

# The Study of Gender Humor Discourse in ‘*Friends*’ Comedy Series

Lailan Syafrina Dewi<sup>1</sup>, Anni Holila Pulungan<sup>2</sup>, Widya Andayani<sup>3</sup>

{lailansyafrinadewi23@gmail.com<sup>1</sup>, anniholilapulungan<sup>2</sup>, widyaandayani@unimed.ac.id<sup>3</sup>}

Postgraduate School of English Applied Linguistics, Universitas Negeri Medan, Indonesia <sup>123</sup>

**Abstract.** The study focuses on the gender humor discourse in the comedy series "*Friends*". The study's objective was to classify the gender humors present in the comedy series "*Friends*". Critical discourse analysis and a qualitative descriptive methodology were both used in the study. The study's data comes from gender humor discourse-heavy scripts from the television sitcom "*Friends*". Martin et al.(2003)'s classification of gender humor types was employed in the study. The four categories of humor identified by Martin et al. are affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive, and self-defeating. According to the study's findings, 26 clauses of various humor types were identified, including: eight (31%) types were self-defeating. Self-defeating types appeared frequently in the '*Friends*' comedy series, with seven aggressive types (27%) and six affiliative types (23%) and five self-enhancing different types (19%).

**Keyword:** Gender, Humor, Discourse, Comedy Series.

## 1 Introduction

Gender disparities is one of the most often searched for humorous topics. Most kinds of humour there would have shown to be more appreciated and used by males than by females, though not all. Gender differences are especially pronounced in nasty or repulsive comedy. According to<sup>1</sup>, males found Women found sexist and racist jokes to be less offensive than men, and males found inappropriate jokes and insult humor to be hilarious than women.

Numerous research on comedy and gender have been conducted in the past, but few of them have directly addressed the workplace. Furthermore, there are probably assumptions regarding gender disparities as a result of the wider stream. According to these studies, males are more likely than women to use and value comedy (both offensive and non-offensive), both in self-report studies and studies in which other people's judgments on humor are recorded. If the

---

<sup>1</sup> Groch, A. Joking and appreciation of humour in nursery school children. *Child Development*. 1974.

effectiveness and perceived behavior of a leader are related, women may be at a disadvantage in this conversation. Positive humor is more likely to help men than women. Since men are more likely than women to use crude and derogatory humor, it is more likely that such communications will be accepted if they are expected from men.

According to Kramarae<sup>2</sup>, because men and women have diverse perspectives on the world, they probably have different interests in humor. Because they must adhere to the social standards of the dominant group, women are more likely to notice men's lighthearted interests than vice versa. He believed that this was the genesis of the widespread belief that women lack a sense of humor. In other words, even while women find comedy funny, guys may not necessarily need to.

There is unquestionably a need for more research on the topic of comedy and gender over time. It is being done in this instance to see whether there are any similarities or contrasts between the gender humors that were provided in prior studies and the most recent humor phenomenon. One of the media that can show humor is film, which can also show people communicating and interacting at the same time and location. A comedy movie was one that was intended to entertain and make people laugh. As a result, the focus of the study's debate will be on the critically acclaimed and widely watched comedy series "*Friends*".

Friends is a short film series that ran for a total of 236 episodes over the course of 10 seasons on American television from 1994 to 2004. This comedy series received a reasonably good rating from the audience, which is 8.8/10, according to statistics from IMDb.com, the biggest and most complete online film database. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that this comedy series has garnered numerous accolades, including the ASCAP Film and Television Music Award for Top TV Series in 2005, the Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Lead Actress in a Comedy Series in 2002, the Primetime Emmy Award for Best Directing Comedy Series in 1996, the American Comedy Award for Funniest Supporting Female Performer in a TV Series in 2000, and numerous others. Friends presented the story of six "Friends" who, at the age of roughly thirty, were attempting to find their place in the world while still struggling to make ends meet. They talked about the challenges of life, such as friendship, love, drama, and family issues, amidst the bustle of Manhattan. Six men and six women respectively portrayed Rachel Green, Phoebe Buffay, Monica Geller, Joey Tribbiani, Ross Geller, and Chandler Bing in the hit television series "*Friends*".

