Audience Interpersonal Identification with the Television Series *Friends* as it is Reflected

in Avid Viewers within the Twixter Life Stage.
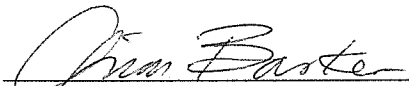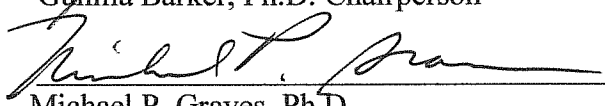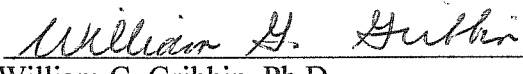
_____

Presented to the Faculty

Liberty University

School of Communication

_____

In

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Master of Arts

In Communication

By

Renee Ruth Peckham

April 15, 2006

Thesis Committee

(signature)   4-24-06
Gunilla Barker, Ph.D. Chairperson   Date

(signature)   4-24-06
Michael P. Graves, Ph.D.   Date

(signature)   4-24-06
William G. Gribbin, Ph.D.   Date

Abstract

Twixter is a term, popularized by Time magazine, to define what sociologists classify as individuals in their mid to late twenties who are finding themselves "betwixt and between" adolescence and adulthood (Grossman, 2005). Researchers Cote and Allahar (1996), Bennett (1994), and Buchmann (1989) have identified mass media as a key contributor to this new transitional life stage, specifically discussing the influential potential of television. As individuals identify with various televised content, fictional characters establish role models that individuals then emulate. The series *Friends*, in particular, portrayed this Twixter life stage. This thesis addresses Kelman's (1961) theory of identification as it relates to the series *Friends* by interviewing 14 women who demographically fit within the Twixter life stage. Four prominent themes emerged: Initial identification, character identification, episode identification and life stage identification. It was found that the initial draw to the series was a strong identification with the characters as quasi-mentors, the characters relationships or the socialization of the series among their peers. It was this initial interpersonal attraction that precipitated avid viewership and built a parasocial relationship which interviewing evidenced each woman's strong identification with the characters, events within various episodes and particularly the life stage of the characters. As *Friends* reflected the Twixter life stage, the majority of the women disclosed that they perceived their life stage as similar to the life stage of the characters on *Friends*, strongly supporting the premise that identification is the key to influence.

Key Words: Identification Theory, Parasocial Theory, Twixters, *Friends*, Influence

Table of Contents

Chapter One

Introduction

The years from 18 until 25 and even beyond have become a distinct and separate

life stage, a strange, transitional never-never land between adolescence and

adulthood in which people stall for a few extra years, putting off the iron cage of

adult responsibility that constantly threatens to crash down on them. They are

betwixt and between. You could call them Twixters. (Lee Grossman, 2005, p.42).

In February 2005, *Time* magazine printed an article titled *"Grow Up? Not so

fast."* The article addressed the permanent shift that has taken place in the way young

people approach adulthood and that an intermediate phase between adolescence and

adulthood has developed somewhere along the way. Speculation for this transition in life

was given to different economic and cultural conditions; however, the end of the article

pointed to television, specifically the show *Friends*, as a potential contributor.

Advocating the prolonging of adulthood, Grossman's (2005) article in *Time* drew

attention to the forestalling of adulthood as potentially being a reflection of televised

influence. This generation, finding themselves between adolescence and adulthood, has

been conditioned to savor the pleasures of having little responsibility while investing in

time-consuming soul searching as they carefully chart the course for their lives. This

process of growing up has become interminable and is reflected in what is now being

described by some scholars as a societal phenomenon.

Apter (2001), a psychologist at the University of Cambridge, became concerned

with her students between the ages of 18 and 24 entering what she refers to as the

"threshold of the next stage in life." Her concern arose in 1994 when she realized many

of her students were struggling more than usual with transitioning into life after graduation. For the purpose of this thesis, the term *Twixter* will be used to categorize this particular life stage and the individuals that represent it.

Who are these Twixters? As defined by Grossman and supported by social scientists Arnett (2000) and Apter (2001), Twixters can be defined as full grown men and women, often with a college degree, who dress, talk, and act much like they did in their teens. They stand on the threshold to adulthood and refuse to step over. They typically move from job to job and from one romantic relationship to another, appearing to be completely uninterested in settling down. They don't own homes and frequently change living arrangements, sometimes choosing to live with their parents as a financially freeing alternative for supporting their carefree lifestyle. None of them are married, none of them have children, and all of them are between the ages of 23 and 30. They equate adulthood least of all with finishing college or getting married, but rather identify moving out of their parents' home and having their first child as "growing up." More than one-third of individuals that fall into this category do not consider themselves adults and would cite "enjoying life the way it is" and "not yet being financially independent" as reasons for their delayed entry into adulthood (Lee Grossman, 2005, p.43).

There are a number of considerations in understanding why this cultural shift has taken place, one of them being the focus of this thesis: television. According to Fiske (1987), scholars recognize television as simply a popular cultural medium. Collecting viewers from a wide variety of sociocultural experiences and numerous subcultures, television producers purpose to homogenize this wide variety so that one television program will ultimately appeal to a mass, diverse audience. Producers are presented with

the challenge of bonding the vast array of audience preferences through a single entertaining program by determining what a mass audience has in common. Since the economics that drive the production and distribution of televised series require a mass audience to survive, they are created with the intent of drawing a diverse group of individuals around one singular event. It is inevitable, then, that popular television will strive to serve the common interests of its audience members, reinforce these ideals and interests and subsequently establish these interests within the new cultural context created by unifying a mass audience. This thesis is not proposing that televised series are capable of creating a hegemonic society, but rather televised series carry a cultural weight that can subtly and often unconsciously influence the thoughts and beliefs of its viewers. In particular, this thesis considers the theoretical concept of identification as one of the key means to explain the cultural shift that has manifested itself in the Twixter generation. It was anticipated that avid viewers of the series in question, *Friends*, would demonstrate through interviews a level of identification and a consistent, similar perception of adulthood. Ultimately, the argument here is that individuals engaged in regular interpersonal parasocial interaction with characters on a television series will develop a strong sense of identification, which is one of the keys to influence. Given the expansive audience a popular series such as *Friends* had over a ten-year period and continues to have in syndication, the premise is that this series, through its mass audience's identification with the characters in the series, has gradually contributed to the cultural paradigm that is Twixterhood.

The inquiry of this thesis attempted to address the following: Did the audience of the series *Friends* identify with the characters of the sitcom, and could this be seen as an

indication of a generation's hesitancy to transition into adulthood? Avid viewers of

Friends who fall within the parameters of what is defined as a "Twixter" were

interviewed in order to determine their perceived level of identification with the

characters or the lifestyle portrayed in the series *Friends*. The assumption in embarking

on this thesis was that ideas and beliefs about each of these transitional stages of life are

molded and shaped by our environment. If television is an integral part of our

environment, it could be a resource for understanding the current Twixter cultural and

social life stage.

A case is first made for the importance of studying a televised medium as a

vehicle for social conditioning, the validity of choosing the series *Friends*, and the

significance of studying the impact of the interpersonal cues in the series on the audience

that grew up watching it in light of the interpersonal communicative nature of the

relationship between the characters in the series and their audience. To do that, I will

address the following questions: (1) Do the stories told on television reflect or create

ideas of social and cultural importance, (2) does *Friends* qualify as a valid choice of a

televised series for examining this new demographic audience response, and (3) is the

interpersonal nature of audience interaction with television remarkable?

Justification

The first question, *do the stories told on television reflect ideas of social and*

cultural importance, is discussed by esteemed television critics Alder and Cater (1976) in

their article *A Context for Criticism*. According to this article, the television medium had

not received the kind of criticism it deserves. They stated that "Although television has

become the primary source of news and entertainment for most Americans, [it has been]

ignored as an object of serious criticism." Explanations for these oversights included, but were not limited to, the idea that television is not worthy of serious attention as the contents of television are merely expressions of corporate creation and warrant minimal concern rhetorically within popular culture. They acknowledged this academic bias against pop culture studies three decades ago and suggested intellectuals viewed television at the time as only a "sociological phenomenon," ascribing it little significance or value. Adler and Cater's (1976) studies were to the contrary; they saw the unifying culture in America being a mass mediated popular culture. Television allows millions around a nation, and even around the world, to gather together without physical proximity and collectively share an experience. Paula Fass (1976), in her article *Television as a Cultural Document*, described television as the unification of "discrete beings into a mass audience, synchronizing our time and homogenizing our imaginations" (Adler & Cater, 1976). This is the very chemistry of television. In this way, television could be thought of as a cultural smorgasbord of behaviors, values and beliefs, dispensing these varieties of taste, allowing an audience to indulge in a common experience. This enables an audience to convene around a unified table of credence that is then discussed long after the meal is finished. Nearly thirty years later, Moores (1993), Joyrich (1996), and Pack (2000) support the culturally unifying properties of television. If television, then, reflects the values and beliefs within a culture, can it also effect a change in society?

To answer that question, consider the following: were a foreign individual to watch American television, would the cultural assumptions made become the social expectation if the individual traveled to America? In a time when 98 percent of

American households own at least one television which is turned on roughly 7 hours a

day (Rosenzweig, 1999), the degree to which people learn and emulate the behavior of

the characters they see on television is of critical concern. According to Fiske (1987),

audiences are composed of a wide variety of groups that are everything but a

homogenized mass; however, each group unifies as it collectively "reads" television in

order to produce meanings that connect with their social experience.

These selected scholarly observations on cultural and social reflection of

television, along with its potential influence, provide a solid basis for considering

television as a medium worthy of critical analysis. The next question one must then ask

is: *does "Friends" qualify as a valid televised series for examining this new demographic

audience response?*

On September 22, 1994, NBC introduced America to the new member of the

Thursday night lineup. The pilot for *Friends* commenced the post-collegiate lifestyle of

six friends in urban New York. A disgruntled actor, a paleontologist, an aspiring chef, an

aspiring musician, a spoiled shop-aholic, and a data processor entered millions of

people's lives that evening and would live in that time slot for the next ten years,

unfolding their life story until the series ended in the spring of 2004. All the characters

within the series fit into the demographic framework of a Twixter.

The selection of *Friends* for this study is based on a number of factors. First,

Friends being a weekly program that had maximum prime-time exposure and featured

consistent cast of characters as well as ongoing plots and themes. In his article "Values

in Prime-Time Television," Selnow (1990) discussed how plot lines from prime time

television were often demonstrative of personal values. Since prime time television is

extremely sensitive to the changes in popular culture, there are intended messages being conveyed to audiences. These messages deserve academic attention to determine what they are and how the message might be reflected in national culture. Evidence collected over a number of decades through academic research has indicated that television portrayals can influence a viewer's perception of reality (Blosser, Marlowe, & Selnow, 1989). The idea is that television is capable of "mainstreaming" the views of its audience by channeling them into common patterns similar to those exhibited within the medium. Given the weekly airing over ten seasons, *Friends* is a valid series for investigative study.

Another reason for choosing *Friends* is the show's audience appeal, which resulted in its impressive popularity. *Friends,* throughout the 236 episodes, eventually drew 28 million viewers (Johnson, 2004). Amassing such a huge audience supports the importance of asking what values and attitudes were communicated in this show. Chesebro (2003) suggested that much of what we know, or believe we know, we have never personally experienced; thus, our reality is a collection of stories that are heard, seen, or told through our social environment. As we collect these unique pieces of rhetorical discourse, they become pieces that make up the tapestry of who we are. With the vast audience that *Friends* appealed to and the regular, weekly time audiences invested in the lives of these characters, it is important then to consider what reality the audience created by reflecting upon the stories of this series. It was this very thinking that was explored in this thesis through qualitative interviews. Arguably, *Friends* not only succeeded as a great entertainment sitcom, but also became a model lifestyle for many of its viewers.

Prime-time television has seen many genres come on and off the air, but there are few shows that have reached the ranks of *Friends,* which successfully left production after ten years of running. *Friends* does not stand alone in the longevity category, as it followed after a very successful predecessor, *Seinfeld,* which held approximately 20 million viewers weekly, leading to the question: what is it that draws viewers to a show and keeps them invested in it? This can be addressed along with the last question of relevance: *what is the interpersonal nature of audience interaction with televised characters*?

Having established the validity of studying the television medium, and the appropriateness of considering the specific television show *Friends* as an agent of cultural influence, we must also take into account the interpersonal nature of the relationships built between the characters in televised entertainment and the audiences that faithfully watch them. Television brings to the surface what has been described by Snyder (1966) as "presence." Defined, this is the face-to-face interpersonal communication a person engages in when watching television. A viewer wants a sense that she is in touch with the world and wants to see not just the surface of the lives on the screen but the struggling, feeling, and enjoying aspects of the characters portrayed. Snyder (1966) found, for example, that women who follow soap operas for a considerable amount of time experience a greater self-revelation from the characters on the screen than they do from their neighbors and sometimes even close friends. According to the work of Hoffner and Cantor (1991), interpersonal attraction to a media character is based on three factors: perceived similarity to a character, desiring to be like a character, and liking the character. Austin and Meili's (1994) work supports this

position, suggesting that the power of interpersonal attraction in identifying and subsequently modeling behaviors is not only the result of a perceived similarity, but equally an outcome of a desire to be like the social agent - in this case, a televised character. Should the tripartite reactions evidence themselves, the attraction increases the likelihood of the individual emulating the behaviors of the particular agent. As suggested in social learning theory, people who share perceived similarities with another individual are more likely to model behaviors after that individual than after someone who is believed to be dissimilar (Bandura, 1977).

This thesis proposes that through regular media consumption, a form of interpersonal relationship, also referred to as parasocial interaction, develops with the characters and is key to influential changes in audience views. The purpose of this thesis is to explore the interpersonal relationship between avid viewers of *Friends* and the characters of the show within the context of identification theory. Because they identify with the life stage of the characters, it was predicted that the informants interviewed would evidence a life style that reflects and is influenced by the one portrayed on *Friends*.

