inclusion, exclusion, authorisation and marginalisation, which reproduce dominant masculine values, positions it as a mechanism of control both attractive to, and appropriate for a diverse range of political interests. (Murrie 1998:10)

Unless the heterosexual bias within the context of *Friends* is challenged, one fails to recognise the display of power taking place there. Homophobic jokes for example, are most likely to be funny among the target audience, which is white, middleclass and heterosexual. The subtle homophobia may be read completely differently from a gay point of view, as it reinforces the notions of homosexual men as being the other, different, or at best someone where either Joey and Chandler do not want to be assumed among. In a different context, Brendan Gough (2000) has put forward a similar critique in his discussion on a new kind of homophobia. In interviews with white, male, middleclass, university students in Britain he noted that statements such as ‘I’ve got nothing against gay people, but...’ were common. The nineties’ emphasis on political correctness has influenced what we assume are socially acceptable expressions (Sandell 1998), and the people Gough (2000) interviewed felt the need to justify their attitudes within this framework. That does not mean that people are less hostile to homosexuality, but more careful in their statements. Maybe the subtle homophobia of Joey and Chandler may harm gay men in new ways, and that make them feel even more excluded from the arena of popular culture.

The influence and use of the concept of homoeroticism pops up surprisingly frequently in attempts to analyse popular culture. Barbara Ellen, a columnist in the *Observer*, reflects this when she claims ‘I watched a wonderful gay movie the other night’ (Ellen 2000). She is referring to the blockbuster *Gladiator*’s display of men, fighting and sweaty, men’s torsos in front of a mainly male audience in a London cinema. A motivation for this may be reflected in Steve Neale’s claim that the male spectator’s look is significantly ‘mediated by the looks of the characters involved, [a]nd those looks are marked not by desire, but by fear, or hatred, or aggression.’ (Neale 1993:285) Through this, the heterosexual viewer is fooled to believe that his narcissistic identification with in this case the gladiator, is channelled into heterosexual patterns. Simpson (1993) and Sedgwick (1992) aimed to reschedule the economy of sexual interest. This has taken place in investigations covering everything from re-reading Shakespeare as potentially having been gay (Sinsfield 1994), to men in advertising (Wernick 1991).

Homoeroticism – fashion or fact?

Ellen and Simpson’s use of homoeroticism as referring to straight men’s attraction to other men on screen within a ‘straight’ context, indicates that the concept has been developed since Sedgwick presented ‘homosocial desire’ as a starting point from which to re-read relations between men”. David van Leer (1989) criticises this aspect of Sedgwick’s writing. He suspects her of squeezing the ‘homosexual’ out of the concept of homosocial desire. Sedgwick aimed to draw the homosocial back into the area of desire, and through this to show that it is hard to distinguish heterosexual and homosexual men. To her the whole issue of latent homosexuality, for example, became absurd, because distinctions are what you make of them. She claimed that we are continuously travelling back and forth between poles of sexual identities. Van Leer claims that even though Sedgwick’s intentions were good, the consequences resulted in homophobia instead of breaking down the barriers. He finds her de facto excluding gay men from it, transforming homosocial desire into heterosexual instead of homosexual desire. He writes

[u]nable to speak from within the minority, Sedgwick must perforce speak from within the majority; denied the language of homosexuality, she necessarily speaks heterosexuality. (van Leer 1989:603)

Even though his statement is somewhat tinted by essentialism (‘only gays or lesbians can read homosexuality properly’), it is a relevant critique of both Sedgwick’s and my own view, as we may potentially bias our readings towards a heterosexual standpoint. For example, I

acknowledge that male-male desire occurring within contexts of what I have described as homosocial and buddy settings may represent potentially homoerotic desire. I do however protest that this necessarily signifies repressed homosexual desire, because that is jumping to conclusions. If every interpretation moves along polarising lines, that is heterosexuality as opposed to homosexuality on *all* conditions, we are once again stuck within a framework that undermines critical and constructive thinking about relations between men. Nonetheless, since any ambiguous desire may be present in mainstream texts as *Friends*, van Leer argues that it is anyhow fulfilled in heterosexual relations in the end. The potential ambiguity is always left out for the heterosexual bonding as in homosociality. Therefore, according to him, after having made the homoerotic relation stand out from the crowd of buddies, mates and homosocial relations, we are left with yet another version of heterosexual colonisation of same-sex socialising between men.

In this chapter I have shown that the concept of homosociality tends to signify values of heterosexism, homophobia and the exclusion of women. The theory of homosocial desire as introduced by Sedgwick (1992) has proved to be useful for my discussion of Joey and Chandler because it opens up for contradicting interpretations of their relationship. Several conceptualisations namely flow out of homosocial desire: firstly, it represents a continuum between homosexuality and homosociality. Simpson (1993) labels this continuum homoeroticism, and it is a tool that questions the assumed heterosexual basis within relations between men. Then, 'homosocial desire' implies a critique of compulsory heterosexuality, but it does not necessarily imply homosexuality. I have also showed that if we fail to point critical looks into how we interpret friendships between men, structures of (heterosexual) power are left untouched and invisible. Even so, claiming that Joey and Chandler symbolise homoeroticism does not necessarily lead us closer to how these two, as well as other heterosexual men, think of their own friendship relations. Applying the concepts listed above possibly disturbs and disrupts the seemingly coherent heterosexual foundation in these friendships. However, to get closer to what Joey and Chandler may be struggling with in their socialising, I want to scrutinise their relation more closely from another angle of analysis: reading Joey and Chandler as representing male intimacy, which is what I am doing in chapter 3.

