

English 280, First Place; Professor, Dr. Timothy Helwig

Unspoken Words: What Our “Friends” Say About Us

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Audience Analysis (140 Words): This analysis is written for white, middle class Americans who follow popular media and social trends. It could be published in a popular social analysis magazine, such as *The Atlantic* strong friendships and equality among social classes, gender, and race. The goal is to inform readers on the stereotypes associated with race, gender, and social class and shed light onto the influence the popular television show *Friends* has on these stereotypes. *Friends* was the first of its kind to combine family and work life into one show at turn of the century and its influence on its large audience was incredibly significant. It is a call to action to recognize the stereotypes in popular television and media, especially the latent comments, and to eliminate the negative impacts they have on viewers.

night sitcom gained immense popularity since its premiere in 1994, all through its ten seasons, because of its progressive take on friend

narratives reflect and reproduce dominant understandings of our social world and therefore are

Friends became the pioneer of the Generation X

movement, renewing an appreciation for friendships, offering a positive outlook on

that upward mobility is feasible, however the struggle to attain that gain was largely bypassed. Rachel, on the other hand, grew up in a very upper class household, in which she was able to get a nose alteration in high school and remained dependent on her twenty-eight years old. Because of her upbringing, Rachel reflects a lot of negative upper class stereotypes, such as being air-headed, selfish, and a spendthrift, as well as valuing appearance over all else. However, she also transcends some negative upper class stereotypes when she starts working as a waitress (her downward mobility to the middle class) to earn her paycheck, making her self-reliant and financially independent from her family and friends. These characters have exhibited previous social class mobility, but throughout their lives present during the show that mobility no longer seems possible after they have reached the equilibrium of the middle class, despite the struggles they face.

Monica is an unusual representation of class status because it appears she was raised middle class, but her former characterization proposes otherwise. Monica stands out, in particular, from the rest of the group because she American beauty standards suggest deviation from that ideal middle class standing that she has wherein fatness emerges as a degenerate space of over-consumption and laziness. These characteristics are inscribed on many bodies deemed to be socially threatening, specifically

even often made fun of by her own parents for her weight. Snide comments about how much she eats or how her size is too large for normal activities (such as when her father indirectly insists

are used to create comedy.

explained by applying th

182). Unfortunately,

strays from realism in order to achieve comedy, but instead also ends up achieving a very unrealistic perspective on what life is like living paycheck to paycheck. This, in turn, teaches audiences the false idea that middle class status, once achieved, is very hard to lose.

Aside from social class, *Friends* also makes some important remarks towards race. Phil Chidester, an assistant professor in the School of Communication at Illinois State University, claims because whiteness does function as a marker of identity and difference that is founded in and perpetuated through social discourse, it becomes important to examine the rhetorical character of this racial position. *Friends* often uses visual rhetoric, more specifically the lack of racial diversity throughout the show, to make comments on race and racial stereotypes. The setting of Manhattan, one of the most racially diverse communities in the nation, is unusually lacking representation of racial others during the shows entirety. All six members of the exclusive group are white and, throughout the ten seasons, no other race has been able to penetrate their circle. This shortage of diversity is often perceived as support for superiority of white people and white culture. The members of the group often have new relationships with people of other races, but each of them are eventually rejected for not fulfilling the in s expectations.

More specifically, (African American), Julie (Asian American), and Emily (English) exhibit attempts by racial others to permeate the borders of the group that ultimately end in failure. In Seasons 4 and 5, Ross gets into a spontaneous

day. However, their relationship does pose that, despite Emily being white, her strong English heritage is what kept her from becoming a part of the group. Her accent was frequently mocked by the friend group and her family was rejected for their unruly demand for money.

relationship with Charlie in Season 10 is rather short-lived, especially since in the process of trying to court her, she falls in love with Joey instead. After she re

white, between what is acceptable to the in-group and what must be ultimately rejected in order

Over the seasons, Joey is constantly

chided for his actions, whether he does not understand a joke, he cannot answer a question, or he

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