First, a comprehensive look at the scholarly work associated with this study will be addressed. This literature review will cover recent scholarly work on the Twixter generation as it applies to the ideas of forestalling adulthood. The review will then turn its attention to television and its audiences. It will review the academic works involved with the development of television audience criticism and the relationships that television builds with its audience. This leads into the third area of review, the academic discussion of mediated interpersonal relationships. In the exploration of televised influence on its

respective audiences, a general look at scholarly work will lead to the discussion of identification and parasocial interaction theory, respectively. The final area of review will be on the series *Friends* itself.

Having established an academic foundation for this thesis, the methodological approach to the study will be outlined in the third chapter. An outline of the research questions will be presented along with established support for choosing the interview process as the most appropriate choice of research method for this type of study. Justification for the demographics of the interviewees will also be provided.

What will follow is a chapter highlighting aspects of the interview that address the research questions outlined in the methodology chapter. These are categorized into four major themes: identification with the show, character identification, episode identification, and life stage identification.

The last chapter of this thesis will marry the literature reviewed with the interview results in a discussion that addresses the possible social and cultural ramifications of audience identification with the television series *Friends*. Conclusions will be drawn as a reflection of the research questions initially posed in chapter three, and future research within the area of identification and television audiences, specifically in reference to the study of *Friends*, will be considered.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Twixter Generation

In 1932, Huxley wrote *Brave New World* as a vehicle for extrapolating events from the first part of the twentieth century into the future. The context of his book was the nature-nurture debate. On one side of this debate were those who believed that overriding genetics, or nature, would determine human behavior; on the other side were those that believed what happened in the social environment was of ultimate importance (Huxley, 1932). Though this text was used to portray what would happen if social and biological sciences were combined and used for political control, it became the platform for identity research and its environmental conditioning. Since the thirties, much of the future Huxley (1932) spoke of has become the present and the past. The mass culture he speculated about in his book has become the social compass of today.

In consideration of the influence mass culture has on the development and transitional changes from adolescence to adulthood, the following will consider different studies and rhetorical contemplations that have contributed to and perpetuated these changes, specifically addressing the new life stage of Twixterhood.

"Adulthood" is an early twentieth-century Western society term that has undergone significant changes in meaning since the inception of its widespread use (Cote, 2000). Prior to that, there was no definitive term for the transition into that particular life stage. According to Hareven (1994), the life changes that we are experiencing culturally today, such as adulthood, are similar to those experienced in the nineteenth century. Society's life courses over the past two decades have become

increasingly more erratic, removing from the widespread homogenization of life-stages evident in the first three-quarters of the past century. It was common twenty years ago for individuals to find themselves married with children before entering their mid-twenties. "Settling down" was something that was expected once an education was complete, giving little thought to other post-grad alternatives, as this was understood to be the norm. These traditional markers have become blurred or extinct, most recently within the past decade, leaving insufficient external guidance and limited internal resources for adolescents to take hold of in advancement to maturity (Cote & Allahar, 1996).

Buchmann (1989) examined changes in the life course of twentieth century adolescents and discovered a pattern of individualization. Although this research pre-dates the parameters of this thesis, it is relevant as she connected the freedom from traditional social collectives with the arrival of new technologies capable of conforming society. Buchmann (1989) noted that technologies such as television established a different set of societal rules and obligations. According to Hanley's (2000) report, teenagers are strongly influenced by those whom they come in direct contact with. Teens first listed their friends and peers as most influential in their life and acknowledged television as a secondary influence, making specific reference to particular television shows or characters that they desired to imitate.

Hardwick (1984) asked a group of second-year college students to write essays discussing their perception of adulthood. What he discovered was that one quarter of the students either had no answer or said that there was no definitive way to determine when one had reached adulthood. Among the responses, the idea of self-reliance was most

frequently mentioned, followed by completion of growth and conformity to social norms (Hardwick, 1984). In a later survey of 346 college students in the mid-nineties revealed that 63 percent of the students believed themselves in some ways to be adults and in others not (Arnett 1994). The transition from adolescence to adulthood is now a process that could take individuals many years to actualize.

Culturally speaking, a pattern of enforced idleness and reduced contribution to community has now become characteristic of young adults, forcing many to live as dependents of their parents well into their twenties (Cote, 2000). These individuals are finding themselves caught in an identity moratorium that leaves them open to various forms of identity manipulation. This type of manipulation can manifest itself within the televised messages of writers and producers of entertainment programming. Bennett (1994) addressed this concern stating that American society "now places less value than before on what we owe others as a matter of moral obligation; less value on sacrifice as a moral good; less value on social conformity, respectability, and observing the rules; and less value on correctness and restraint in matters of physical pleasure and sexuality" (p. 8). He also reported that the change in Americans' use of time has implications for the transition into, and nature of, adulthood. At the time of Bennett's (1994) study, American teens spent an average of five minutes per day alone with their fathers and twenty minutes with their mothers; however, three hours were spent watching television. Is there a potential correlation with the cultural values present in entertainment programming and the amount of time an individual engages in watching it?

As the selected literature confirms, analysis of the beliefs, values, and attitudes of television viewers is worthy of critical consideration. There are further studies that could

be considered in this literature review, but those discussed above strongly support the significance of studying televised programming. Television, therefore, must have an impact on the way individuals develop and, eventually, how they make their way into adulthood through passive televised socialization. In Cote's (2000) words, "the make-believe worlds of television, characters, and communities try to make us feel at one with them" (p. 75). One must now consider the consumer of said programming and the significant studies of the medium's audiences.

Television and its Audiences

How might television affect its viewers? Where do most Americans go to find dramatic models of adult behavior? Would not the significant time spent by individuals in front of a television indicate a stronger model for how things are done than what is observed in their individual private worlds? Viewers gain a wealth of information from watching television. One can learn of other lands and other people, acquire tolerance for behaviors, and develop intolerance for others, and one could interact less or differently with friends and family - all creating a number of intended and unintended effects from viewing itself (Williams, 1986). Adults do indeed gain a sense of what is considered acceptable behavior from the public media. This being so, audience analysis warrants the scrutiny given from academic scholars.

Early television audience criticism focused on the text and the meaning between genres, programs, series, or the larger audience to which they belonged (Newcomb, 1994). Critical analysis of television was able to gather and focus questions of aesthetics and ideology, cultural and social issues, the context of home and the context of a nation, the application of politics, and the analysis of ideology; however, the significance of

these issues rested in the specific analysis of each individual case and context (Newcomb, 1994).

According to Putnam (1995), the introduction of television in homes since the 1960's has progressively made our communities wider and shallower. Although this has broadened individual tastes and opened a new world of electronic language and economic advancement, it has been at the expense of social externalities associated with more primitive forms of entertainment. The time, then, that is given to television replaces time originally used for other social interactions where individuals would learn societal norms and behaviors.

At the time of Bennett's (1994) study, a research article by Strasburger and Donnerstein (1999) discussed the behavioral and psychological displacement created by media. Behaviorally, time spent watching television takes away from other activities such as physical exercise, reading, and socialization. Psychologically, the content of what is viewed invariably affects the consciousness of the viewer. Images viewed on television present role models for making choices based on the paths of least resistance, effort, or both (Cote, 2000). Thus, Strasburger and Donnerstein (1999) concluded there is little question of a cause and effect relationship between television viewing and real-life behavior.

In the late twentieth century, relationships became engendered by the technological interchanges within which they existed. Where social interchanges were commonly exchanged within the local domain of a neighborhood or town settings, many of these interactions were replaced with a more secluded interchange within the home in front of the television. Whether centered on the sharing of a sporting event or a gathering

for the latest weekly sitcom, each instance brings groups of people together to share a common experience. As described by Giddens (1991), the social identities of late modernity have been radically altered by the conditions of industrial capitalism, resulting in the alteration of day-to-day social life and affecting the most personal aspects of experience. Earlier work by Novak (1977) supports the idea of television as a national medium where it does not favor accent, speech patterns, and other cultural differences prominent in the United States. It is the instrument of the national mobile culture showing how life is "done" in a language that can be understood as "televisionese."

Television critics Newcomb and Hirsch (1983) discussed the cultural basis for analysis and criticism of television as a bridge between concern for television as a medium central to contemporary society and as an aesthetic object whose story telling functions unite and examine culture. This view is fundamental to the development of this study, as it established the presence of dominant messages that are embedded in fictional entertainment. The cultural analysis of television is based on the idea that communication is a symbolic process in which reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed as we attempt to understand its meaning and message. Newcomb and Hirsch (1983) argued that television is a central storytelling system which, when carefully examined, reveals dense, rich, and complex meanings.

In *The Making of Sitcom,* David Marc (1989) began with an analysis of the *Dick Van Dyke Show*, discussing the political and cultural impact the show had in its five seasons. He commented on how the show's creator, Carl Reiner, brought stage and hearth together, paving the way for future sitcom successes like *Bewitched* and *Beverly Hillbillies*: bringing another world into people's living rooms. Marc (1989) argued that

television is a vehicle of personal expression used by the network creators. The importance of his analysis of situational network television, analyzed over the past decade, is his discussion of the major players in comedic television to date and how they have continued to influence the development and progression of this genre.

In recent work, Barry Putterman (1995) examined style, theme, performer and writer of situational comedy in the text *On Television and Comedy*. He discussed the marriage between stand-up comedy and sitcoms through the analysis of shows like *Cosby, Alf,* and *Seinfeld*. Putterman (1995) acknowledged television as mass culture art, suggested that there is the distinct possibility that audiences are capable of suspending reason when watching televised programming, and concluded that believing in fantasy long enough will turn fantasy into reality. Using this argument, it is possible then that the stories being told through televised series could have a lasting impression on their viewers, bringing us to the theoretical implications in the study of audience analysis.

Mediated Interpersonal Relationships

Exploring the possible influence television can have on its respective audiences, this review will now focus on the audiences' responses. There are two emerging theories that are relevant to the study in question: identification theory and parasocial interaction theory. Before discussing the literature published on these theories, attention will first be given to the interpersonal nature of television.

Television is a derivative of the Greek word *tele*, meaning "at a distance," and the Latin verb *video*, meaning, "I see" (Gumpert & Cathcart, 1979). Since Samuel Morse's invention of the telegraph, mediated forms that either conveyed sounds or images and sounds over great distances have one common denominator: individuals attempting to

communicate with each other immediately and with no necessity of actual physical proximity. It can be argued that all media could be used for interpersonal communication and likewise be used for mass communication. Consider that the telephone can be the channel for a dyadic conversation or the mouthpiece to broadcast simultaneously to many people. The television can in the same manner be used to unite two people in a common experience, thus qualifying its potential for building interpersonal relationships (Gumpert & Cathcart, 1979). Taking this idea further and considering how, in the same way, one might find it unnecessary to visit a friend when one could simply make a phone call, media has the ability to alter the way in which individuals relate to one another and transform the realm in which those relationships exist.

According to Sennett (1977), television and other forms of media are tools that have been invented to fulfill a human need. This need is described as the cultural impulse to withdraw from real social interaction in order to feel more like a person abridging social interaction and personal experience. Now the potential for relationships has expanded outside of space and time; where intimate interpersonal relationships once required physical and psychological closeness, these things are no longer necessary (Gumpert & Cathcart, 1979). This has created a communication paradox, where those who live in urban communities may no longer know their neighbors but are more intimate with those who live in another country or on a studio set. One might not travel to an adjacent city to visit a relative, but chances are, both families have seen Jerry Seinfeld, Oprah Winfrey, Jennifer Garner, and many others on a regular basis. What must be understood is that there are elements within mediated communication

influencing interpersonal communication as relationships are built, often unconsciously, with the individuals appearing in our living room week after week.

It is possible, then, that the structure of interpersonal behavior and identifying interpersonal behavior "codes" used in watching television can be experienced in a manner resembling live interaction (Meyrowitz, 1978). These concepts are supported through recent texts such as Hill (2002), Jones (2003), and Holmes (2004) whose collective work mutually suggest that television has radically altered our world as audiences are looking for moments of authenticity in an "unreal" environment. The following will discuss theories about ways in which this interaction is conducted.

Identification and Parasocial Interaction Theory

Kelman (1961) introduced the first embryo of identification theory, referring to identification as "a persuasion process that occurs when an individual adopts the behavior or attitudes of another individual or group based on a self-defining relationship" (p. 57). Interpersonally, we are capable of building relationships in life with individuals who have no interest in reciprocating the relationship. This behavior of self-defining a relationship does not only occur between two individuals in real life, but with relationships on screen as well. He saw identification as being inescapably linked to persuasion. From here, a theoretical framework could be established for public opinion and could potentially predict social and cultural change. The adoption of another's behavior because of an actual or perceived relationship with that person is a potential outcome of the identification process. In this process the person believes in the values, beliefs, and behaviors that are adopted from the other person as being their own. Identification is

based on the individual's affiliation or group membership from which "strength and a sense of identity" are obtained (Kelman, 1961).

Kenneth Burke (1969) describes identification in this way: "you persuade a man insofar as you talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his." Identification in this way can include a person's physical characteristics, talents, occupation, background, personality, beliefs, and values. The greater similarities present between the speaker and his/her viewer, the greater the extent of the identification. Griffin (2003) draws a theological connection from scripture to identification when Ruth tells her mother-in-law Naomi in Ruth vs. 16-17: "For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God." Through Ruth and Naomi's story, Ruth was identifying with Naomi, thus creating a joint interest. Though it cannot be proven that subconscious identification produces behavior and attitude change, confirmation can be found that perceived similarity facilitates persuasion.

Although identification theory is fairly new, the academic community has not overlooked the phenomenon. Freud (1992) described identification as the earliest expression of an emotional tie with another person. Burke (1969), as mentioned above, referred to identification as the process where one individual shares the interests of another. Identification is a way that an audience can say "I am like you" or "I have the same interests as you" (Cheney, 1983). Fraser & Brown (2002) have established in their studies that although the process of identification commonly occurs in interpersonal relationships, it also can occur through prolonged exposure to celebrities through the media.