Chapter 3 Male intimacy

In this chapter I aim to discuss the goodbye scene between Joey and Chandler from a perspective that highlights the degree of intimacy in their friendship. I start by discussing how I understand the concept of intimacy and its form and relevance in this particular male setting. Then I re-read the goodbye scene between Joey and Chandler as representing male intimacy. Thirdly, I will look into the context of their friendship. I scrutinise what structures their way of behaviour and why it seems to be problematic to establish space for personal disclosure within it. This is to further explore the theory of intimacy. Fourthly, in contrast I examine reasons for not overemphasising the importance of intimacy. Towards the end of the chapter I look into cultural ideologies of gender and how they structure the ways we assume friendships between men ought to be. Finally, the power of popular culture is investigated and the possible outcomes of Joey and Chandler as contributing to new scenarios of doing masculinities.

The goodbye scene: male intimacy standpoint

I understand the concept of intimacy as ‘close associaton, privileged knowledge, deep knowing and some form of love’ (Jamieson 1998:93). By *male* intimacy I think of men sharing personal feelings with each other in such a way so that disclosure has an intrinsic value (Sandell 1996). My understanding of the latter version is taken from Jillian Sandell’s interpretation of the work of Hong Kong action film director John Woo. She interprets male interaction taking place in Woo’s *Hard Boiled* (1992) as coloured by ‘aimless’ socialising. That is, their social relationship per se is interesting. There is less need of action motivated friendship. The exchange of emotional interest in each other, displaying notions of care for and dependency on the other, are alien elements within the paradigm of male homosocial relations. In *Hard Boiled* disclosure of personal feelings takes place outside the context of activities or action. Similar things can be said to describe Joey and Chandler’s friendship. Generally, Joey and Chandler’s depiction is centred around their jokes and everyday dealings at the level of conversation. Activity-driven socialising is the exception. Hill (2000) suggests that research ought to pay attention to the value and significance of the seemingly unimportance of ‘chat’ and ‘fun factor’ in men’s socialising. The absence of these things, although, is usually seen as proving that men are incapable of displaying emotions, and only exceptionally delving into interpersonal, deeply touching conversations. Hill sees these aspects as men’s possibly different ways of dealing with emotionality. The contrast between the buddy scenario as discussed in chapter 2 and Joey and Chandler then seems to be the

following: in the first one intimacy occurs as a consequence of male interaction, while in the second situation it is regarded as an activity in and of itself.

Reading the goodbye scene from this perspective, Joey and Chandler probably noticed that their first farewell was far from satisfying. They stood clumsily at each side of the table simply nodding to each other. The awkward atmosphere lasted for some seconds, then Joey went out the door leaving Chandler behind. When Joey returned and gave Chandler a proper embrace a few seconds later, the mutual homophobic tension was momentarily released, and they parted in a satisfying manner. However, they were both aware of their profound friendship tie being under pressure and facing an uncertain future. In this example Joey and Chandler are struggling to express themselves through establishing an intimate body language, as well as telling each other that they care and are going to miss one another. This seems to come easy for women, while heterosexual men find this a troubled area of communication.

Connell (1995) touches upon this tension-laden field when he interviews five white, heterosexual, middleclass, Australian men in their twenties and early thirties, and one man in his fifties. These men claim to have acknowledged the existence of sexism and turned pro-feminist through their involvement in lasting relationships with what Connell labels 'feminist' women. (Regrettably, he does not give a thorough explanation of what makes the women 'feminist', or the men pro-feminist.) Nevertheless, according to Connell, they experience a constant bad consciousness about not being able to do much about sexism and gender inequality on a structural level in society. Moreover, they express a desire for better relationships with other men, but are struggling to establish them. One reason, Connell brings up, is the classic barrier of homophobia, as the men express that there are few ways of expanding patterns and ideologies of male socialising without touching upon the ambiguous territory of sexual identities. He discusses how these men had changed their attitudes towards women and women's issues due to their engagement. Unfortunately this had not given them any clear line on homosexuality. Therefore, Connell writes:

Their practice of change did not bring into question the heterosexual sensibility of their bodies. So they had no way of bringing into focus the difficulties involved in new-model relationships among men. (Connell 1995:133-4)

The troubling aspects of male social interaction become increasingly plausible in the following episode (Episode 217). Here Joey returns to Chandler's flat to ask whether he can move in again. Joey misses Chandler, but he does not know how to express his feelings for Chandler, who has already found himself a new flatmate, Eddie. Joey realises there is little chance of moving back in again due to this, and leaves feeling down and out. Eddie's

presence brings out the element of jealousy in their relationship, and they start quarrelling over petty things. Some days later (though in the same episode), Joey stops by to pick up his mail. Eddie is serving Chandler 'eggs à la Eddie', and Joey comments that he thought Chandler liked Joey's eggs best. Eddie leaves for work, Joey is about to serve himself some juice, but the carton is empty. He then suddenly explodes, complaining about there being no juice. Chandler sarcastically answers 'there's more juice in the fridge', whereby Joey protests 'this is not about juice anymore'. What follows brings to mind jealous lovers embarking on underlying problems in their relationship, where these are triggered by minor details, as I discussed in chapter 2. They are unwilling to face an explicit confrontation on their potentially differing degrees of personal and emotional investment in each other.

Prior to this situation for example, both of them were separately 'counselled' by their other friends. Joey asks Phoebe and Monica (at Central Perk, their regular hangout) for advice on suggesting to Chandler that he could move back in again. They recommend him to give it a try. In his confrontation with Chandler, Joey seems to be looking for ways of expressing how he misses Chandler, and that he did not think that he would be replaced by a new flatmate so soon, for it has only been a few days since he moved out. Rachel reflects this by commenting in the others' presence: 'It'll never last, he's just a rebound roommate' (ibid), once again echoing (and mocking) the notion of Joey and Chandler's situation reflecting two lovers splitting up, rather than two friends. When Ross and Rachel give advice to Chandler (in his flat), Ross expresses, 'You're just gonna have to accept the fact that you're just friends now, OK, you're not (...) roommates anymore' (ibid). Ross' wondering about which terms fit best to describe Joey and Chandler's relationship reflects this ambiguity. To him they seem to signify something more than being plain friends, and the best phrase he finds is 'roommates'. Nevertheless, does it include what they have? There are few contextual alternatives within male, heterosexual socialisation for emotional disclosure apart from sports and similar activity driven relations, and this seems to enter Ross' mind. Ross ponders between categorising Joey and Chandler's friendship as 'just friends', or something else, and he ends labelling them 'roommates', still hesitating. None of the terms includes what he thinks Joey and Chandler's relation signifies. Unfortunately, there are few other ways of putting it, which troubles Ross, as well as heterosexual men generally, because relations between men then quickly turn ambiguous in terms of sexuality (Connell 1995).