The goal of this study was to categorize the many gender-related humors, such as those used by men and women in the sitcom "*Friends*" when talking with individuals of the same gender and those used when interacting with people of a different gender.

### **Critical Discourse Analysis**

Mullet<sup>3</sup> defined discourse has become prominent concepts in the fields of language, culture, and gender. It can also be anything that aims to understand social problems in society and to create a new, more ideal reality. A few examples include laws, stories, written texts like letters or textbooks, speeches, classroom activities, nonverbal cues, visual cues, multimedia, and movies.

---

<sup>2</sup> Kramarae, Cheri. Women and men speaking: Framework for analysis. Rowley, MA: Newbury. 1987.

<sup>3</sup> Mullet, D. R. A general critical discourse analysis framework for educational research. Journal of Advanced Academics. 2018.

The term "discourse" refers to the study of language in connection to its social context, whether written or spoken. Understanding how language is used in everyday situations is its purpose, with a focus on the social aspects of communication and the ways in which individuals use language to "achieve certain goals. Fairclough<sup>4</sup> describes more details Discourse is used in a variety of ways, including (1) as a component of the social process of meaning formation, (2) language associated with a specific social sector or practice (e.g., 'political discourse,' and (3) a way of construing world features associated with a specific social perspective.

### **Humor**

According to <sup>5</sup> humor is the type of media that the public is most receptive to. We encounter humor frequently because it has the power to amuse audiences. Humor also serves as a deterrent from stressful circumstances. Furthermore, descriptions of comedy frequently concentrate on the audience's or the speaker's intended meaning. Humor is "a particular sort of communication that establishes an incongruent relationship or meaning and is delivered in a way that causes laughing".

### **Types of Humor**

The concept "humor styles" describes how people (who can be men or women) use humor in their everyday lives. A concept called "humor styles" was put out by Martin et al<sup>6</sup>. They investigated individual variations in these four forms of humor by studying affiliational, self-enhancing, aggressive, and self-defeating humor. By learning more about comedy kinds, we may better understand how individuals engage with one another and employ humor on a personal and interpersonal level.

#### **Affiliative**

The capacity to use humor in speech, jokes, and practical pranks on people to amuse them, grab their attention, foster connections, and reduce any tension that may develop in interpersonal relationships is known as affiliation. Since it benefits both the user and others, this kind of humour is not hostile and improves social connections. Affiliative humor is a sort of constructive comedy that focuses on using humor to develop group bonds, such as supporting the statement "*I love making others laugh*". As stated above, persons who have affiliative humor typically use humor to gain social or interpersonal advantages. They thrilled and amused others to raise the quality of social interactions (to strengthen interpersonal ties and allure). Since affiliative humor reinforces both the self and others and enhances conflict resolution in romantic relationships, it is linked to both intimacy in interpersonal relationships and conflict resolution in dating couples.

#### **Self-enhancing**

---

<sup>4</sup> Fairclough, N. Critical discourse analysis and critical policy studies. Critical Policy Studies. 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Yue, X. D., Leung, C. L., and Hiranandani, N. A. Playfulness Adult styles, and subjective happiness. Psychological Reports. 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Martin, R. A., Puhlik-Doris, P., Larsen, G., Gray, J., & Weir, K. Individual differences in uses of humor and their relation to psychological well-being: Development of the Humor Styles Questionnaire. Journal of Research in Personality. 2003.