There have been numerous studies conducted on identification with celebrity personae. Basil (1997), for example, discussed celebrity-endorsed advertisements. His article referenced the use of tobacco by celebrities on film and on television as a form of "advertising" resulting in audience members identifying with those characters and taking up smoking as a result. Kahle and Riley (2004) discussed the strategic use of celebrities in endorsements, recognizing the power of identification with sports celebrities. David Giles (2003), in his book *Media Psychology*, argues that a single celebrity endorsement of a product might have more of an impact than thousands of ingenious ads. Himmelstein (1994) also raises questions of identification in commercial marketing in light of how television shapes consciousness in the minds of Americans. When Earvin "Magic" Johnson became the spokesman for HIV/AIDS prevention, it was found that those who identified with him as a sports celebrity were more inclined to respond positively to his message than those who did not (Basil, 1996). Princess Diana became a hero to many people in England and internationally as she served in numerous social causes, and those who followed her life closely also expressed a strong identification with her and admittedly sought to emulate her values and behaviors (Brown, Basil & Bocarnea, 2003). Millions have identified with international icon Elvis Presley. Interviews were used to discover the strong identification Elvis impersonators had with Elvis Presley himself (Fraser & Brown, 2002).

Within the music industry, celebrity identification with diva icons such as Madonna has been considered. According to Cathy Schwichtenberg (1993), Madonna can be read as a barometer of culture that directs our attention to cultural shifts, struggles and changes appealing to audiences on multiple levels.

Andrea Press (1991) expressed concern that television was heavily influencing women's identities in our culture as she investigated the relationship between representations of women in entertainment and the perception women have of themselves. Margaret Heide (1995) considered the influence television has on women in their thirties, observing the capacity of network television to serve as a cultural forum that organizes and shapes individual understanding of the social self. Bonnie Dow (1996) also conducted a similar study of middle-class women and their responses to television as it related to feminist discourse.

Identification then, in its broadest sense, is understood as the common ground held by people in a communication process (Rosenfeld, 1969). Closely linked to the idea of identification is parasocial identification. Horton and Wohl (1956) originally developed the idea of parasocial relationships. The first article gave an early explanation for the way media and media performers create the illusion of interpersonal relationships with their audience. Such relationships were seen as a one-sided interpersonal relationship that television viewers established with media characters.

In a parasocial relationship, television characters are seen as real friends, and viewers may come to believe, or at least feel like, they actually know them (Antecol, 1997). Horton and Wohl (1976) also saw parasocial communication as containing elements of interpersonal and vicarious interaction. An imaginary relationship, created through the feelings or actions of a character on television, allows a viewer to follow the interactions of actors without actually taking part. The more that a viewer is able to suspend disbelief, forgetting the context of a program, the greater the likelihood the viewer will observe the program interpersonally. Now the gulf between parasocial

relationships and interpersonal relationships diminishes and the lines between reality and fiction are blurred.

The enacted role depicted on television may be a version of an everyday occurrence becoming an approximation of the ideal pattern of living not often achieved in real life (Horton & Wohl, 1976). In a sense, this ideal portrayal can be envisioned as the characters on screen holding up a magic mirror to their audience, playing their part of living more skillfully and ideally than is normally possible in the real world. Instruction is now given to those watching, on how life ideally should be enacted, depicting individuals' lives through imagination in ways that one is not able to do in actuality. Horton & Wohl (1976) discussed "personality" programming, which contrasts with dramatic programming in that it stresses all the values of friendship and intimacy through joking, teasing, praising, admiring, gossiping, and anecdotes.

A number of studies have involved the idea of parasocial relationships. Houlberg (1984) addressed the parasocial interaction between viewers and newscasters and the perceived relationship that develops, and Alperstein's (1991) studies found parasocial interaction between audiences and celebrities in television commercials. As Barker (2001) deduced in her study on Dale Earnhardt, the concepts of identification and parasocial behavior can be considered predictors of cognitive, affective and behavioral changes and a consequence of exposure through media.

Evidence suggests that parasocial relationships are encultured from childhood, as shown in James and McCain's (1982) work. This study found that as children engage in an imaginary world at play, the idea of pseudo-relationships is developed. Given that

this is something developed within childhood, there is great possibility that we may continue these practices into adulthood, changing our definition of "play."

Television differs from cinema or theater in that it is able to maintain a "nowness" or "liveness" as it encourages and inculcates habitual viewing of a particular program at a set time every week (Fiske, 1987). This constant repetition of character on a weekly basis means that the characters "live" in similar time scales as that of their audience. Because television characters have a future, in that they will return the following week, there is a built-in expectation of the next show. Television, then, lends itself to a very different relationship between the audience and the character than is offered through the cinema. Television does not simply deal with the stars, but rather with their personalities, which offers a familiarity to an audience that is much more intimate and can be perceived as an equal (Langer, 1981). In *Friends*, Jennifer Aniston merges into the character Rachel Green, where realness is created and audience members find themselves caught in the blur between reality and fiction. This "realness" combined with familiarity allow television characters to develop a unique relationship with their audiences. As Fiske (1987) states, "…the real appears to exist in its own right, and the representation is judged according to how closely it approximates to it; the representation is seen as reflective, not productive" (p. 151).

Identification, then, as a relationship of audience to performance, is the disguise of the constructed nature of the performance where instead an audience begins to experience the representation as though it were real and in turn begins to view the characters as individually real people (Fiske, 1987). Identification encourages the audience to share experiences and emotions with the characters. Identification requires an

understanding of the viewer as a unified individual and the character's representation of a unified individual. Central to this thinking is wish fulfillment, the desire to embody any of the characteristics portrayed by the character to meet a viewer's unsatisfied desires. The viewers then project themselves into the character through a desire to submerge their own identity into that of the fictional character. Viewers are able to enter the characters' world in a way that is impossible with real people, as the characters are never fully represented in any episode, allowing the viewer to fill in the rest. Although viewers are aware, for the most part, that the characters are not real and that identifying with them could be viewed as self-delusional, there is a desire to project oneself into what the character has done or might do in the future in seeking personal satisfaction or pleasure from engaging in this type of identification.

In the process of assessing audience involvement with the series *Friends,* it was assumed that both parasocial interaction and identification take place. It was therefore expected that the audience of *Friends* would exhibit parasocial behavior and identify with the characters.

Friends

Scholarly work on *Friends* is scant, but popular analysis and response is abundant. For example, an article written in the *Chicago Tribune* discusses what impact the void of *Friends* would create in the world of sitcoms (Johnson, 2004). A number of writers support its influence on the Twixter generation. Johnson (2004) believed *Friends* became the "voice of a generation" and compared its impact to that of *Frasier* for middle-aged people. His opinion is that *Friends* was not just a sitcom, but spoke of a lifestyle on an emotional and comedic level that took six characters and moved them

through major milestones in life. Their lives played out in the living rooms of 28 million households each week exemplifying the life of post-collegiate twenty-year-olds trying to survive. Johnson (2004) uses interviews with the co-creators and NBC's chief programmer to establish much of the groundwork for this thesis's investigation into the subtle, suggestive narrative effects of this series on the generation it left behind.

Similarly, an article found in the *Baltimore Sun* paid tribute to the close of the comedy by acclaiming *Friends* as the "popular show [that] captured a generation and changed the messages of prime time" (Zurawik, 2005). According to this article, *Friends* did capture life in the mid-1990's as it was being lived by many members of "Generation X" as evidenced in the show's premise: the idea of relying on peers, and not blood relatives, as family and as a community.

A number of themes have threaded themselves throughout the 236 episodes of *Friends,* building a palpable case for contributing to the present day phenomenon of the "Twixter" generation. Zurawik's (2005) article closes with this statement from creators Kaufman and Crane: "*Friends* [is] a show that brought the culture together, and they would like to believe the message of community will linger after tonight's finale" (p. 2).

A study on the impact of condom-efficacy messages with teenagers in an episode of *Friends* was published in the *Pediatrics* journal. This study used telephone surveys to determine the impact an episode that centered on condom use had on its audience (Collins, 2003). It was concluded that entertainment television could serve as a healthy sex educator and potentially improve an adolescent's knowledge about sex.

A dissertation by Vegard (2000) examined scenes from selected episodes and discussed their impact from a sociological viewpoint of cultural theory. She noted that

physical expressions between Northern-European and American men are usually restricted to specific situations and circumstances such as athletics or personal crisis. The negotiation of intimacy in the male characters of *Friends* could be interpreted as an attempt to widen the degree of physical disclosure between men and potentially evoking an underlying homosexual agenda. The main question in her research is situated around the premise for the television series' sexual identities. Vegard (2000) proposed that Joey and Chandler's friendship introduced a new way for men to interact with each other by incorporating a high degree of emotional connection. Although the results were inconclusive, the study does establish remarkable support for the use of popular culture in promoting alternative cultural ideologies. These findings suggest that *Friends* may be seen as a re-formulation of traditional gender patterns in men, but Vegard (2000) conceded that this is not the driving force of the series.

Based on the literature discussed above, there is significant justification to study the identification avid viewers of *Friends* had with the series. An extensive search has not produced any scholarly research on audience identification or parasocial interaction with the characters of *Friends*. Having addressed the important works associated with the Twixter generation, television as a medium and its audience, mediated interpersonal relationships, identification and parasocial interaction theory, and works specifically on the series *Friends*, this thesis will now address the methodology employed for this study.

Chapter Three

Methodology

Research Questions

As discussed in the literature review, people who identify with a character on television might attempt to adopt the character's values, beliefs, and behaviors, most likely unintentionally. As viewers find commonalities between themselves and the characters portrayed on screen, relationships develop. The viewer begins to empathize with a character, perhaps identifying with that individual in one way or another. Identification is the expression of an emotional tie with another person, and it is from this perspective that the following research questions were be explored.

> RQ1: To what extent did avid viewers within the Twixter life stage identify with the characters of *Friends*?
>
> RQ2: In what ways did viewers within the Twixter life stage identify with a character or a character's lifestyle?
>
> RQ3: To what extent did viewers within the Twixter life stage perceive themselves as influenced by their identification with the characters of *Friends* or their lifestyle?

Viewers of *Friends* potentially are unaware of their ability to suspend disbelief and evaluate the characters and lifestyle of the program interpersonally. This thesis predicts that individuals exposed to *Friends* at various points over the ten-year period it aired would exhibit elements of identification based on a development of a parasocial relationship with the characters and the Twixter life stage.

Qualitative Interviews

This thesis employed a qualitative research process, implying that the processes and meanings at the center of this study could not be rigorously measured or examined in terms of quantity, intensity, or frequency. Instead, qualitative research relies on the socially constructed nature of reality and the quest for answers to questions that stress how social experiences are created and given meaning. This form of study is preferable to a quantitative study, which instead focuses on the measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables, as opposed to the processes that precede this measurement. Quantitative studies of identification and parasocial interaction, some of which were reviewed earlier, typically focus on the relationships between media exposure, identification, and attitude or behavior changes. Qualitative researchers, on the other hand, explore a depth and complexity of social situations. This is accomplished through the collection of empirical research, in this case through conducting interviews. Although there is no single interpretive truth in qualitative research, there is a method employed to "isolate target populations, show the immediate effects of certain programs on such groups, and isolate the constraints that operate against policy changes in such settings" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 274).

Qualitative research aligns well with the purposes of this thesis in addressing the research questions stated above. The quest to explore and understand the patterned conduct and social processes of society are of primary concern in qualitative study. The basis for the values and attitudes on which individual and collective participation is built, drives the qualitative researcher (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Determining the basis for the values and attitudes of the Twixter generation was the pursuit of this study, and drawing a

connection to the social conditioning of the television series *Friends* was the catalyst to this research.

There were a number of considerations in choosing interviewing as the method employed for study. Interviewing was found to be the best method to unearth a deeper understanding of the relationship audience members had with the characters of the show. The objective was to capture selected interviewees in moments of self-disclosure, remaining unbiased, and taking what was disclosed, untainted, to a textual analysis to draw out essential meanings. Kvale (1996) described interviews as "the conversations of everyday life" (p. 366). He said that the qualitative research interview seeks to discover and describe the meanings of central themes in the life of the subject's world. Interviews are particularly useful, then, for getting the story behind a participant's experience. In-depth information can be pursued through interviewing with the option of immediate follow-up if further investigation of given responses is necessary. Because the interview is more personal than the questionnaire, and because mail surveys do not offer the interviewer the opportunity to probe deeper, the interview method was deemed the most appropriate choice for this type of study.

Interviewing is one of the most common and most powerful ways used to understand humanity. Interviewing constitutes an interaction as well as the study of interaction; thus, it is at one time the tool and the same time the object (Kvale, 1996). The earliest forms of interviewing were unstructured, ethnographic observations. During World War II an increase in survey research developed to measure the mental and emotional lives of over half a million American soldiers during the war took place. The dominance of survey research continued well into the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, and it

was not until the late 1990s that other research methods began to erode the survey's dominance within the social sciences (Fontana & Frey, 1994). One such method, qualitative interviewing, began walking hand in hand with participant observation methods and is recognized most readily in popular culture through interviews with such celebrities as Bob Dylan and John Lennon.

Establishing its place in popular culture, it is fitting, then, that interviewing was the method employed for this thesis. Semi-structured interviewing obtains a breadth and depth of data collection. The traditional type of semi-structured interviewing is the open-ended ethnographic [in-depth] interview. The premise of this style of interviewing is the pursuit of general topics that the interviewer wishes to learn about, which are investigated through open-ended questions in an informal approach to interviewing. In contrast to structured interviewing, which attempts to capture precise data in order to explain behavior, semi-structured interviewing is an attempt to understand the complex behavior of members of society without imposing a prior categorization that might impinge on the inquiry (Fontana & Frey, 1994).

The Interview Process

We turn now to a synopsis of the elements considered in the interview process. The first is assessment of the setting. How is it that one intends to become part of the world that he or she is trying to study? In this instance, there is no specific location or setting that must be accessed, but rather the establishment of a relationship anew with each interviewee to maximize disclosure. Next is the understanding of the respondents' language and culture. There are most certainly different ways of saying things, and definitely things that should remain unsaid. Despite the absence of a language barrier,

there still exists vulnerability in the construction of the questions such that meaning, biases, and interpretations can mislead the course of study (Fontana & Frey, 1994). Careful consideration is given then, to the construction of the interview questions and the prompts that accompany them to guide the interviewee on the right track. Presentation for the interview is another consideration, as one's presentational self can leave a profound impression on the respondent and at times affect the interview's success or failure. One of the greatest hurdles in the interview process is locating the informants to be interviewed. The task of a researcher is to locate an informant within the specific group demographics who will act as a guide and translator within that culture in hopes of providing insight about that culture (Fontana & Frey, 1994).