The context of their friendship

In the situation above neither Joey nor Chandler want to disclose that they actually miss each other, and that they would prefer moving back in together. This would alter the power balance in their relationship. Joey cares about Chandler, but he was the one who chose to move out.

Chandler, on the other hand, is the one who was left for the love of another (flat), and therefore will not admit that he misses Joey. The flat may work as a metaphor expressing the problems Joey and Chandler encounter trying to establish a certain emotional presence together. Joey interprets Chandler finding himself a new flatmate so soon, as signifying that he did not care that much about Joey after all.

In contemporary Northern Euro-American societies heterosexual men tend to channel their participation within the economy of intimacy into the sphere of heterosexual coupling (Jamieson 1998). Due to this, mutual emotional disclosure between men usually needs a 'safe' context where this can take place. Exchanging favours like 'eggs à la Joey' is one such thing, while more overt expressions potentially challenge underlying structures of relations between men. These actions may be read as essential in structuring Joey and Chandler's friendship. The fact that Eddie enters the scene of Joey and Chandler's relationship occurs to be problematic to Joey. The classical sociological work of Georg Simmel (see Hill 2000, p. 256), claims that the shift from being a dyad to a triad, is a crucial one. That may happen when a heterosexual couple has their first child. At once, the child is challenging the mutual flow of attention between partners. Taking this perspective into account, Eddie may be the third part, and Joey not being ready for this development, rejects the whole idea and feels deserted by Chandler. Then the notion of being flatmates obviously plays a significant part in defining their friendship. Maybe being roommates actually is another arena where men can display emotional presence within safe settings, an unambiguous scene where small, everyday details is laden with symbolic values. However, this possibility relies on fidelity of some sort. Simply switching from one person to another, as Chandler does from Joey's point of view, is unacceptable, and Joey protests. Whose eggs Chandler prefers plays a vital role in a complicated web of relations. The exchange of gifts reflects a pattern more recognised as central to friendships between women, as accounted by O'Connor (1992). In this way Joey giving Chandler a bracelet and the chicken, as well as the more communal leather chairs and wide-screen television, may reflect intimate disclosure rather than homosocial desire. These actions may be read as essential in structuring Joey and Chandler's friendship and the awareness of where emotional presence may take place constrains their behaviour.

From this point of view it is also understandable why Ross never becomes as close to either of them, while Joey and Chandler develop a '[t]rust, faith that confidences will not be betrayed and privileged knowledge will not be used against the self' (Jamieson 1998:9). Ross does not share their flat and does not take part in their economy of intimacy. Can it be this simple? Probably not. Interestingly though, when Chandler moves in with Monica, Joey starts searching for a female flatmate (Episode 602). There is never any question of sharing the flat with a man. That would somehow threaten what Joey and Chandler's relation signifies. As the setting changes, they can keep their relationship alive, because they are practically still living

together, the only thing keeping them apart is a corridor, two women (Joey's new flatmate Janine, and Chandler's girlfriend Monica), and separate flats. Joey falls in love with Janine shortly after she moves in. Later he splits up with her because she does not like Chandler and Monica. Joey cannot simply dump his best friends, and Janine moves out (Episode 611).

This way of comprehending Joey and Chandler's relationship is viable in a sense where they are understood as acting their relationship in terms of searching out relations where sexuality is not the central issue of interpretation. They have shared accommodation for a while and have increasingly got to know each other quite well. Nonetheless, these readings of close relations between men quickly slip into issues of sexuality, as discussed in chapter 2, and that may be problematic for those involved. Therefore, from a male intimacy perspective, including the notion of homosocial desire into the sphere of relations between men too easily alters the quality of a friendship as understood by those included. I see this as possibly a homoerotic trope. Are we giving far too much attention to the notion of homosocial desire when it is read as homosexual interest within men's friendships? I am not denying that relations between men may serve needs of suppressed homosexual desire, but simply labelling any sign of intimacy among men may subvert the whole situation. Turning to homoerotic interpretation may for example stimulate an even stronger and absurd homophobia. Roger Horrocks (1995) mentions this scenario since, according to Sedgwick, patriarchal culture requires intense male homosocial bonding that simultaneously appears erotic and homophobic. The first one is necessary to keep patriarchy rolling as a powerful, coherent social body, and the second one excludes certain social groups; women, gays and inferior masculinities. Therefore, '[A]n increase in homoerotic images...might in fact function as a reinforcement of patriarchal masculinism, and a backlash against feminism.' (Horrocks 1995:11)

Blinded by male intimacy?