The capacity to keep an optimistic attitude on life even when other people do not is self-enhancing. It involves using humor as a strategy to get over challenges and have pleasure, especially while dealing with life's mistakes and inconsistencies. Positivity and self-focus toward humor are characteristics of the self-enhancing humor style. High self-enhancing joke scoring can "cheer" themselves by agreeing to the statement, "*Even if I'm alone, I am constantly fascinated by life's oddities,*" as an example of how they utilize humor to boost their spirits. The example that follows shows how people with self-enhancing senses of humor use humor can maintain or improve their emotional fellow human. They manage challenging situations by viewing them from a humorous angle, maintaining a lighthearted viewpoint on life.

#### Aggressive

Aggressive humor refers to the desire to make fun of or manipulate other people through the use of sarcasm, uncomfortable jokes, or other means. It's a style of humor that some people could find offensive. "Aggressive humor," which focuses on other people and involves making fun of and criticizing them, is a form of negative comedy. I frequently taunt others about their mistakes, as in the sentence "When someone commits a mistake". Those phrases are used with an aggressive sense of humor. It use humor more as a technique of harming or controlling people than as a way to improve interpersonal interactions for both the self and others.

#### Self-Defeating

Self-defeating: People who indulge in this type of comedy do it at their own expense, making others laugh as they make themselves look foolish or despised. This style of comedy also involves the concealment of emotions through the use of comedy as a crude sort of protection. The sense of humor seems to be an attempt to win over others or obtain acclaim at the price of oneself, which is a sign of low self-esteem. This type of humor is in contrast to self-deprecating humor, which is a positive form of humor in which people can laugh at their own flaws and not take themselves too seriously. A person-centered strategy is self-defeating humor. Self-defeating performers make fun of themselves. Sometimes people use self-defeating humor to try to fit in or be accepted by a group, but the humor is directed at the person instead of the group. For instance, accepting the statement, "*Letting people make fun of me is how I keep my friends and family happy*". From the previous example, it can be inferred that those who had a self-defeating sense of humor made other people laugh by making fun of themselves. They use comedy as a coping mechanism to avoid facing issues and dealing with uncomfortable emotions.

#### Gender and Language

Holmes<sup>7</sup> claimed that sociolinguistics addresses the issues of gender and language. There are minute distinctions between the language forms used by men and women in every linguistic community. a brief explanation of how sociolinguistics uses the terms "sex" and "gender". In contrast to gender, which refers to divides based on biological traits, he prefers the term gender since it is better suitable for categorizing people according to their socio-cultural behavior, including speech. The main focus of discussions on gender is how men and women speak differently.

---

<sup>7</sup> Holmes, J. Women, Men and Politeness. London: Longman. 1995.

As characteristics of female language usage, Lakoff<sup>8</sup> identified lexical hedges, tag question, rising declarative intonation, empty adjectives, exact color terms, intensifiers, hypercorrect grammar, superpolite forms, avoidance of powerful swear words, and emphatic stress. Lexical Hedges are pauses in conversation sentences that take the form of phrases or filler words to indicate a lack of confidence, incomplete knowledge, doubt, uncertainty, or bewilderment.

A request can also be a very polite order that suggests a course of action to be taken in the speaker's support or sympathies rather than making a direct demand for compliance. Let's say that you are watching TV while seated. The person in front of the TV is not merely standing there in the statement above; the speaker wants them to relocate or go somewhere else so that the TV is not blocked.

### Men Language

A variety of factors contribute to the establishment of linguistic distinctions between men and women. The masculine language was said to be more aggressive, mature, and in direct or pointed forms. These words include ones like mhm, yeah, and right. These words are frequently used by men to establish control. Second, when giving directions and directives, men frequently utilize the words gimme, going to, and gotta as well as the words want to and kinda, especially when they are with other guys of the same sex. Third, there was a common misconception that men used more swear words than women. Males and men used far more expletives in discussion than did women and women, according to Coates' research, but mixed conversations tended to accommodate both sides. Take the words "gosh dang," "fuck," "chew," "crap," etc. Fourth, when it comes to compliments, studies reveal that men choose to complement one other on their abilities and belongings. For instance, it's nice, nice person, and well done. The fifth theme is that discussions between men or in groups of people of the same sex occasionally center on current events, travel, and sports. And finally, men ask questions to learn more information in a different way from women, who occasionally employ question tags. They directly posed the query.