The demographics of this thesis sought individuals who met the following criteria. The informants needed to be single, either living at home or living with roommates, still in search of a permanent career, unmarried and that have no children. Ages ranged between 23 and 30 years old. These demographic parameters represent the Twixter demographics and are similar to the lifestyle of the characters portrayed throughout the series. Interviewees were geographically located along the eastern coast of North America. Participants were also to have been self-defined as avid watchers during the airing of the sitcom. Avid watchers included those who were faithful audiences through the majority of the ten years the show aired. For consistency, the female gender was used for this interview, as statistically they were the predominant watchers of the series. A snowball sampling method led to the location of the informants. Through general inquiry, individuals were located who fell within the demographics. Like a rabbit trail, they referred friends, family members, and co-workers who also aligned with the

selection criteria and were willing to be part of this study. There were 14 informants who participated in this study, seven of them located in Ontario, Canada and seven of them in Virginia, United States of America.

This thesis proposes that identification is the key to influence. If these informants found themselves identifying with the characters or their life stage, this identification would potentially lead to influence reported by the informants. The interview questions were designed to probe below the surface of the women's attitudes and draw out their perceived identification. In an effort to avoid any negative connotation with the idea of identifying with individuals in a television series, the questions used in the interviews were worded in such a way that they directed the interviewee to describe how they perceived elements within the series "relating" to their personal life experiences.

A major goal of qualitative interviewing is for the researcher to establish rapport with the interviewee and thus earn the interviewee's trust (Fontana & Frey, 1994). The researcher must keep in mind that there is a delicate balance between a close rapport with the respondents and maintaining a distance and objectivity, which will allow the researcher to collect the empirical materials necessary to build an analysis. The respondents were interviewed and recorded within a coffee shop environment to maintain a relaxed atmosphere without too great a distraction. The miniature tape recorder remained as inconspicuous as possible to allow for casual uninhibited conversation. Careful monitoring of answers to meet the required responses and use of prompts throughout the time of the interview were utilized to direct the conversations. The interviews were then transcribed for analysis.

The Analysis Process

Sociological and anthropological researchers have shown that finding categories, relationships, and patterns between and among themes will lead to completeness in the narrative of an interview (Denzin, & Lincoln, 1994). According to their suggestions, this methodology will employ the following steps of analysis. First, location within the informant's personal experience or self-story of key phrases and statements that speak directly to the Twixter phenomenon will be addressed. Next, interpretation of the meanings of these phrases are conducted in order to inspect them for what might be revealed about the essential, recurring features of the Twixter phenomenon being studied. Lastly, this thesis offers a tentative statement or definition of the Twixter phenomenon in terms of the essential recurring features previously discussed and in light of the theoretical framework.

The data collected from the interviews were categorized, grouped, and clustered in order to compare and contrast the respondents with each other. This opened an opportunity for uncovering meaning in the participants' lives and provided a base of information for describing and explaining the essence of the experience. The following chapter is a summary of the themes teased from the informants' discourses as they pertain to the research questions and the premise of this thesis.

Chapter Four

Results

A number of themes became prominent in the readings of the interview transcriptions. This section of the thesis will discuss the themes that evidenced themselves through recurrence and repetition. The same thread of meaning was weaved through the discourse of the informants, observing in some instances the explicit repetition of similar words and phrases. The results discuss the informants' responses within the context of identification. Through analysis, four prominent themes emerged: initial identification, character identification, episode identification and life stage identification.

Initial Identification with the Show

All informants, having established some degree of faithfulness in viewing *Friends*, disclosed three common motivations for watching the show: a need for mentoring, relationships, and sociality. A mentor is an experienced or trusted advisor who trains and counsels others. The idea of *Friends* being perceived as a mentorship show evidenced itself in a number of narratives from the informants. Generally speaking, *Friends* was seen as a good indication of what adulthood might be like, and something to look forward to once college was completed and the informants entered the real world.

Sarah, who, at 29 years of age, would have been 17 when the show first aired, acknowledged that the show's portrayal of city life, living with your friends in large amounts of ambiguity but freely doing so, was appealing then and still is to a degree now. She described their lifestyle as "an ideal, something I'd like to have." Sarah believed the show paved the way to suggest that even in her 30's, she can have an adventurous life

and a good time, something everyone wants. Sarah thought *Friends* "was the funniest show...(and) loved their sense of independence and yet connectedness to each other." For her, the freedom in the show was appealing and desirable. She perceived the lifestyle of the characters as a fair reflection of how it is in the real world. She discussed the appeal of a group of friends living in the same community and the freedom within those relationships in that environment. In her words: "I've always had that dream of being the city girl that had an apartment and some ambiguous job that really didn't matter, but my friends really mattered, and I was connected to this group of people, and we were all just roughing it out together."

Through Teresa's (25) interview, the connection between the initial draw to the series and the idea that the show gave insight into "what life is like when you get into the real world" was revealed. Still being in high school when the show first aired, she recalled thinking that the image of the characters at that stage was that they were by all rights adults; however, they weren't boring in the way she perceived adults to be. "I thought that all people when they got married...life was over and it got boring...but they were enjoying life still at an independent level, in their own characters." They were unattached and still having fun, the template for the adult life that she determined was appealing. She disclosed this idea with the comment "I thought that was how it really is in the real world." She also discussed the attraction to the series relationally, specifically through the interactions between Rachel and Monica and between Chandler and Joey, which provided a way for her to escape her present life and think about what it might be like in the future for her. The social element also existed for her as she watched *Friends* faithfully through junior high school and stated: "Friday during lunch, *Friends* was our

social conversation." It was the student's main topic of discussion and the focal point for their social interaction.

Liz (23) echoed Sarah, in that she identified with the lifestyle in New York City as being the initial draw. The show had impressed on her not only a desirable city life, but also one that encompassed its socialization around the setting of a coffee shop. In her narrative, she went on to discuss how she found herself and her friends at a coffee shop similar to that of *Central Perk* where they would "go and sit there and chat and study." She disclosed how the show helped to shape even her and her peers' fashion sense, with the infamous "Rachel hair-cut" making the show, in that regard, a reference point for many of its viewers. Liz's response regarding the relationships was interesting in that she disclosed how as a child, she figure skated frequently and did not have time to build friendships of her own outside of her practice schedule so she found a "friendship" with the characters of *Friends*. She was quick to point out that she did not necessarily think of them as her personal friends; however, given her place in life at the time, the dynamics of their relationships drew her to the show.

For Laura (27), the show's popularity first motivated her to watch it, but her initial identification came as the result of the "ideal life" she saw. "It was the fantasy life, they don't work. Well, they do work, but it doesn't seem like they work. It would be so much fun if we could do that." Even though Laura knew that the characters did work, it was the apparent freedom in their jobs that she envied. She also recognized that after the show first aired, she and her peers, reflecting the lifestyle of the series, spent an increased amount of time at local coffee shops. In her narrative she also discussed her interest in the characters of the series and their relationships. She watched the series because it was

popular with her peers and it was something she did with her family every Thursday evening.

Kim (27) made an interesting connection in recalling her initial draw to the series. She mentioned *Beverly Hills, 90210* as the show that she looked to in elementary school for guidance, on what high school might be like, and what to expect when she got there. In the same way, she looked to the series *Friends* as the example of what adulthood would be like, and what to expect as she moved towards it. It became a prototype as she looked up to these characters that were on their own, aspiring to be there eventually. She also made reference to watching the show for the explicit purpose of observing their hairstyles and fashion to direct her personal style. She identified with the relationships in the series in that she enjoyed seeing people living a life that she could relate to, one where the characters were "single, and making fun of things that happen to people all the time in reality, and it's nice that they make a joke [about what happens], and you can laugh about it." Being able to watch the relationships develop on television in a way that reflects real life was something that appealed to her, and she looked up to the characters as individuals.

Janice (25) saw in *Friends* the life that she wanted. Her draw to the series was the example the show gave of personal goals she wanted to obtain in adulthood. In her words, it was "the kind of life you want to live." She liked the idea of being on her own, having a job, finding herself, finding relationships, and the bond between friends. It was a life that she would aspire to live up to, something that she believed most people would wish to have one day. In her words, *Friends* was "a show people [wished] they could live like and be like. It's the life that you don't have, that you want." For her, *Friends*

created a standard for what to expect when she moved into adulthood. It gave her "a goal to what I want." In terms of relationships, she referred to the characters on the series as the "kind of personalities you want to be around." Socially, she started watching the series in high school because her friends also watched it. She described herself and her peers as "living off [the show]...it gave something to be social about." The draw for her was built around the commonality among her community of friends.

Andrea's (23) attraction to the series was subtly suggested. She discussed how in high school she saw the show as the standard for all the things that she viewed as inherently wrong with the adults in her life. The show demonstrated for her that life isn't about finishing school, getting married, and eventually getting divorced. Instead, it opened her eyes to see that people can enjoy their 20's and 30's and thus reduced the adult pressures that she perceived society placed on her. The show created a reference for how to live. The relationships in the series also played a part in initially drawing Andrea in that "they had fun doing everything...the fact that it was a comedy is great, but just the friendships and the ups and downs they went through and the changes they went through were [a] huge [draw]." She explicitly discussed the social element of the series, saying that she "watched it consistently...every week because you'd have to go to school and talk about it and laugh about it."

Summer (25) indirectly connected with the show initially in that she saw a group of individuals on their way through life not knowing what they were doing or caring about what they were doing but just hanging out and having a good time doing whatever life brought in their path. It provided an example of the life of an adult, or what one would want adulthood to be like. She loved the characters in the series and disclosed,

"the relationships they had, that's what kept me." She valued the show's depiction of loyalty, relating to "the value of friendship in the show." She identified strongly with the way the characters went haphazardly through life.

Grace (24) used the word "contemporary" to describe the series. It was what she "envisioned (her) friendships to be [like]." She comes from a diverse background, having grown up in Kenya and spent some of her high school years in America, so for her the series was not a place for lifestyle mentorship. She did not expect her life to be similar to the show. The one thing that *Friends* exemplified for her is that life is not planned, and even as she moves into adulthood, life becomes less predictable. She viewed the series as an accurate representation of relationships in America, and watching the show was how she imagined her friendships would be once she left Kenya to come to America. She was drawn to the sarcastic dimensions of their relationships and how they were all "lovey-dovey" with each other.

Becky's (27) initial attraction to the series did not involve the idea of mentorship. She acknowledged that there were things that happened to the characters within the show that she related to and that helped build her identification with the series. She "liked the characters...they are funny and I can relate to them at times." However, she did not view the series as an example of what she could expect her life to be like in the future. The various events of the characters' lives drew Becky to the series from week to week, especially in the relationship between Rachel and Ross. She specifically was drawn to the different romances that developed on the show. She enjoyed watching these relationships because "they are easy to relate to [her] own life."

Sandy (23) and Laura C. (25) both described their personalities as ones that naturally went against the grain and avoided the show altogether in the first few seasons. They saw the show as a trend, and made concerted efforts to go against the trend. Neither made a social connection with friends from watching the series, but both strongly ascribed the relationships of the series as the draw to the show. The thing Laura C. and Sandy most related to was friendship, as Laura C. summarized: "knowing there is someone there for you, and you are there for them," their strongest connection was the idea of friendship.

Jennie (25) was one of the few individuals who no longer had any support financially from her parents, owned her own house, and had direction toward a lifetime career. For Jennie, it was the friendships of the series that drew her the most and the life situations that the characters would find themselves in which would keep her interest. She loved "how the characters in *Friends* could be goofy but then have serious moments and then beat each other up."

Sarah P. (24) did not ascribe to the series as a source of mentorship for lifestyle. She, much like Jennie, has a handle on her career goals, but she is not as financially independent from her parents. Her perception of the show was that it provided a poor template for guidance, one that misrepresents men and woman living and working in their early 20's and 30's. She discussed her interest in watching people's real life situations on television and that being one of the reasons she was initially drawn to the show, even using it as a point of reference in saying, "It made my life seem good."

In summary, the humor with which the show was written and the way that the show used humor in the day-to-day lives of the characters were key to establishing

viewership among the informants, and it was that humor, coupled with the portrayal of the characters' relationships, which caused the informants to become avid viewers.

Episode Identification

The informants were asked if there was a situation on the show to which they related. Their responses produced this second theme. Each informant, when prompted by the question, was able to recall at least one specific episode or situation in the episode that she identified with. The following will discuss the informant's narrative responses.

Sarah discussed an episode she identified with, saying, "I related to that scene where they are all standing at Ross' window and see Monica and Chandler making out, and I relate to the feeling of…oh my gosh, it's not really happening!" Sarah said she related to that feeling of watching your friends do something you can't believe they are doing. She recalled a moment in her life that created a similar situation to an episode where Monica left a message on an old boyfriend's machine that she wanted to go back and re-do but couldn't. Sarah also identified with the episode at the end of the series where Monica and Chandler bought their first house. Recently purchasing her first home, this new ownership puts her in a life stage where she identified with the characters in the latter seasons as they began to grow up. It was the commitments made by the characters near the end of the series that she now identified closest with as she pursues similar commitments in her own life at 30 years of age. She described the characters as developing "a sense of responsibility for others…toward the end you see them starting to look outside themselves. It's choosing responsibility for others, and there is a certain level of permanence." That feeling is something she identified with in her present life stage.

Teresa laughed at the idea of how she related to the episode where the characters were going to Ross' award dinner at the museum where he worked and Monica was having issues with her ex-boyfriend. Rachel was having trouble finding something to wear, and Ross was stressing out over the entire calamity. The episode's portrayal of expiring time, being wrapped up in a mistake, and everyone being on different pages, according to Teresa, prompted her to say: "that whole episode sums up my life!" All the characters in that episode remained great friends despite having their own agendas and being involved in multiple things. They all still supported each other. Teresa identified that situation as being a reflection of her current place in life.