I have emphasised the need for looking beyond the homosexual-heterosexual dualism, and I consider several writers as not grasping the complexity of relations between men (for example Hammond and Jablow 1987 and Seidler 1997). There is still a certain danger of focusing too much on male intimacy as a defining element to making relations between men emotionally complete. Because, how can we tease out an understanding of what people regards as close? (O'Connor 1992) Walker (1994b) writes that certain problems occur by using the concept of intimacy to read friendships between men. It is for example easy to miss out on those men who emphasise other aspects of their friendships than the lack of emotional disclosure. Previously critics have pointed out that men are generally incapable of showing emotions, and I support Walker (1994a, 1994b) when she questions this assumption:

Thus, for men whose identities included a notion that they, as men, were not open with friends, the times when they were open were insignificant. There were many other activities of friendship that men preferred to emphasize...the narrow debate over intimacy obscures some implications of how men talk to one another about women for gender relations and inequality. (Walker 1994b:53-4)

Sue Hill agrees in the narrowness of the debate as she states the importance of moving beyond the emphasis on verbal self-disclosure (see Hill 2000:266). She found her interviewees defining their friendship as 'close' and profound in ways that they would not admit were intimate. Still the degree of disclosure was crucial when they related to men they knew well. Hill argues that seemingly superficial chat does not necessarily signify incapability among men of being emotionally present. 'Chatting', trivial in content, but perhaps central in relevance for the maintenance and development of friendships, has usually been ignored, she writes, referring to Marshall Sahlins' way of viewing this as 'practical and relationally expressive functions' (Hill 2000:257). Disclosure of emotions is in other words not necessarily a key to male closeness.

Alan Petersen (1998) criticises the focus on male emotions in several of the men's studies' writings. He launches into a thorough critique of Victor Seidler's repeated focus on how men need to change, act in accordance with their emotions, search inwards in their souls, etc (Petersen 1998). Seidler works within the 'consciousness raising' paradigm. In the late eighties Seidler set out on a project of counter working the given masculine virtue of rationality that Western men have to cope with. His main project was to make men change, develop and get in touch with their emotional selves.

In short, efforts towards changing men's emotions are far from unproblematic, and it should not be assumed that they are compatible with the goals of feminism and the gay, lesbian and queer movements, which are basically about changing relations of power. (Petersen 1998:94)

Victoria Robinson (1996) presents a similar point of view. She criticises that critiques of heterosexuality are too narrow, and when concerned with heterosexual men's insecurities they fail to examine the structural manifestations of male power, contradictions and links to women's oppression.

Petersen (1998) thinks that Seidler fails to question the obvious issue of homosexuality within his writings. Petersen also alleges that Seidler is yet another example of

Western, heterosexual, middle class men theorising men within his own, narrow minded concept of masculinities. Petersen claims that Seidler uses a therapeutic language that actually works exactly opposite to his intention: He criticises the terms of Enlightenment where scientific and common sense knowledge are confronted, and attempts to break down dualistic thinking of men and women within academia (Seidler 1989, 1997). Instead Seidler ends up entrapping himself by introducing new borderlines and categories as well as taking for granted some universal aspects of being men. For instance, Seidler seems to be alleging that ‘there is a stable, gender-specific, emotional realm, unmediated by history, culture, and the specificities of situation [...]’ (Petersen 1998:91) I agree in Petersen’s critique because Seidler’s perspective developed within and out of men’s studies’ interpretation of the seventies’ feminism, a period when consciousness raising was an ethos of dealing with gender issues.

There is a chance that Petersen would find my account of Joey and Chandler echoing similar perspectives to Seidler’s work. My reading of Joey and Chandler is however different because I have opened up for an interpretation that implies that their relation may not be as unproblematic regarding sexuality as it may be thought of in the first place. I realise that I am reading Joey and Chandler slightly isolated from the women in the series, since I am not going into a proper discussion of this central context for the interplay between the men.

Cultural ideologies of gender

I have looked into how Joey and Chandler mutually engage with each other, in what context this takes place, and what structures it. How does this relate to the ‘real’ world? Karen Walker (1994a) discusses how men and women relate their behaviour and conceptualise personal relations within cultural ideologies of relations.¹⁴ Walker’s argument is that most writers on friendships fail to grasp that there are differences between the (gendered) cultural ideologies and social reality. Cultural ideologies signify models and ideals that society and culture enforce upon the sexes. The depiction of Joey and Chandler may serve to counter work dominant ideologies of buddy relations representing homosociality, as I discussed in the second chapter. Cultural norms are powerful in this sense, because they work as blueprints for how men and women perceive friendships are supposed to be (Walker 1994a). She claims that few writers have noticed that we must theorise friendships (like all other gendered activity) within a cyclical framework where cultural ideologies inform gendered social interaction, as

¹⁴ Her analysis is based on interviews with 52 middleclass and working-class women and men in the United States, carried out during the early nineties.

well as pay attention to how people merge and make sense of structuring elements and behaviour.

Far too often writers isolate the ideology of gender, and leave out the context and specific practice that people carry out. In her thesis, Sue Hill (2000) was aware of this and asked how men find a way around these barriers that certain cultural ideologies of gender create. Her interviewees solved this problem by distinguishing 'behaviour' and 'inner being'. Men in their late 20s or early 30s usually defined masculinity as performance, that is, continuously reflecting upon their own personality, identity and behaviour. Thus, they reflect what she refers to Anthony Giddens' claim that in 'modern society individuals are involved in an ongoing reflexive project of the self.' (Hill 2000:259; referring to Giddens 1991;1992). Giddens claims that people in the West are increasingly aware of a 'pure relation', one that enables one to know someone else fully and in to the most profound depth. In the example taken from Episode 216, as already examined in chapter 2, I discuss how Joey and Chandler are clearly positioning themselves within the gendered ideologies of men's relations. They find it problematic to express emotional care and interest in each other since this opposes to what they know is socially acceptable for heterosexual men to do as partly due to heterosexual constraints on men's emotional presence (Joyrich 1996; Sandell 1996).