### Gender and Humor

Few studies have particularly examined the workplace, despite the fact that there have been many studies on comedy and gender. Particularly given that there are more and more women working in businesses, this field of study is essential. The bigger stream, however, surely generates presumptions on gender disparities. Men appear to use and value comedy (both non-offensive and offensive) more than women, based on self-report studies and studies on how other people interpret humor. If comedy is connected to how leaders are perceived to act and perform in this discussion, women may suffer. Positive humor may help men learn more than women. Additionally, men use crude and insulting humor more frequently than women do, which increases the likelihood that others will accept such statements coming from men.

A classification of comedy subtypes was created. The usage of humor is influenced by both gender and the makeup of the group, according to log-linear modeling. The most statistically significant findings were that women were more likely than men to employ observational comedy, insults and role-playing were more common in single-sex talks, and humor including quotes or obscenity was more frequently used by males than by women.

---

<sup>8</sup> Lakoff, R. *Language and Woman's Place: Text and Comentaris*. New York: Oxford University Press. 2004.

According to a study on the purposes of comedy, women are more prone than men to utilize humor to foster camaraderie. Women in particular frequently used comedy to reveal intimate details about themselves. Men were more likely to leverage on similarity or shared experiences when employing humor to foster a sense of camaraderie. Power-based tactics like inciting conflict or manipulating others were extremely rare. Men are more prone than women to use comedy just to advance their position, forge bonds with others, and enhance their sense of self. Men are more prone to use comedy to deal with situational issues than women are, who are more inclined to utilize general coping mechanisms to deal with issues that are unrelated to the current scenario. Compared to men, women were more likely to utilize humor that was focused on a human-related issue. More jokes about work, computers, TV shows, books, or movies were made by the males. In single sex groups as opposed to mixed groups, speakers are significantly more likely to utilize humor targeted at a member of the same sex group. Speakers who interacted with people of different sexes maintained gender boundaries by making jokes about them.

### ***Friends* Comedy Series**

'*Friends*' is a popular comedy series in American culture because it has reached a large number of people in the United States since its debut in 1994- 2004. Through six characters, three men and three women, it illustrates what should be "normal relationships" between men and women. The dynamics of these six buddies are a good subject to study because they show men and women interacting together and separately in everyday life with even proportions.\

Six characters in their twenties who live in New York City and "pursue love, happiness, and career" are Rachel (Jennifer Aniston), Monica (Courtney Cox-Arquette), Phoebe (Lisa Kudrow), Chandler (Matthew Perry), Joey (Matt Le Blanc), and Ross (David Schwimmer). The majority of the action took place underground (in their flats or the Coffee House), where they congregate to talk about recent occurrences, primarily romantic misadventures. Early on, the show's creators determined that it should be an entirely ensemble production, with none of the six characters taking center stage. They remained with this decision for the whole ten-season period.

## **2. Method**

This study performed a qualitative descriptive analysis using the critical discourse analysis method. This CDA was used to emphasize the significance of societal issues or phenomena<sup>9</sup>. The study's main methodology was<sup>10</sup> paradigm-based approach. In this study, a qualitative descriptive analysis was conducted using the critical discourse analysis methodology. The purpose of this CDA was to emphasize the significance of social phenomena or concerns. The study used a paradigm-based technique as its major methodology. The study's primary source of data were phrases from the comedy series "*Friends*" that included gender-related humor. The information came from the ten-season script of the NBC comedy sitcom *Friends*, starring Marta Kauffman and David Crane, which ran from September 22, 1994, to May 6, 2004, according to the data sources. Clauses uttered

---

<sup>9</sup> Creswell, J.W. Educational research: Planning, conducting and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research (Fourth Edition.). United State of America. Person Education Inc. 2012.