Kim discussed an episode about relationships, where Monica was dating an older man, Richard, and they broke up because he didn't want to have kids. Richard ended up wanting her back, but Monica declined because she wanted children. Kim identified with this in saying, "I guess in that [same way] I've been with people I really liked but we've just had different goals in our lives and sometimes even if you really like somebody, there is no point in keeping it going." She understood Monica's decision as she too has found herself having different goals from the person she was with, which prevented her from staying in the relationship.

Liz identified first with the episode where Rachel got her first job at Central Perk. Liz recently began her first job at a restaurant so she identified with embarking on a new career and described it as being in "that kind of industry, where they are out a lot, spending lots of money, [and going to] parties." She also referred to the episode where Rachel was dating Chip, her high school boyfriend, and how inconsistent Chip had been in their dating relationship. Monica, Rachel's friend in high school, was there through all

of it. Liz identified with the bond between Rachel and Monica in relational turmoil because she has gone through similar situations with her best friend from tenth grade.

Laura could not name a specific episode that she identified with, but rather an idea that encompassed a number of episodes: friends becoming family. She identified with how the characters were constantly switching relationships, stating, "I can definitely relate to meeting someone and then being like, oh, this isn't the right person. How [the characters] go through different people, because I'm still in that kind of mode of life right now, so I can definitely relate to that."

Janice identified with an episode involving a fight between Ross and Rachel. They had broken up, and shortly afterward, Ross decided to sleep with another girl; that situation actually happened to Janice. She had "taken a break" with someone, and in the interim, that person slept with someone else. She identified the similarity in saying "I watched that show and was like, oh my gosh, that happened to me!" Her perception of *Friends* was "[The show] is real enough where people can relate, but fantasy enough that you want to be like that."

Like Laura, Andrea did not name a specific episode, but found herself relating to the idea of relationships and made that the focus of her narrative. Watching the characters date different people, going through different boyfriends, were the ideas that she identified closest with. "[The show] would never be about trying to find a husband and settle down, it would be about, you know, enjoying what you were doing and having fun doing it." She found comfort in this, in "seeing these people aren't always stressed to find that one person they are going to marry…kind of opened my eyes to see that people can enjoy their 20's and 30's and when it's time, it's time…[the only] adult I knew were

my parents' age who were married or divorced or people my own age, so there was no reference for how to live." For her, *Friends* was able to create a reference point for adulthood.

Summer discussed the first episode, where Rachel left her groom at the altar and arrived at Central Perk in her wedding dress. Summer identified with this episode, as she identified herself as someone who runs from relationships as well. She stated that, like Rachel, she runs from relationships because "I think it's what I want and find out it's not what I want...I lose interest and get freaked out. I don't want to date the nice guy; I try to date the nice guy and I'm like, no, I want the wild one." She perceived Rachel as having the same inclinations toward men. In the same way that Rachel's family wanted her to marry the "right guy" in the first episode, Summer's family would want the same for her, but she hasn't found him yet either. She also referred to the episode where Monica hosted a Thanksgiving party and things started to go wrong. It was Monica's perfectionism in that episode, "wanting everything to be perfect when she's hosting, like when she's hosting those parties and things go wrong and she freaks out, that is so me!" Like Monica, Summer is also a neat freak, and is compulsive about cleanliness.

Grace identified with the episode where Ross introduced the other characters to his girlfriend from London. She identified closest with Rachel's character in that episode recalling, "Rachel was like 'Ya, I'm happy for you!' but she really wasn't. I've done that! I just did that yesterday!" She also identified with Rachel's personality in that episode. "I'm not very confrontational, and Rachel isn't as well, she just waits till she blows, and that's me!" The way in which Ross met his girlfriend from London was

similar to a situation Grace experienced in Scotland, meeting a complete stranger under similar circumstances.

Becky identified with the same episode showing the situation between Rachel, Ross, and his new girlfriend from England. She described the connection by saying: "Rachel was always wondering what was going on with Ross and his girlfriends, especially the whole scenario with his English chick, and I feel that way with my life right now." Her previous boyfriend recently found a new girlfriend, and she identified strongly with that episode and the difficulties in those relationships. Despite those difficulties, the whole series showed her that should enjoy every situation, even the bad ones, and make the best of it.

Sandy's comment was interesting in that she distinguished between identifying with the beginning of the series as being different with identifying with the show at the end of the series. She identified most closely with the relationships in the series, most especially with Rachel and Ross as she found herself in a similar relationship that seemed to be on and off all the time, and she really wanted it to work out, but it never really did. What she did not identify with was the end ,with the characters having children, getting married, and settling into some kind of a career. She felt that she might be able to better compare herself with that situation when she gets in her 30's.

Jennie couldn't initially recall an episode that she identified with, but after some thinking, she referred to the one where Monica called an answering machine, left a message, tried to erase it, got another girl's voice, hung up, and so forth. Even though she didn't identify with this in her own personal life, she had frequently witnessed it in the lives of her friends. One of her favorite episodes was "when all the girls were sitting

on the couch in their wedding dresses, pigging out and like nothing turned out right for them, and I just have a lot of close friends like that where silly stuff always happens!" She also identified with the episode where Phoebe competed in a race on a medicine ball because Jennie had participated in a similar competition herself.

Character Identification

Discussing the importance of relationships in drawing viewers to the series, and episode identification, the third theme examined informants' identification with specific characters in the show. The informants identified with the characters in two ways: an expressed desire to be like a character or characters, and/or disclosing self-perceived similarities with the characters. These were evident in three areas: shared personalities, similar career experiences, and similar relationship situations. The following examines each informant's response to open-ended questions and a synopsis of their responses.

Expressed desire

Sarah desired to be like the characters in a number of ways. She expressed how she "always wanted to be Rachel because she got away with the most and had the most fun." She also expressed a desire to have the type of careers that they had, where they are financially independent but do not work very hard for their money. She described it as "the life you desire but you don't know what they do to get it."

Teresa also desired to be like Rachel. Reflecting on this, she stated, "who wouldn't want to be like Rachel? She's really cute and funny and had it together, yet she was kind of on the edge ditsy. She never took anything too seriously, except maybe her tainted relationships with Ross, but she was usually just fun and looked cute all the time." Rachel's character rarely got upset about life, but instead kept a lighthearted perspective,

something Teresa desired. She also identified with the relationships of the entire cast, desiring similar interaction within her own life. She stated, "I always want to have that girl interaction, that friend you can just call up and hang out with, that lives with you, or across the hall, something like that, and they had that bond."

Andrea saw Rachel as "the fun one...she kinda goofed off, and I like that. I like that airy side because I don't want to be seen as the perfectionist all the time; I just want to be seen as the fun one." The way in which the characters enjoyed their jobs, their relationships, and their time hanging out together is how she believes life should be.

It was Rachel's life style that that Liz desired, describing it as "that kind of funky fun lifestyle. She's still a bit crazy, but has a good head on her shoulders."

When Grace discussed traits she wished she had, she made reference to Rachel's character. Grace plainly states, "I want to become more affectionate like Rachel...she's cute and that's why she gets all the attention." Rachel's compassion and care was something that Grace desired in her own life.

It was the professional part of Rachel that Sandy desired. She discussed wanting to become the kind of business woman Rachel ended up being and making that something she strives for in life.

Jennie discussed how she loved Courtney Cox's character Monica from the show. She didn't see herself as being like Monica but expressed the desire to have similar characteristics. She described her desire stating: "I like her in persona because that is how I thought she was in real life...I feel like I fell in love with her as a person because of the character she played on *Friends*. She's so sweet and genuine; she's a clean freak.

I would really think that would be her [in real] life." It is these traits that Jennie always liked.

Expressed similarity

Sarah easily discussed her identification with various characters. In high school, she found similarities with the character Phoebe. She described herself as being "out there, like I had these quirky ideas and even my closest girlfriends, there were three of us that spent a lot of time together, were those three characters. In the group, I would have been Phoebe." Recently though, she has found herself identifying more with Monica in that she perceives herself as having a controlling personality. She commented that, "In the past few years, I would relate more to Monica. I would be more like the controller. I watched her and [noted] that if she is like that and can still have friends, maybe I can be [that way] too."

Kim disclosed identifying with most of the characters in some way. She identified with Monica: "She's competitive, and one of the boys; I relate to that. Rachel, well to start off, just being a server and being completely lost, I relate to that and Phoebe, I mean, I think everyone has a Phoebe moment." She identified with Chandler, who always complained about his life and his job. She closed saying, "They were always out of jobs, you know, I've been through that, trouble with money, I've been there. That's our life now. I'm single; they were mostly all single. To have a group of friends I meet up with and laugh about things with is very similar to them."

Professionally, Liz identified with Joey because he was always aspiring to be an actor, and she always dreamed of being a singer. It never really happened for Joey, and it doesn't seem to be happening for her either. Relationally, she identifies with Monica and

Rachel's friendship saying, "I have a friend and we've gone through everything together, just like Monica and Rachel."

Laura commented, "I'd probably [identify] with Rachel, because she's flaky, and I can definitely be flaky, and she doesn't really know what she's doing. She was kind of not sure, bouncing around, so I can relate to that too. She also has a hard time with guys, and I relate to that." In the same way that Rachel's character goes through many different guys, Laura sees herself as being in that same "mode of life right now." Professionally, she sees similarities too in that she is not in her career yet, and she is working part time and looking for a career in the same way that Rachel spent much of the show trying to find her niche in the professional world.

Janice discussed how there are things about most of the characters that she shared similarities with. She revealed that her identifications were with "Chandler, because he's kind of a goof and he's kind of funny and clumsy with his thoughts and words. That's how I am. I find myself a lot like Monica because she's compulsive about cleaning, and she has an obsessive behavior that I find myself like that as well." She identified with the idea of friendship portrayed in the series as she has three close friends who share the same diverse set of personalities as the characters on *Friends*.

Andrea first commented on how people in her life believed she would identify most closely with Phoebe. She disclosed that she was "one of those people in high school who didn't care about fitting in." She had her two best friends, so her peers' opinions were of little consequence to her. Andrea viewed herself as being a little bit like everybody. "I'm a bit of a perfectionist like Monica. It comes down to the time where I find myself picking about nothing and wanting the best." Relationally, she recognized

awkwardness in the situations the characters would find themselves in and identified with that. The characters would get into situations, and she would find herself in similar ones, thinking, "How did I get myself into this? Why am I here, and what am I doing? The characters on *Friends* experienced the same kind of thing." She also identified with the friendship the characters shared and how they kept life light-hearted and enjoyed each moment together.

Summer's identification with Rachel was a professional one. "That woman was from job, to job, to job, always having relationships issues, never finding a nice guy, always wanting to find a nice guy, wanting to be happy, and never seeming to achieve it."

Grace first identified with Monica's personality. She recognized similarities in how hard Monica was on herself and how outspoken she was. Grace believed that she is much the same way and shared the apparent power Monica had in the show over the people in her life. She described how in various episodes, the characters would comment: "Monica said..." and everyone would "freak out." That's how she believes the people in her life feel about her. Relationally, she identified with Rachel's character, specifically with the relationship she had with Ross. The way in which Ross and Rachel never openly communicated with each other rang with a sense of familiarity for Grace.

Becky noticed that as she has grown up, she has become more like Monica. "Monica is very particular about things. She likes the apartment a certain way, and I'm like that." She stated that she identifies most closely with Rachel's emotional personality, especially with relationships. Becky perceived Rachel as being "almost child-like through the whole series...it always seemed like she had a problem growing up and letting go, and that's me!" The way in which she could never fully let Ross go and

was always waiting for him is similar to a relationship situation in Becky's life. Professionally, she identifies with Rachel's struggle to take care of herself and negotiate frequent career changes.

Sandy first acknowledged that most of the girls she knew wanted to be like Rachel, but she perceived herself as a combination of Rachel's and Monica's characters. " Monica is like me sort of, or I'm like her, sort of; it's that neat freak part which reminds me of her. How she is OCD [obsessive compulsive disorder], and I'm kind of like that." Hearing some of the jokes they make about Monica in the show, she has found herself thinking "that is *so* me."

Laura C. identified most closely with Phoebe, stating, "She's a scatter brain, and so am I. With her, it made me feel okay to kind of be left field all the time instead of on the front and center. She kind of did things when she wanted to and didn't care what people thought because she knew her friends were there. Within my own personal development, I kind of found that comforting because I talk a lot and I do stupid [stuff] all the time." She even went on to say that she believed Phoebe "helped her become less irritating." Relationally, she identified with Rachel's character, recognizing how she "was always at odds with men. I can relate with that…I don't think there is such a thing as a good one, but the good for right now, and that's how it was in the show."

Jennie believed that she identified most closely with Rachel's character in the way that she appeared to be "one of the guys." She described this, saying, "I'm like one of the guys. Not the girly-girl, even though she was cute and stylish, she never appeared to me like a Monica who was very prissy, and Phoebe was just weird." She is not extremely feminine in the way she handles herself on the show, and that's how Jennie saw herself.

Sarah P. disclosed that she identified most with the professional situation of many of the characters. She "is one of the first of my friends to be in a career; also a career that involves long hours. I am usually the dork of the bunch, who can roll jokes at times, but is often the butt of most of the jokes because of my quirkiness." In this way she identified with Ross and his profession, as he was the only one who appeared to have a career. As a result, Ross was frequently the pawn of the characters' jokes, and Sarah identified with that. Personality-wise, she identified with Monica. She saw herself as "a little neurotic, liking to have things exactly as I have planned them in my mind. I can sometimes try to control a situation in order to have it work out perfectly," and in that way, she identified with Monica's character.

Life Stage Identification

The last theme teased from the results was the informants' self-perceived identification with the life stage of the characters. There were a number of interview questions that addressed the life stage of the characters, and the following will discuss their responses.

Sarah discussed how the series was about people growing up together. Initially, the characters would all look out for each other, but if things got tough, they were going to look out for themselves. It wasn't until the end that Sarah noticed the characters choosing to be responsible and establishing a certain level of commitment. Joey appeared to be the only character who never developed that sense of commitment and responsibility, and he was also the only one, she noted, who went on as the same character in another series. She saw *Friends* as a reflection of our current culture, commenting, "I think it has impacted us greatly as we see more and more of our real life

friends, whether it is digressing, toward that lifestyle. Friends my own age will complain that men are irresponsible and are excused for it...I think our culture has been influenced to be more irresponsible and less committed because of the show." She acknowledged wanting that lifestyle, disclosing a personal selfishness. Sarah could sense an impact the ideas on the show had in her life and that she has even noticed her own friends perpetuating that lifestyle.