There are significant differences between what we say and what we do, as Walker (1994a) points out. She questions whether men's and women's same-sex friendships differ distinctively, disagreeing that men's friendships are motivated by activity, while women emphasise the importance of sharing feelings in friendships with other women. Sue Hill reflects similar attitudes, finding a gap between the collective 'tough' masculinity, and the individual men's experiences and attitudes (Hill 2000:259). Cultural ideologies, were not powerful enough to disable the people she interviewed from making their own friendships in practice differ significantly from the norm. Walker contrasts these cultural ideologies with 'experiences in specific friendships'. She found that the latter contradicted the former among the majority of the interviews she did. Several interviewees expressed stereotypical thoughts on what constituted male friendships. A common view among the interviewees was that activity-related socialising, like sports, for example, was central to men's relations. Sharing of personal information, troubled thoughts and feelings were either not mentioned as an important part, or frowned at. Nevertheless, a majority of the men told her that they discussed personal matters with specific friends. When asked what was typical for relations between men later in the discussions, they still answered sports, doing things together, activity, etc. This shows how powerful (and invisible) the cultural ideologies of male friendships sometimes work, and it reflects the impact gendered cultural ideologies may have on men, highlighting the differences between what people say and what they do.

The power of popular culture

Joey and Chandler's socialising in *Friends* may not necessarily represent anything radically new about social behaviour among men. I am rather suggesting that the series' description of two men engaging closely with each other perhaps conveys attempts to explore different discourses for displaying emotions among heterosexual men, thus challenging the strict borders of sexualities that tend to structure much of men's social interaction (Steinberg, Epstein and Johnson, 1996). Taking into account the huge popularity of the series in the United States and across Europe (leaving out other countries in this example), makes the series interesting in having a wider impact on society than one might first assume.¹⁵ In relation to this, Jane Arthurs claims that it is crucial not to dismiss attempts to reinvent mainstream popular culture, giving voices to less heard depictions of, in this case, friendships between men. Her focus is whether Ridley Scott's 'road movie' *Thelma and Louise* (1991) should be judged as a feminist film or not. She argues positively that it could, writing '*Thelma and Louise* does not offer a radical alternative to patriarchal cinema, but rather moves inside it to disrupt the codes of gender in Hollywood film.' (Arthurs 1995:104) By broadcasting a show like *Friends*, different masculine virtues are displayed and power relations are possibly questioned. In our case, *Friends* may represent an effort to subvert sexual conventions and ways we may assume some sexual preferences as 'normal/natural'. Ross' ex-wife for instance, had just left him for another woman when the series started in 1994. She is what Margaret Marshment (1997) refers to as a 'lipstick lesbian'. That is, a good-looking and amiable lesbian, instead of the stereotypical, media(ted) view of lesbians as angry, non-feminine and outdated radicals. Jillian Sandell (1998) criticises *Friends*' for giving an unreal and absurdly normalised picture of sexual difference. On the contrary, perhaps this is a way of showing that sexual difference can be familiarised. Perhaps at that stage television and film will start describing gays and lesbians in a manner that exceeds the conventional polarising pictures: either seeing gay and lesbians as victims (*Philadelphia*, 1993; Tom Hanks as a gay man dying of AIDS, fighting for justice), or leading exceptional lives (*Boys Don't Cry* 1999; a young woman in sexual identity crisis, attempting to live her life as a man, but is finally killed because of her transgression of sexual boundaries).

On the other hand, Lynne Joyrich (1996) criticises John Fiske (1987) for interpreting *Miami Vice*, another American television series, in severely ignorant manners. Fiske claims that the incoherent narrative of the series, where style and fashion occurs as more important than thrilling story lines, *Miami Vice* is disrupting the ideals of hegemonic masculinities.

¹⁵ Rai 3, the Italian state television's homepage, refers to *Friends* as the second most watched situation comedy in America in 1999.

What Joyrich claims Fiske turns a blind eye to is ‘the close-ups of women’s breasts’¹⁶ (Joyrich 1996:93). Similarly, much of Joey and Chandler’s conversations include subtle homophobic jokes and comments, acted as if they are acceptable performances. This contradicts the picture of *Friends* portraying ‘new’ masculine narratives. It may also characterise a conversion of homophobia into a more politically correct discourse, never expressed explicitly (Gough 2000). Furthermore, Sandell (1998) is perfectly right in her critique of *Friends* being unable to deal with for example racial difference, not to mention that all of the cast ‘happens to be’ attractive, slim and beautiful. Am I overlooking the fact that the series may simply be echoing conservative, heterosexual ideologies? Perhaps. Nonetheless, I believe it may be read in contradicting manners, and perhaps some of the spectators find Joey and Chandler’s struggle interesting because it reflects their own situation, attempting to establish a greater degree of emotional presence and personal disclosure in their relations to male friends. Moreover, Arthurs writes ‘[c]ultural politics need to take account of what is achievable within existing structures at the centre as well as the margins.’ (Arthurs 1995:104) Thus, perhaps popular culture is a space that is useful for promoting alternative cultural ideologies of gender, since it works on another level than average academic textual discourse does (Fiske 1987; Arthurs 1995).

This chapter has discussed how Joey and Chandler confront each other and search out grounds for personal disclosure. Their struggle shows that it can be difficult for heterosexual men within this context to express emotional investment in each other because it challenges the cultural ideologies of gender which within they position themselves. Ross’ hesitation and problems of finding a suitable description for their friendship reflects what Connell (1995) comments on: even though heterosexual men want to expand the emotional presence within their friendships, the sensitivity of their heterosexual bodies are often tuned into a mode of non-disclosure. Thus, expressing care through words can make one question the other’s sexuality. I have also shown that the degree of male intimacy within their friendship is dependent upon a context where the flat is a ‘safe’ space for interaction, and switching flatmate becomes an issue of fidelity rather than practicalities. Nonetheless, there is a danger of giving far too much attention to intimacy as a decisive variable describing male relations. One may assume the presence of universal, male emotions as Victor Seidler (1989) does, and the basis for a collective change on those grounds. That may turn out to be essentialist and not necessarily in accordance with wider issues of power (Petersen 1998). One should also delve

¹⁶ Robert Hanke (1990) claims a similar view when criticising another American sit-com, *thirtysomething* for representing a ‘negotiated version of hegemonic masculinity that is able to express and contain elements of liberal feminist ideology while remaining complicit with dominant gender ideology.’ (Hanke 1990:231)

more into the actual significance of the small favours that men are claimed to do, but that are dismissed as valuable to men (Walker 1994b). Finally, perhaps depictions of men like Joey and Chandler in popular culture do have impact on the ways we comprehend friendships between men.

Conclusion

Throughout this dissertation I have discussed how Joey and Chandler are socialising with each other and how their friendship may be read in various and contradictory manners. In the first chapter I argued the importance of giving credit to the way writers have discussed women's friendships and especially how they have connected their focus to wider, social contexts and frameworks. I claimed that the rest of the cast, by being present in the series, heterosexualise the relation between Joey and Chandler even in their absence. I asked whether it is useful to investigate texts (understood in their widest sense) like *Friends*, and I concluded via Ann Game (1991) that fiction and theory are not necessarily that different; delving into one of them may just as well enrich the other. Choosing a few, isolated sequences from the series as my main material raised some problems, and I informed the reader that I was not attempting to present the reality behind the friendship between two persons, but rather offer a questioning and open reading of it. I was also worried about repeating the navel-gazing and naïve aspects of much writing within men's studies. I hoped that my dissertation would steer clear from some of these problems, and perhaps present a constructive way of looking into male friendships.

In the second chapter I contrasted homosociality and homoeroticism. Homosociality is a widely used concept within sociology and writings on film and television describing close relations between men. The concept may as well be used to discuss women's same-sex friendships, since the term initially indicated all-male, all-female, same-sex relationships (Martin 1986). However, the concept implies a homophobia and heterosexism by excluding gay men and women. It also mainly addresses activity-focused socialising. Homoeroticism is first and foremost a concept derived from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's idea of homosocial desire. She claimed that there is continuum between the intrinsic heterosexuality of men's homosocial bonding as opposed to homosexuality. Mark Simpson (1993) is one of the writers who have adapted Kosofsky's ideas onto popular culture, using homoeroticism as a concept aiming to question the taken for granted heterosexuality of homosociality. In other words, the homoerotic perspective aims to undress the power structures surrounding socialising among men, and most of all show the absurd aspects of homophobia. I presented a subverted reading of Joey and Chandler, presenting the possibilities of them perfectly well being gay.

In the third chapter I continued my discussion of what is possibly going on in the interaction between Joey and Chandler. I challenged the homoerotic argument, not dismissing its probability, but rather wondering if it was useful for male viewers' identification with the protagonists, and how they reflected upon their real life friendships. I introduced the concept of male intimacy as perhaps being a better way of grasping important aspects of Joey and Chandler's socialising. From this point of view it became comprehensible why personal

disclosure and emotional presence seem to be problematic aspects of heterosexual, male friendships. Connell (1995) pointed out that the heterosexual sensitivity of male bodies hinders the social appropriateness of men's degrees of emotional investment in one another. This echoes issues of power and personal politics. This is not to say that there is necessarily a universal perception of emotional suppression among men and the need to overcome this obstacle. Then I expressed concern about the dangers of focusing too much on personal disclosure as defining elements in judging what are 'good' and 'bad' friendships among men. Everyday details, comments and seemingly superficial conversations may signify more than they originally seem.

Finally, I returned to the question of representation as discussed in the first chapter. I argued that perhaps popular culture may present different perspectives on friendships between men, and widen the scope for understanding how some men try to deal with and search out different ways of being friends, expressing insecurity and dependence upon each other. Sociological research has tended to juxtapose heterosexual men with an incapacity of expressing emotions. They may be right, as my discussion partly indicates. But few writers have focused on *how* some men handle this struggle. Karen Walker (1994a; 1994b) and Sue Hill (2000) are two exceptions from the mainstream. Perhaps popular culture, and television series in this case, are more fluid which allows them to catch up and be more sensitised towards social needs and changes prior for example sociological research. Therefore it may be fruitful to pay closer attention to what is going on in apparently trivial mediums as situation comedies and television series.

Literature

Bird, S. *Welcome to the men's club: Homosociality and the Maintenance of Hegemonic Masculinity*. In Gender & Society, v10 n2 p.120 (12)

Bly, Robert. 1991. *Iron John: a book about men*. Shaftesbury: Element.

Carroll, Berndadette. *Hollywood abuses actresses, says director*.

The Independent, 3rd September 2000.
<http://www.independent.co.uk/enjoyment/Film/News/2000-09/hollywood030900.shtml>
[Accessed 5th September 2000]

Cynthia Carter, Gill Branston and Stuart Allan (eds). 1998. *News, gender and power*. London: Routledge.

Craig, Steve. (ed) 1992. *Men, masculinity, and the media*. Newbury Park, Ca.; London: Sage Publications.

Drude von der Fehr, Bente Rosenbeck and Anna G. Jonasdottir (eds). 1998. *Is there a Nordic feminism: Nordic feminist thought on culture and society*. London: UCL Press.

Ellen, Barbara. *Glad to be a Gladiator*. *The Observer*, 21st May 2000.

<http://www.guardianunlimited.co.uk/Columnists/Column/0,5673,223234,00.html>
[Accessed 3rd August 2000]

Fiske, John. 1987. *Television culture*. London : Methuen

Fuchs, Cynthia. J. 1992. The Buddy Politic. In *Screening the male: Exploring masculinities in Hollywood cinema*. Cohen, S. and Harke, I.R. (eds) London: Routledge

Game, Ann. 1991. *Undoing the social : towards a deconstructive sociology* Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

Goldson, A. *The New Zealand buddy movie: men, cars and the rise (and fall) of the feminist thriller*. In Hecate, May 1995, v21 n1, p.137 (9).