Teresa first discussed her idea of adulthood as being something like her parents - married, mortgage, car - but now that she is considered an adult, she is no longer sure what an adult should really be like because she doesn't feel like one. In her words, "I still don't feel like an adult. Now that I'm at their age looking at the show, I'm thinking, they are not adults, because I'm not an adult, and I am at the same age they were at in the show." Ten years ago, when the series first started and she was in high school, she saw them as adults because they lived on their own, went out, and did things together. Now, she completely identifies with the life stage the characters were in when the series first started, stating, "When I hear the word 'adult,' I think boring. It is all about perspective. I mean, I make adult decisions. I think it's a level of maturity I've reached. I mean, I am an adult. It seems like a daunting word...*adult.* I don't know what 'adult' is. I guess I'll figure it out when I'm 65." In her opinion, the series did a good job of depicting actual life.

Kim began discussing the show's large audience reach and its longevity and suggested that the show's ability to relate to a large audience suggested its cultural relevance. In her words, "obviously relating to a large audience, I guess that says something about society in the fact that these are all struggles [the characters] are having

which must be struggles people have had or were going through at some point in their life because if it showed something that no one ever experienced, I don't think it would hold the audience that it did." Kim believed that *Friends* fairly represented adult life and the need to laugh at the good and the bad. In her closing remarks, she stated that *Friends* "took the pressure off other people to see that these people are around my age, and they don't know what they're doing either, and that it's okay."

Liz discussed the show's growth through the life stages. She recognized that early on in the series, the characters were "wild," having "one-night stands," switching boyfriends, and so forth, but as the series progressed, Liz saw them grow up. She stated, "I think they did a good job of showing the progression into adulthood. Everyone goes through that progression…we all definitely grow up, and everything changes. I think the show did a good job of showing that." Even though she didn't believe she would mimic the show's progression into adulthood exactly, she thought the show was a good model of that transition.

Laura initially stated that she didn't see the show's characters as adults. To her, they acted like a bunch of kids, not taking things in life seriously; however, she went on to say that she doesn't feel like an adult either, and she's 27. She reflected on this, saying, "I still think of myself as 18 years old. I don't feel my age at all. When I think of adulthood, I think of my parents - having a family, having a job, and not having any fun. That's what I think of adulthood, but I guess that's not what it is. I guess I just have a different idea of adulthood and growing up because there is nothing to follow. No one has grown up in this time and in this society before us!" The show gave Laura a different idea of adulthood and a different template to model her adult life after.

Janice believed the show was a fair representation of American life styles. As a 24 year old, not in a career, living at home, and recognizing that many of her peers are this way, Janice believed that *Friends* exemplified what adults and young adults should be like. Her comment was: "I'd like to think that what *Friends* showed is adulthood. It's the hip, chic adulthood. It shows what adults should be, what they want to see young adults to be like, on the go and stylish." She believed the series helped to set the standard for what the world is right now and viewed *Friends* as "absolutely a good place to go for advice."

Andrea, one of the youngest informants at 23, disclosed that she also believed *Friends* is what adulthood is like. As a child, she had thought adulthood would have been more structured. Now that she is in her twenties, she has found it to be closer to what the show *Friends* depicted throughout the series. Recently out of university, Andrea and her peers have no idea where they are going and do not have career paths planned. She discussed this, saying, "When we were leaving high school we knew we were going to university, and we all went to university. Now [that we are done with university] we are all saying, okay, now what? I guess I thought you kind of fell into your part, and now I'm asking, how's this all going to come together?" She has found herself facing many of the same questions and struggles the characters in the series faced, like, "where am I going to get the money I need?" and "who am I supposed to be with?" She feels more lost now as an adult and believes the show did a great job of portraying the instability she feels and the challenges she is facing.

For Summer, the majority of the population is like the characters on the show. Relationships, livelihood, socio-economic status, all these situations on the show are

similar in real life. She initially stated that she doesn't believe the show portrays adulthood well because it portrays adults who can't seem to grow up, but she went on to say that there is a certain age where people are expected to have life figured out. "You visualize that by the time you are a certain age, you are going to have it all together. They should have it all together; they're in their mid to late twenties. Just like I should have it all together. Society makes us feel like we should have it all together." She sees adulthood as stable, in a career, making good money and supporting oneself, yet at 25, she finds herself struggling in all the same ways the characters struggled.

Grace stated that the life style of the show is exactly the way that it is in America. Relationally, she believes the show did a great job of portraying the sexual perceptions of individuals in their twenties. She saw many of the relationships in the series representing those in the real world. She believed that it didn't show the characters starting life, but rather found them somewhat stagnant in a limited form of growth, never actually reaching adulthood but working towards it.

Becky expressed that the show helped to get people excited about becoming adults. Even though she thought the characters behaved like teenagers at times, this gave adulthood greater appeal. *Friends* showed that all situations in our life can hold humor and that it is okay to live a "normal" life without all of the drama. She recognized that in reality, it was impossible to have as much free time as the characters did and maintain their lifestyle. Becky acknowledged that some people might see it for what it is, a show; however, others might not be able to separate reality from fiction and take it for the way that life is.

Sandy felt that *Friends* did a good job showing the life style of adults who were not very serious, not always professional, and, despite being adults, were able to still have fun. She believed that the show set a good example for how adulthood could be and that it didn't have to be all work and no play.

Laura C. believed *Friends* demonstrated that even at 35, "you could still act like a kid." It showed that when you are an adult, you could behave as an adult, but have fun while you're doing it. The events in the show were a good reflection of everyday adult life. She felt that it did a great job covering the gamut of issues and situations that adults face today.

Unlike most of the others, Sarah P. saw the show's portrayal of adulthood as an extension of university. She described it as "one big relaxed party with your core group of friends." They faced the occasional tough decision, but she didn't feel that the series accurately portrayed people in their mid twenties to early thirties because people at that age should be settled and secure in their life styles. The show didn't depict any sense of responsibility. She commented on this, saying, "[The characters] seemed to live a carefree frivolous life with no real thought to life's real struggles. This somehow gives a false impression of what life is really like. The viewer may often wonder why their life can't be that simple." To her, *Friends* was a group of "30-somethings" who wanted to stay young forever, but by the end of the show, their lives changed and forced them into growing up and embracing adulthood.

The four aspects of identification display a rich data set evidencing a strong connection between interviewees' identification with the various aspects of the series *Friends*. Initial identification with the show evidenced itself through the idea of quasi-

mentorship, relationships and sociality. These women first began watching *Friends* in search of an example of what to expect of life in their twenties. In a quasi-mentorship situation, they watched the series because they found themselves engrossed in the relationships within the show, returning week after week to follow the characters' lives, and a number of the women found themselves watching the series in order to identify with their classmates the following day within their social circles. Interviewees then perceived a strong identification with specific characters themselves, citing a desire to be like a specific character or reflecting on various similarities with a specific character. The desires and similarities encompassed specific behaviors demonstrated by various characters, personality traits, or characteristics. From there, a collection of responses evidenced a strong connection between episode identification and the interviewee's personal life. Each woman could cite at least one example of a situation in an episode that they believed was a reflection of something that happened to them and that they identified within their personal life. The last theme was identification with the life stage of the series, demonstrating the potential influence the series had on the women who professed to be avid viewers. *Friends,* previously defined as prototyping the life stage of the Twixter generation, was a series the majority of the interviewees described as being a clear reflection of the lives they found themselves currently living. A more comprehensive discussion will now be given to these results.

Chapter Five

Discussion and Conclusions

Methodological Conclusions

The results of this study confirmed Kelman's (1961) view that identification is a

"persuasion process that occurs when an individual adopts the behavior or attitudes of

another individual or group based on a self-defining relationship." The idea that one can

persuade an individual simply by utilizing his or her language through speech, gesture,

tonality, order, image, attitude, or idea, is in effect identifying one's own ways with the

ways of others. In this same manner, the informants of this study disclosed the ways in

which the characters in *Friends* persuaded them to become faithful viewers as they found

elements within the series to which they could relate. The results of this thesis do indeed

indicate that identification is one of the keys to understanding media influence on

individuals.

The Research Questions

What is the pervasive force that motivates an individual not only to take the time

to watch a television show, but to do so with the religious commitment required of an

avid viewer? As Hoffner and Cantor (1991) discussed, people choose to spend their time

with people who share common interests and have common goals and similar life

experiences. It is the similarities among and between individuals that draw them together

by providing the relational building blocks. Through investing time and continuing to

share common experiences, these individuals may develop long-term relationships. The

results of this study support the possibility of one being drawn to the lives of people

observed on television.

The premise of this thesis, to explore what influence *Friends* has had on young women in the Twixter life stage through viewer identification, yielded a number of different conclusions. Connectivity within a realm absent of actual physical proximity in a contemporary mediated society through identification evidenced itself through the results of this study. Researchers have long been grappling with the question of how media influence audiences. The results of this study suggest that individuals who identify with the characters' personalities, situation, or life stage within a particular television show will develop a parasocial relationship with those characters. As viewers follow the series over time, this relationship will become influential within their individual realities.

The first research question asked: *to what extent did avid viewers within the Twixter life stage identify with the characters of Friends?*

The consistent response from the women regarding the series was a desire to be part of something that they, as a viewer, could identify and connect with. When the show first aired in 1994, all those interviewed were in the ages 13 to 18, still in the impressionable maturing stages, looking for leadership into what the future might hold. As James and McCain (1982) discussed, parasocial relationships with televised characters are encultured from childhood. In a parasocial relationship, television characters are seen as real friends, and viewers may come to believe, or at least feel like, they actually know them (Antecol, 1997). According to Hanley (2000) the key influences of teenagers are those with whom they come in direct contact. The results of this study support her research, as the women interviewed looked to the characters in *Friends* as role models in their teens for their impending adulthood. The characters of *Friends* fit the Twixter prototype of prolonging adulthood, shirking responsibility, and

avoiding commitment; because the interviewees viewed this series as a valid role model, eventually finding their lives modeled the lives of characters in the series and this raises cause for concern. The women all disclosed their faithful commitment to watching the characters' lives progress on a weekly basis. Whether it was the dream of one day experiencing a similar life or a present connection with the characters and their situation that initially drew them to *Friends*, it was nearly unanimous among the interviewees that identifying in these ways motivated them to watch the show.

Kenneth Burke (1969) discusses identification as a persuasive force. This element of persuasion is not lost on the producers and beneficiaries of entertainment television. The ambition of the producers and writers of any pilot series is to gain a widespread audience and following. The creators of *Friends* piloted a show designed to relate in some way with a mass audience in hopes of building a long-term following. Their goal was to persuade American television audiences to become avid viewers of the series through identification, thus influencing the greatest number of individuals to regularly watch the show. The results of this thesis shed light on the reasons for the success of *Friends* as the informants disclosed their initial attraction to the series captured through the ideas of mentorship, relationships and socialization.

As individuals, we are always looking for role models: people who have gone before and paved the path ahead of us, giving us an idea of how to get where we are going. One of the informants' initial attractions to the series was this idea of quasi-mentorship. As teenagers, the informants esteemed the example of adulthood depicted in the show. Decades ago, within a nuclear family, children may have looked to the examples of their grandparents and parents through the narrative of their lives as

examples of how to approach issues such as dating, school, careers, marriage, and children. As television became a regular fixture in American homes, stories were not only told and observed by family members but also by the people on television. This created opportunity to spend less time engaged in real life experiences and more in the lives of fictional characters on television. Through this shift, Adler (1976) saw television as a sociological phenomenon that had the ability to positively or negatively unify culture in America. The women interviewed shared this unity as they discussed the portrayal of adulthood in the lives of the characters on *Friends*. It was an ideal, something they would like to one day have. For these women, *Friends* was a good indication of what adulthood might be like. The characters' lives gave them something to look forward to once they graduated into the "real world," an appealing template for adult life. Psychologically, the content of what is viewed invariably affects the consciousness of the viewer. Images viewed on television present role models for making choices based on the paths of least resistance, effort, or both (Cote, 2000). These women recognized that the people around them, whom they would have looked to for guidance into adulthood, were from a different generation culturally. There was a common understanding expressed in the interviews that the adults in the informants' lives epitomized their childhood perception of adulthood, being the only reference they had. However, once reaching what should be "adulthood," they found that their parent's example of adulthood no longer seemed to fit within the world they lived in. Introducing outside influences, shows like *Friends* provided a different perspective on adulthood and a new model for life. Seeing the characters as closer in age than their parents, these women used the framework of the characters on *Friends* as a contemporary prototype for adulthood.

Horton and Wohl (1976) describe how an individual might view the enacted role depicted on television as a real version of an everyday occurrence, thus seeing it as an approximation of the ideal pattern of living. Most of the women interviewed for this study disclosed how this portrayal of adulthood was common discussion in conversations with their peers at school. This leads to another area of identification: relationships.

Chandler and Monica, Ross and Rachel, Phoebe and Joey, as individuals and as a group, provided the relationships that drew the women interviewed into the series and captivated them in the ten years that were to follow. As discussed in the literature review by Basil (1996), Fraser and Brown (2002), and Barker (2001); interpersonal relationships can be built with celebrity figures, such as Princess Diana, Elvis Presley, or Dale Earnhardt, and after prolonged exposure to such celebrities through the media, behaviors and attitudes may be adopted. The women interviewed described themselves as avid viewers of the series, and through their weekly engagement with the show, they began to build self-defined relationships with various characters in the series. The show was described as a way to escape real life. Riveted by the various relationships within the series, these women spent time between episodes contemplating what might transpire between different characters on the show. This is significant for a number of reasons. Prior to television, individuals would have found situations in real life to speculate and deliberate over; however, it would have been within the context of their actual, unmediated, social and cultural place in life. A girl living in a northern urban American city would observe and discuss life events and issues within her cultural context much differently than a girl of the same age living in a small rural midwestern town. The advent of television bridged this cultural gap and united multiple cultures within one

cultural experience. Time that would have originally been spent discussing the relationships within their cultural world, was time potentially transferred to engaging in the relationships of fictional characters within the culture of the series. Opportunity arises here for the lines between reality and fiction to become blurred, no longer binding an individual by any social or cultural norms. Television has the ability to unite a mass audience, and individuals from all walks of life enabled the lessons that were once watched and learned within their socio-economic and socio-cultural environments to become homogenized into a single, produced environment. The time taken to engage and build a relationship with the lives of the characters on television was time taken away from engaging and building relationships in real life. As described in Albert Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, individuals learn from the environments they are exposed to. In creating a television show that offered its audience a reference point, a cast of characters who had personality traits that encompassed a wide variety of social experiences eventually led to the construction of a single identity among social groups, in this case, within the social circles of the interviewee's friends. *Friends* had a number of strong persuasive elements, especially for the teenage generation looking for examples to follow. It is this thinking that has perpetuated the individualism Buchmann (1989) discussed, where societies have left the communities they were built on and through television have developed a socialized, uniform means of thinking. This leads to the third form of initial identification: socialization.