- Gough, Brendan. 2000. *Heterosexual masculinity and 'new' homophobia: The contemporary othering of gay men*. Unpublished; paper presented on the conference Rhetorics of Masculinity, Universidad de Sevilla, 2nd-4th March, 2000.
- Gullestad, Marianne. 1996. *Everyday life philosophers: modernity, morality, and autobiography in Norway*. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.
- Gullestad, Marianne. 1984. *Kitchen-table society: a case study of the family life and friendships of young working-class mothers in urban Norway*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Hammond, Dorothy and Jablow, Alta. Gilgamesh and the Sundance Kid: The myth of male friendship. In *The making of Masculinities*. 1987. Brod, H. (ed). Routledge: New York, London
- Hanke, Robert. *John Woo's cinema of hyperkinetic violence: From 'A Better Tomorrow' to 'Face/Off'* In Film Criticism, 24(1), 39-59, Fall, 1999
- Hearn, Jeff. 2000. *Forskning om mand I fire dele af verden: USA, Australia, England og Norden* In NIKK Magasin, 2000, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp..., (Unpublished English version: *No More Men's Studies, Please*)
- Hearn, Jeff. 1998. Theorizing men and men's theorizing: Varieties of discursive practices in men's theorizing of men. *Theory and Society*, vol. 27 no 6, pp. 781-816.
- Hearn, Jeff. 1996. *Is masculinity dead? A critique of the concept of masculinity/masculinities*. In Mac an Ghaill, Mairtin Understanding masculinities: Social relations and cultural arenas. Open University Press: Buckingham
- Hearn, Jeff and Morgan, David H. J. (eds) 1990. *Men, masculinities & social theory*. London: Unwin Hyman.
- Horrocks, Roger. 1995. *Male myths and icons: masculinity in popular culture*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Jamieson, Lynn. 1998. *Intimacy: Personal Relationships in Modern Societies*. Cambridge: Polity Press

- Joyrich, Lynne. 1996. *Re-viewing reception : television, gender, and postmodern culture*. Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press.
- MacInnes, John. 1998. *The end of masculinity: the confusion of sexual genesis and sexual difference*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Martin, Robert K. 1986. *Hero, captain, and stranger: male freindship, social critique, and literary form in the sea novels of Herman Melville*. The University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill and London
- Marshment, Margaret. 1997. The picture is political: Representation of women in contemporary popular culture. In Victoria Robinson and Diane Richardson (eds) *Introducing Women's Studies: Feminist theory and practice*. 1997. London: MacMillan.
- Morgan, David H. J. 1992. *Discovering men*. London: Routledge.
- Murrie, Linzi. 1998. *The Australian Legend: writing Australian masculinty/writing 'Australian' masculine*. Journal of Australian Studies, number 56 (March)
- Neale, S. 1993 [1983]. 'Masculinity as spectacle: Reflections on men and mainstream cinema.' In Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark (eds). *Screening the male: Exploring masculinities in Hollywood cinema*. Routledge: London, 1993.
- Nissinen, M. 1998. *Homoeroticism in the biblical world: a historical perspective*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press
- O'Connor, Pat. 1992. *Friendship Between Women: A Critical Review*. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf
- Pearce, L. 1993. 'Finding a place to which to write: the methodology of feminist textual practice' In Beverly Skeggs (ed) *Feminist cultural theory: process and production*, 1993, pp. 81-96.

- Rai 3 Italian state television, homepage on *Friends*
<http://www.raidue.rai.it/raidue/schede/2004/200444.htm>
 [Accessed 28th August 2000]. (stating that it was the second most viewed situation program in the United States in 1999.)
- Sandell, J. Re-inventing Masculinity: the spectacle of male intimacy in the films of John Woo. *Film Quarterly*, Summer 1996, v49 n4 p.23
- Sandell, J. The personal is professional on TV: I'll be there for you: 'Friends' and the fantasy of alternative families. *American Studies*, Summer 1998 v39 n2 p141(15)
- Sedgwick, E. K. 1992 [1985] *Between men: English literature and male homosocial desire*. New York : Columbia University Press.
- Seidler, Victor J. 1997. *Man enough: embodying masculinities*. London: Sage.
- Seidler, Victor J. 1989. *Rediscovering masculinity: reason, language and sexuality*. London: Routledge.
- Sherrod, D. The bonds of men: Problems and possibilities in close male relationships. In *The making of Masculinities*. 1987. Brod, H. (ed). Routledge: New York, London
- Showalter, Elaine. I guess we are not going to see the (episode of the situation comedy 'Friends' where one of the characters reveals he is gay) *People Weekly*, May 6, 1996 v45 no18 p15 (1)
- Simmel, Georg. 1971. *On individuality and social forms : selected writings (of) Georg Simmel* Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press.
- Simpson, M. 1994. *Male impersonators: men performing masculinity*. - London : Cassell
- Sinfield, Alan. 1994. *Cultural politics: queer readings*. London: Routledge
- Spangler, Lynne C. 1992. Buddies and pals - a history of male friendships on prime-time television, pp.93-110. In Craig, Steve. (ed) 1992. *Men, masculinity, and the media*. Newbury Park, Ca. London: Sage Publications.

- Stanley, Liz. 1992. *The auto/biographical I: the theory and practice of feminist auto/biography*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Steinberg, D.L., Epstein, D. and Johnson, R. (eds) 1996. *Border Patrols; Policing the boundaries of heterosexuality*. Cassel:London.
- Steinman, C. 1992. 'Gaze out of bounds' In Craig, S. (ed) 1992. *Men, masculinity, and the media*. Newbury Park, Ca.; London: Sage Publications.
- Van Leer, David. 1989. The Beast of the Closet: Homosociality and the pathology of Manhood. In *Critical Inquiry*, Spring 1989, v15 n3, p.587.
- Walker, K. (1994a) Men, women, and friendship: what they say, what they do. *Gender & Society* June 1994 v8 n2 p246(20)
- Walker, K. (1994b) "I'm not friends the way she's friends" Ideological and behavioral constructions of masculinity in men's friendships. *Masculinities*, Vol. 2, No. 2, Summer 1994, pp. 38-55
- Walters, Susan D. 1999. Sex, text and context: (In)between feminism and cultural studies' In Ferre, M.M., Lorber, J. , Beth, B.H. (eds) *Revisioning Gender*, 1999, pp. 222-60
- Wernick, Andrew. 1991. *Promotional culture: Advertising, ideology and symbolic expression*. London: Sage Publications

Films

Hard Boiled, 1992. Film. Directed by John Woo.