A number of the women disclosed the socialization of *Friends* within their peer groups as one of the initial draws to the series. Amongst their high school peers, the series *Friends* was the focal point in many of their conversations. They described the

need to feel accepted and a desire to be able to relate to the people within their life. These women wanted to be able to identify with their classmates. Recognizing the show's popularity among their peers, a number of the women disclosed that they began watching the show so that they could participate in their classmates' conversations the following day at school. In this situation, identification is taken outside of simply identifying with an element in the series and into the arena of using the series to identify with others in real life. Freud (1992) described identification as the earliest form of emotional tie with another individual in the beginning stages of a relationship. In this sense, these women felt compelled to watch the show to maintain the emotional tie with their peers, in anticipation of group identification the following day. Not wanting to be left out of the conversations for an entire week, these women religiously watched the show to maintain relevancy within their peer groups.

This finding allows us to draw some important conclusions regarding the subtle impact popular television can have on relationships. *Friends* gained popularity among a mass audience where potentially many of the show's initial viewers did not necessarily identify with the show itself; however, in seeking to identify with those around them, they may have started watching the series. Through this peer identification, these women later found themselves identifying with elements of the show. Many of these women believed that to build and maintain their real life relationships, making the series *Friends* a part of their Thursday night television watching was important. This desire to identify with their peers through watching the show suggests that there is a strong influence by a television series not only to engage an individual with the show, but also to extend beyond the boundaries of an episode into the interpersonal lives of the individuals

watching the show. The interpersonal reiteration of the previous episodes' events solidifies the ideas and behaviors presented in the show among the individuals discussing it. This observation is important as it shows that identification extends beyond the interpersonal relationships built between a viewer and television actors into the perceived need a potential viewer might have to identify with their peers. It is also important to consider the content presented in popular television programming and how the ideas and behaviors in that programming, through repeated discourse interpersonally among avid viewers, begin to influence the actions and behaviors of the audience.

The answer to the first research question is of grave importance as generations following the one studied are even more inundated with televised programming, creating the potential to be less involved in the world around them. The need for role models has not lessened over time, and there is a great responsibility on the shoulders of not only the producers and writers for a televised series, but on the family unit and society as a whole to consider the impact entertainment has had and will continue to have on the individuals engaged in the various narratives of any given show. Entertainment cannot be overlooked as simply a by-product of pop culture, but instead needs to be regarded with serious consideration. As Newcomb and Hirsch (1983) have suggested, television does not only examine culture, it is a form of uniting culture. These results suggest the uniting factor within a given series is the level of identification. The broader the scope of possible identification within a series, the greater the audience; and the greater the audience the more substantial the potential influence on society. These results suggest that the entertainment industry is contributing to a dynamic cultural shift. As stated above, entertainment producers seek to unite individuals from all walks of life into a

contained set of situations and behaviors. A closer look at the specific behaviors and ideals of the individual characters with whom the women identified will reveal the types of identification that are possible.

The second research question was: *In what ways did viewers identify with a character or a character's lifestyle in the series?* Identification was also theorized as a process where one individual shares the interests of another (Kelman, 1961). This also coincides with Hoffner and Cantor's (1991) three factors of interpersonal attraction: perceived similarity to a character, desiring to be like a character, and liking the character. The women interviewed clearly identified with at least one of the characters in *Friends* in at least one of these two ways: expressing a desire to be like them, and/or perceiving themselves to be similar to them in some way. Interestingly, the women viewed themselves as being similar to a number of different characters, even the males, not singling out a single character as the solitary object of identification. In regards to the third factor of Hoffner and Cantor's interpersonal attraction, the women expressed a liking in terms of the characters lifestyle and a desire to live in a similar fashion or identification with that particular lifestyle.

A number of conclusions can be suggested from these results. Herein may lie the answer to the mass audience appeal of the show. In terms of the success of the show, the writers of *Friends* successfully created characters with diverse personalities and behaviors. This allowed individuals from many walks of life to find commonality with at least one of the characters or a combination of elements from various characters. A number of the women said that there were elements in all of the characters that they saw reflected in their own lives. The key points of identification with the characters were

Monica's competitive nature and her obsessive-compulsive tendencies, Chandler's sense of humor and quick wit, Phoebe's naïveté and quirky personality, and Rachel's professional pursuits and relational blunders. Ross and Joey were not referenced in terms of similarities, which could be a reflection of gender differences in that Joey was a womanizer and an aspiring actor who loved to eat, and Ross was a divorcee who dreamed of being a family man.

There was evidence in the interviews that as the show progressed through the years and the characters grew, the interviewees found themselves identifying with different characters depending on the season. Characters that they might have identified with at the beginning of the series, when the informants were in high school, were not necessarily the characters that they identified with towards the end of the series. As the characters matured through the years and became three-dimensional beings, building a past, present, and possible future, the women watching the show also matured into adulthood and found their similarities shifting between characters. Regardless, the process of identification remained constant. Consciously or subconsciously, each woman spent time while watching the series reflecting on the ways in which they were like or unlike the characters on *Friends*.

The second way these women identified with characters on the show was through an expressed desire to be like a character or characters. The enacted roles on *Friends* became a version of a potential real life experience for these women, thus creating an ideal pattern of living they hoped to achieve in real life. These women perceived various characteristics as being more skillfully and ideally played by characters on the show then they believed were capable of enacting in real life. The majority of the women expressed

a desire to be like Rachel Green, whose character had a fun, spunky personality, was popular with all the men, had a high fashion sense and style, and had the greatest number of career pursuits. She was the least sure of her future and found herself in the greatest relationship trials in her long-term affair with Ross Gellar, one of the three male characters. Rachel appeared to be the ideal for the women interviewed as she possessed the greatest number of desirable traits, and most of the interviewees wished they were like her. Only a few perceived themselves as being similar to her. The show became an instruction on how to ideally handle life, such as Rachel's ability to handle tragic circumstances lightheartedly. It should be noted that the informants didn't mention that they were jealous of her infidelity but rather identified with the difficulty of finding the person they are to spend their life with.

The significance of these results are theoretically supported by Horton and Whol's (1976) idea of "personality programming," where life values are taught through humorous anecdotes. The women interviewed openly disclosed their desires to be like individuals on the series *Friends* and to adapt different learned behaviors from the show within their own life. This suggests that identification is a cornerstone to influence in an individual's life. Having first established similarities among various characters, these women then began evaluating the characters for behavioral patterns and personality traits that they perceived as absent in their own life but desired to adopt. Many of these desires are reflections of the Twixter generation (Grossman, 2005). These include the desire to be financially independent yet free from a recreationally restrictive career. Desiring to maintain the collegiate familial atmosphere with one's friends yet not settle down and to keep life humorous and energetic despite age are also indicators of Twixter mentality.

The desires that the women expressed sharing with the characters reflect the present condition of the Twixter life stage. Should audience members take their desires and pursue them in reality, the series, through identification, could be an influential element in present day youth to prolong the stage between adolescence and adulthood; this leads into the third research question: addressing life stage identification.

Within the Twixter demographics, to determine the possible social influence of identification, the question was asked: *To what extent did the informants perceive themselves as influenced by their identification with the characters of Friends or their life stage?* Each woman acknowledged through their narrative the blurring of traditional markers for advancing into adulthood. The identity moratorium, the temporary prohibition of adulthood as described by Cote (2002), is something that all the women identified in their lives and saw reflected in the lives of the characters on *Friends.* Most of the women disclosed uncertainty as to the definition of adulthood. When asked if the characters on the show portrayed a good example of adulthood, the common response was an indecisive "yes." It was this series that had laid the foundation for their perception of adult life in their mid-twenties. The women found themselves, however, grasping at a clear definition of the term "adulthood." Perceiving their parents' generation as boring and outdated, the women no longer viewed their parents as the model examples of adults. As teenagers, they viewed the characters on *Friends* as a fair portrayal of what adulthood should be like, something separate and different from the example set by their parents and other adult figures. Now at the age the characters were when the series first aired, the women found themselves identifying with the life stage they saw as adulthood in their teens. Although some of the women acknowledged that

when watching the show now, they see the characters behaving more like children than adults, most did not perceive themselves as adults either. Rather, these women, now well into their twenties, perceived themselves as years younger in their thinking and behavior. For the majority of the women interviewed, this show was a fair reflection of adult life as they now know it, and nearly all of them identified with the characters' place in life in the early seasons.

The strongest point of identification for these women was the characters' instability in life: not knowing whom to marry, not knowing what career path to follow, yet satisfied with the close bonds they had made with their friends along the way. Their identification here could be labeled negative, yet each woman expressed the commonality in positive terms and viewed the example the show set as a release, allowing the personal and social pressure to lessen on their need to reach adult actualization. If the characters on *Friends* could find their way through life, then viewers could too. There was even the understanding that this idea of "adulthood" is something that is reached later in life and that settling down is something the informants are looking to their early thirties to accomplish. In the way that the characters of *Friends* appeared to "grow up" at the end of the series when they were all in their mid-thirties, a number of the women identified that time as when they believed they might finally find themselves in adulthood.

Theoretically speaking, if these women, in their teens when the show first aired, saw the characters as examples of adulthood and have grown to live up to that standard, this evidence would suggest that identification through repeated exposure is key to influence. What the women interviewed identified in their teens as a template for adulthood, later became the mold they grew into. Naturally, this is not isolated within the

mediated realm, and there are many outside factors that have contributed to the prolonging of adulthood within the Twixter generation; however, strong evidence has presented itself in these results to propose the influence identification with a long-term series has had on the individuals interviewed and potentially on society at large.

In-depth interviews offer considerable benefits to the researcher in the study of identification. Open-ended questions allow informants the opportunity to disclose information that might otherwise be withheld. It is empowering to both the researcher and the informant, as it is an uninhibited form of study, conducive to a comfortable conversational atmosphere and the potential for gleaning elaborate details as the research questions are answered. Measures were taken to minimize the concerns expressed by Conger (1989) regarding bias and varying perceptions on responses. This study required a method that alleviated any reticence about the informants' personal perceptions about their relationship with the characters on *Friends*. The informants being interpersonally engaged in the questioning process with the researcher fostered an environment that alleviated diffident responses. The impersonal nature of quantitative methodology could not have yielded the in-depth responses necessary for this study.

Further Research

Identification itself is a broad field of study, leaving ample opportunity for future research as technology continually creates new avenues for interpersonal interaction. The ways in which this interaction might potentially affect the user's attitudes and behaviors are of significant consequence as culture molds and models itself after the dominant ideology. As suggested by Gottdiener (1985), a three-way relationship exists between mass cultural objects, such as television programming, their industrial producers, and the

social group of users, the mass audience. This substantiates the impact that identification might have on culture. Subsequently, further research on identification would benefit the academic community by raising caution regarding the quality of programming regularly viewed on prime time television. *Friends* was only one of many shows to air on prime time television. Similar studies using different television programming and varying demographic audiences could contrast with or strengthen the conclusions presented in this thesis. There is ample opportunity to examine current culture and the shows that hold prime time televised spots to determine if the impact of parasocial relationships is generational and whether or not it is built on other mediated platforms as well. Additionally, the study of the show *Friends* could extend itself out of the Twixter demographics used in this study and use a broader base to strengthen the evidence that identification is one of the keys to influence. Furthermore, the ages studied here were only between 23 and 30. However, in searching for informants, a large online teen fan base was discovered who regularly meet in chat rooms to discuss the now syndicated series and its characters. There is opportunity to study this demographic age group and the possible influence and effects the series might have on their behaviors and actions. This study remained focused on the female gender, but there is room to conduct a similar study with male viewers within the same demographic.

Another important facet of identification with this series is the writers' use of humor in the script, which was evident in the informants' discourse as a draw to the series. An important avenue of research would be the use of humor in the identification of viewers and the characters on televised programming. There are many other factors that should be considered in this cultural shift, such as the socio-economic climate that

this generation belongs to and the rapidly shifting corporate climate, to name a couple. Questions such as "Do male viewers identify interpersonally with characters on television series in similar ways?" "Did male viewers identify with the male character's on *Friends*?" and "In what ways did male viewers identify with the life stage of the characters on the show?" leave much room for further investigation.

Continuing study in this area is imperative. Albert Bandura's (1977) concept of social learning theory compliments the premise that identification can lead to influence. As media establishes role models that viewers can identify with, social learning theory stipulates that the more attractive an individual finds a potential role model, the more an observer will try to emulate that agent. Research on social learning behavior has evidenced the desire people have to engage in matching the social behaviors of these agents when an attraction exists (Harrison, 1997). The women of this study disclosed their desires and perceived similarities with six characters on a single series that aired once a week. The lifestyles of these characters appealed to the women as they found themselves not only identifying similarities, but also expressing strong desires to follow the examples of certain characters.

Having only scratched the surface of the relationships that are built between an avid viewer and the characters on screen, it is imperative, as citizens interested in a morally grounded society, that we critically examine the content of televised programming. With a growing understanding of the potential influential effects viewer identification can have on behavior and lifestyle, an awareness regarding media messages potential to teach individuals values, beliefs, and ideals, must be considered as it could potentially distort the worldviews promoted by parents, pastors, etc. In a series like

Friends, where homosexuality is an acceptable choice, the sanctity of marriage is weak at best and sex is an expected component in a dating relationship, exposure to the characters' behaviors and ideals over time can render one desensitized. Eventually, what might have initially been shocking to anyone viewing the lifestyle of the characters on *Friends* may not become acceptable, but might no longer entice a righteous anger a morally conscious society must necessarily have.