Philadelphia, 1993. Film. Directed by Demme, J.

American Beauty, 1999. Film. Directed by Sam Mendes

Boys Don't Cry, 1999. Film. Directed by Kimberly Peirce.

The television series *Friends*

Friends, 1995. Episode 201. The One With Ross' New Girlfriend.

TV, United States, 09/21/1995

Friends, 1996. Episode 214, The One With The Prom Video. TV, United States, 01/02/1996

Friends, 1996. Episode 215, The One Where Ross and Rachel... You Know.

TV, United States, 08/02/1996

Friends, 1996. Episode 216, The One Where Joey Moves Out. TV, United States, 15/02/1996

Friends, 1996. Episode 217, The One Where Eddie Moves In. TV, United States, 22/02/1996

Friends, 1997. Episode 321, The One With a Chick. And a Duck.

TV, United States, 17/04/1997

Friends, 1999. Episode 602, The One Where Joey Hugs Rachel.

TV, United States, 30/09/1999

Friends, 2000. Episode 611, The One With The Apothecary Table.

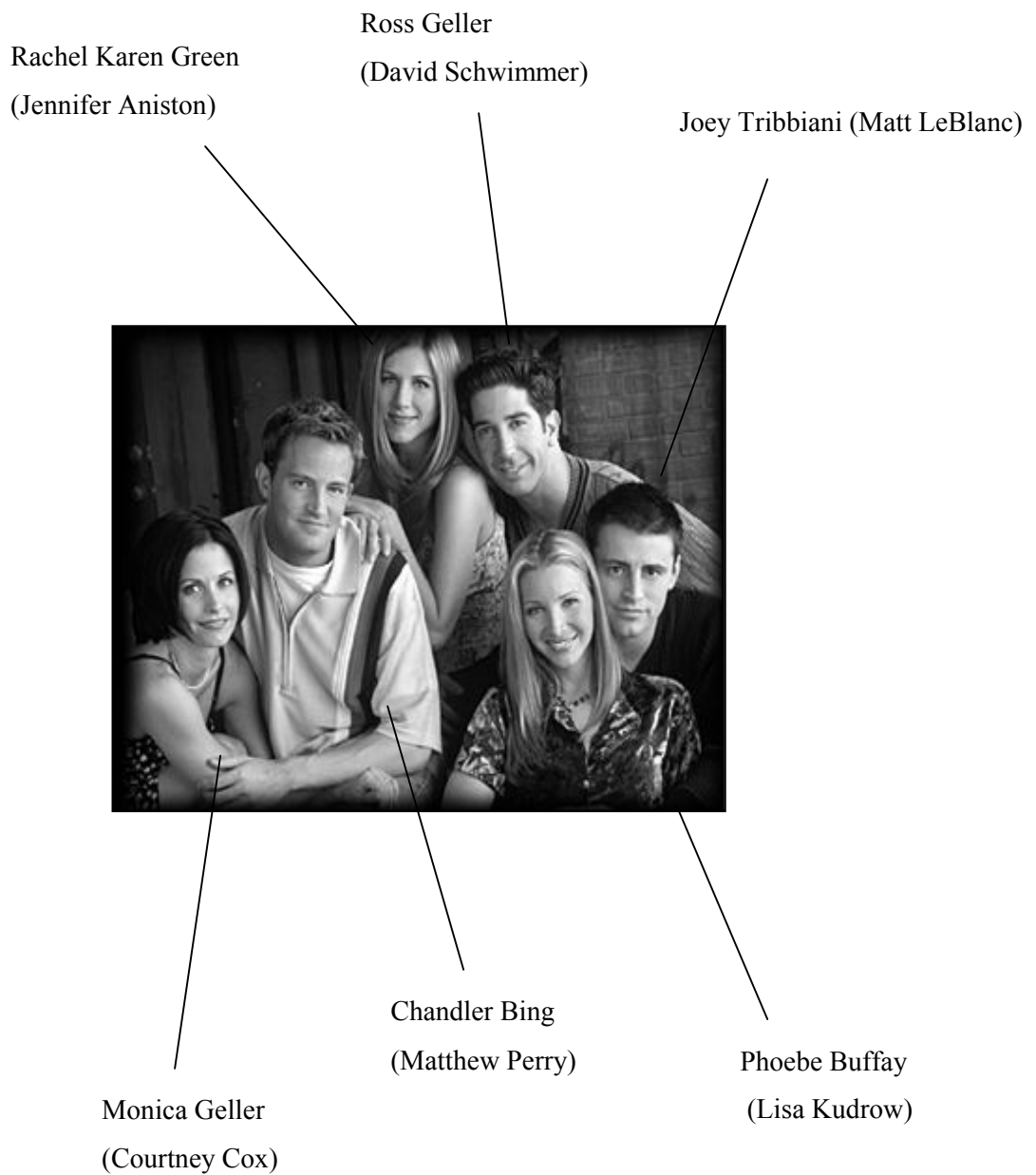
TV, United States, 01/06/2000

Friends, 2000. Episode 612, The One With the Joke. TV, United States, 13/01/2000

Friends, 2000. Episode 624, The One With The Proposal, part 1.

TV, United States, 05/18/2000

Appendix 1



Picture is taken from <http://www.thecfsi.com/>
[Accessed 20th September 2000]