Closing Remarks

The life stage of the characters on the show and the life stage of the handful of interviewees used in this thesis clearly reflect the life stage of Twixterhood. This addresses the premise of this thesis: *Is identification a key element in influencing media audiences toward different behaviors?* One cannot say explicitly that *Friends* perpetuated a societal inclination to prolong adulthood. There is, however, strong evidence here to suggest that as individuals are looking for guidance and role models to progress through the stages in life, engagement with lives of television characters on a regular basis and identification with them can help build a template for what is to come. Through identifying the characters as "adults" when the informants were in their teens, it is possible that these characters became role models and influenced their progression into adulthood.

References

Adler, R. (1976). Introduction: A Context for Criticism. In Adler, R. and Cater, D. (Eds.), *Television as a Cultural Force* (pp.1-16). New York: Praeger Publishers.

Alley, R. S., & Brown, I. B. (1990). *Murphy Brown: Anatomy of a sitcom.* New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group.

Alperstein, N. M. (1991). Imaginary Social Relationships with Celebrities in Television Commercials. *Journal of Broadcasting,* 35:155-180.

Antecol, M. (1997). Understanding McLuhan: Television and the Creation of the Global Village. *A Review of General Semantics,* 54:22-40.

Apter, T. (2001). *The Myth of Maturity: What teenagers need from Parents to become Adults.* London: W W Norton & Co Inc.

Arnett, J. J. (1994). Are college students adults? Their conceptions of the transition to adulthood. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence,* 1:213-224.

Arnett, J. & Taber, S. (1994). Adolescence Terminable and Interminable: When Does Adolescence End? *Journal of Youth and Adolescence,* 23: 4.

Arnett, J. J. (2000). Emerging Adulthood: A Theory of Development From the Late Teens through the Twenties. *The American Psychological Association,* 55: 469-480.

Austin, E. W., & Meili, H. K. (1994). Effects of interpretations of televised alcohol portrayals on children's alcohol beliefs. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media,* 38(4), 417-435.

Bandura, A. (1977). *Social Learning Theory.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Barker, G. (2001). [The Social Influence of Sports Celebrities: Responses to the Death of Dale Earnhardt] Unpublished raw data.

Basil, M. D. (1996). Identification as a Mediator of Celebrity Effects. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electric Media,* 40(4), 478-95.

Basil, M. D. (1997). The Danger of Cigarette "Special Placements" in Film and Television. *Health Communication,* 9, 192.

Bennett, W. J. (1994). *The index of leading cultural indicators: Facts and figures on the state of American Society.* New York: Touchstone.

Blosser, L., Marlowe, J., & Selnow, G. (1989). A Content Analysis of Problem-Resolution Appeals in Television Commercials. *Journal of Consumer Affairs, 23,* 175.

Brown, W.J., Basil, M.D., & Bocarnea, M. (2003). Social Influence of an International Celebrity: Responses to the Death of Princess Diana. *Journal of Communication,* 53(4), 587.

Buchmann, M. (1989). *The script of life in modern society: Entry into Adulthood in a changing world.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Burke, K. (1969). *A Rhetoric of Motives.* Berkeley: University of California Press

Cheney, G. (1983). The Rhetoric of Identification and the Study of Organizational Communication. *Quarterly Journal of Speech,* 69(2), 143-158.

Chesebro, James W. (2003). Communication, Values and Popular Television Series – A Twenty-Five Year Assessment and Final Conclusions. *Communication Quarterly,* 51, 2.

Collins, R. L., Elliott PhD, M. N., Berry MA, S. H., Kanouse, PhD, D. E., & Hunter PhD, S. B. (2003). Entertainment Television as a Healthy Sex Educator: The Impact of Condom-Efficacy Information in an Episode of *Friends" Pediatrics.* 112(5), 68-80.

Creeber, G. (2001). *The Television Genre Book.* London England: British Film Institute.

Conger, J. (1989). *The Charismatic Leader: Beyond the Mystique of Exceptional Leadership.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Cote, J. E. (2000). *Arrested Adulthood.* New York, New York: University Press.

Cote, J. E. and Allahar, A. L. (1996) *Generation on Hold: Coming of Age in the late twentieth century.* New York, New York: University Press.

Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994*) Handbook of Qualitative Research.* Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications Inc.

Dow, B. J. (1996) *Prime-Time Feminism: Television, Media Culture, and the Women's Movement since 1970.* Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Farnsworth, R. M. (1990). The boomerang age: Don't assume 18-24-year-olds are adults. *American Demopgraphics.* 25, 52-53.

Fass, P.S. (1976). Television as a Cultural Document. In Adler, R. and Cater, D. (Eds.), *Television as a Cultural Force* (pp.37-57). New York: Praeger Publishers.

Fiske, J. (2003). *Reading Television*. New York: Routledge.

Fiske, J. (1987). *Television Culture*. London, UK: Routledge.

Fontana, A & Frey, J. H. (1994). Interviewing: The Art of Science. In Denzin, Norman K. & Lincoln, Yvonna, S. (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications Inc.

Fraser, B. P., & Brown, W. J. (2002). Media, Celebrities, and Social Influence: Identification With Elvis Presley. *Mass Communication and Society,* 5(2), 183-206.

Freud, S. (1992). *Letters of Sigmond Freud*. New York: Dover Publications Inc.

Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and self-identity: Self and society in the late modern age.* Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

Giles, D. (2003). *Media Psychology*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Griffin, E. (2003). *A First Look at Communication Theory*. New York: McGraw Hill.

Grossman, L. (2005, January 24). "Grow Up? Not so fast." *Time,* 42-52.

Gottdiener, M. (1985). Hegemony and Mass Culture: A Semiotic Approach. *The American Journal of Sociology,* 90(5), 979-1001.

Gumpert, G. & Cathcart, R. (1979). *Inter/Media: Interpersonal Communication in a Media World*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Hanley, P. (2000, October). Copycat Kids? The Influence of Television Advertising on Children and Teenagers (Electronic Version). *Independent Television Commission, Britian.* Retrieved on February 26, 2006 from http://www.asa.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/D15BCA5A-F34D-4E6D-8540-F4D7140A1C01/0/copycat_kids.pdf

Hardwick, D. A. (1984). College students' concept of adulthood. *Psychological Reports,* 54:967-968.

Hareven, T. K. (1994). *Post-modernism and the social sciences: A thematic approach.* Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

Harrison, K. (1997). Does Interpersonal attraction to thin personalities promote eating disorders? *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media,* 41(4), 478.

Havens, T. (2002) The biggest show in the world: Race and the global popularity of *The Cosby show*. *Media, Culture and Society*, 22, 371-391.

Heide, M. J. (1995). *Television Culture and Women's Lives: Thirtysomething and the Contradictions of Gender*, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Hill, Annette. (2002). Big Brother: The Real Audience. *Television & New Media*, 3(3), 323-340.

Himmelstein, H. (1994). *Television Myth and the American Mind*. Praeger Publishers.

Hoffner, C., & Cantor, J. (1991). Perceiving and responding to mass media characters. In J. Bryant & D. Zillmann (Eds.). *Responding to the Screen: Reception and reaction processes*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Holmes, S. (2004). "But this Time You Choose!": Approaching the 'Interactive' Audience in Reality TV. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 7(2), 213-231.

Horton, D., & Wohl, R. R. (1976). Mass Communication and Parasocial Interatcion. In J. E. Combs and M. W. Mansfield (Eds.), *Drama in Life: the Uses of Communication in Society*. New York: Hastings House.

Horton, D., & Wohl, R. R. (1956). Mass Communication and a Parasocial Interaction: Observation on Intimacy at a Distance. *Psychiatry*, 19(3), 76-84.

Houlberg, R. (1984). Local Television-News Audience and the Parasocial Interaction. *Journal of Broadcasting*, 28, 423-429.

Huxley, A. (1932). *Brave New World*. London: Triad Grafton.

James, N.C., and McCain, T. (1982). Television Games and Preschool Children Play: Patterns, Themes and Uses. *Journal of Broadcasting*, 26, 783-800.

Johnson, S. (2005, April 15). Why 'Friends' mattered. *Baltimore Sun on the Web*, 2 May 2004, http://baltimoresun.com/entertainment/movies/bal-friends-trib0502,0,1713483.story

Jones, J. M. (2003). Show Your Real Face: A Fan Study of the UK Big Brother Transmissions (2000, 2001, 2002). Investigating the Boundaries between Notions of Consumers and Producers of Factual Television. *New Media Society*, 5(3), 400-421.

Joyrich, Lynne. (1996). *Re-Viewing Reception: Television, Gender, and Postmodern Culture*. Bloomington, Indiana: University Press.

Kahle, L.R., & Riley, C. (2004). *Sports Marketing and the Psychology of Marketing Communication*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Kelman, H.C. (1961). Process of Opinion Change. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 25, 57-78.

Kervin, D. J. (1990). Ambivalent Pleasure from Married...with Children. *Journal of film and video*, 42(2), 2.

Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews*. Sage Publications Inc, 366.

Langer, J. (1981). Television's Personality System. *Media, Culture and Society*, 4, 351-65.

Marc, D. (1989). *Comic Visions: Television Comedy & American Culture*. Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers.

Meyrowitz, J. (1978). Television and Interpersonal Behavior: Codes of Perception and Response. In Gumpert, G. & Cathcart, R. (Eds.), *Inter/Media: Interpersonal Communication in a Media World* (pp. 56-76). New York: Oxford University Press.

Moores, Shaun. (1993). *Interpreting Audiences: The Ethnography of Media Consumption*. London: Sage Publications.

Newcomb, H. (1994). *Television: The Critical View*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Newcomb, H. & Hirsch, P. M. (1983) Television as a Cultural Forum. In Newcomb, H. (Ed.), *Television: The critical view*. (pp. 445-470). New York: Oxford University Press.

Novak, M. (1977). Television Shapes the Soul. In Gumpert, G. & Cathcart, R. (Eds.), *Inter/Media: Interpersonal Communication in a Media World* (pp. 321-334). New York: Oxford University Press.

Pack, Sam. (2000). Reception, Identity, and the Global Village: Television in the Fourth World. *Journal of Media and Culture*. 3(1), 1-30.

Press, A. L. (1991). *Women Watching Television: Gender, Class, and Generation in the American Television Experience*. Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Putnam, R. D. (1995). Bowling alone: America's declining social capital. *Journal of Democracy,* 6, 65-78.

Putterman, B. (1995). *On Television and Comedy: Essays on style, theme, performance, and writing*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co Inc.

Ransford, M. (2005). *Average person spends more time using Media than anything else.* Retrieved February 14th, 2006, from News Center Sept. 23, 2005 at the Ball State University web site: http://www.bsu.edu/news/article/0,1370,--36658,00.html

Reeves, J. L. (1990). Rewriting Culture: A Dialogic view of television authorship. In R. J. Thompson & G. Burns (Eds.), *Rev. of Making Television Authorship and the Production Process* (pp.147-160). Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Group.

Rosenfeld, L. B. (1969). Set Theory: Key to the Understanding of Burke's Use of the Term "Identification" *Western Speech*, 33(3), 175-84.

Rosenzweig, R. (1999). Live free or die? Death, life, survival, and sobriety on the information superhighway. *American Quarterly*, 51(1), 160-174.

Schwichtenberg, C. (1993). *The Madonna Connection: Representational Politics, Subcultural Identities, and Cultural Theory.* Colorado: Westview Press.

Selnow, G. W. (1990). Values in Prime-Time Television. *Journal of Communication,* 40, 3.

Sennett, R. (1977). *The Fall of Public Man.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc.

Snyder, R. (1966). Architects of Contemporary Man's Consciousness. In Gumpert, G. & Cathcart, R. (Eds.), *Inter/Media:Interpersonal Communication in a Media World* (pp. 56-76). New York: Oxford University Press.

Strasburger, V. C., and Donnerstein, E. (1999). Children, adolescents, and the media: Issues and Solutions. *Pediatrics,* 103:129-139.

Williams, T. M. (1986). *The Impact of Television.* Orlando, Florida: Academic Press Inc.

Vegard, Iglebaek. (2000, October 2). What kind of male friendship? A case study of Joey and Chandler in *Friends. The 4th European Feminist Research Conference.* Bologna, Italy.

Zurawik, David. (2005, April 15) When 'Friends' became family." *Baltimore Sun on the Web,* 6 May 2004, http://www.baltimoresun.com/entertainment/movies/bal-te.to.friends09,0,7249538.story

Appendix

FRIENDS INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Socio-Economic Questions

Age
How old are you?

Livelihood
Where are you working?
If in school,
- Why are you still in school, and how do you feel about still being there?
- What are you aspiring to do for a career when you are done
Do you like where you are working?
Is this a life-long career for you?

Living Situation
Where are you living?
Is this your ideal living situation?
What would be your ideal living situation?
When do you foresee yourself in that situation?

Relationships
What is your current relationship status?
How do you feel about that?

Parents
Do you parents financially support you at all?
If yes, where would you be if you didn't' have their support
If no,
- how long have you been free of their support
- do you wish that you had more support from them financially?

Series Identification Questions

Tell me what you think of the series *Friends*
How often would you say you watched the show over the 10 years it aired?
What drew you to watching that show?

The Following questions pertain to identification:
Definition:
   a. What is it about the show that drew you in to watch it?
    - how does that relate to you and your life?
   b. What about the show did you find yourself relating to (values, environment, lifestyle, situation)?

c. Is there a particular character you thought, hey, that's like me, or identified with personally?
    - what similarities do you share with them?
d. Are there any aspects of the characters situation in the show that you might see reflected in your own?
e. Have you ever found yourself in a situation similar to something on the show?
f. What do you think you've learned about society from watching this show?
g. What connections could you draw with the series and your life now?
h. Comment on the show's portrayal of adulthood
i. Comment on the show's idea of relationships