<sup>10</sup> Fairclough, N. Critical discourse analysis: The Critical Study of Language (2nd ed.). Longman. 2010.

by actors and actresses, three men (Rs, Ch, and Jy), and three women, made up the study's data. The linguistic analysis of these data served as the basis for the CDA's input. Additionally, the data collection method included observation and documentation.

### 3 Result and Discussion

Based on the theory of humor types provided presented by<sup>11</sup>, several varieties of humor were examined in this study. Humor subtypes include those that are affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive, and self-defeating. Table 1 lists many gender comedy categories.

**Table 1.** Types of Humor

No	Types of Humor	Males	Percentages (%)	Females	Percentages (%)	Total Frequencies	Total Percentages (%)
1	Self-defeating	5	36	3	25	8	61
2	Aggressive	4	29	3	25	7	54
3	Affiliative	3	21	3	25	6	46
4	Self-enhancing	2	14	3	25	5	39
<b>Total</b>		<b>14</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>200</b>

As shown by the data in the table above, the comedy series "*Friends*" in this study used four different types of humor. The percentages of men and women were different. They were self-defeating type 5 (36%). The aggressive type 4 (29%), affiliative type 3, and self-enhancing type 2 (14%) personality types were all used by 14 males. The total of 12 females included self-defeating type 3 (25%) self-enhancing type 3 (25%) aggressive type 3 (25%) affiliative type 3 (25%) and self-enhancing type 3 (25%) types. Because men and women in this comedy series employ humor, including the inappropriate use of comedy as a form of emotion camouflage, self-defeating behavior became common. Humor that is detrimental to oneself is egotistical. Self-defeating humor is practiced by those who parody themselves. Self-defeating humor is sometimes used by individuals in an effort to fit in or gain acceptance by a group, but this humor is aimed at the individual rather than the group.

Males likewise indicated that comedy at work was more amusing and offensive than females, suggesting a connection between gender differences and comedy of this kind. It has been found that men are generally better at understanding and using comedy than women are. It is evident from this humor that men use humor more frequently than women. Compared to men, women typically score lower on comedy. This demonstrated that men are more relaxed when conversing with people of the same gender as themselves. They enjoy warming up a chilly environment, whereas women typically take problems more seriously.

<sup>11</sup> Martin, R. A., Puhlik-Doris, P., Larsen, G., Gray, J., & Weir, K. Individual differences in uses of humor and their relation to psychological well-being: Development of the Humor Styles Questionnaire. *Journal of Research in Personality*. 2003.

The findings of this study revealed a phenomena that appeared when there was humor in the comedy series "Friends" in terms of humor clauses. According to Martin et al.,<sup>12</sup> there are four categories of humor: 1) Self-defeating humor, which is more frequently used by men than by women. Conclusion: Males apply comedy more frequently than females in terms of humor types. In this instance, it was determined that all of the "Friends" comedy series restrictions applied. 2) Males are more likely than females to use aggressive humor. It occurred because men in general tend to act aggressively, and it did so in this comedy series. When talking to everyone they met, men were very animated. 3) Affiliative: As can be seen, in this kind, the use of affiliative humor balances the numbers. In this comedy type, there were three clauses used by males and there were clauses used by women, totaling six clauses. 4) Self-improvement; this type uses a total of five clauses, with both men and women using them. Women used clauses more frequently than males did. According to the hypothesis, this affiliative refers to a tendency to say amusing things, tell jokes, and play practical jokes in an effort to amuse others, attract attention, help people get to know one another, and help reduce any tension that may arise in interpersonal relationships. The tendency to maintain a lighthearted attitude on life even when others do not do the same is what is meant by the self-enhancing.

A few humorous phrases were discovered to indicate self-improvement in this study. It was really frequent. Aggressive, meanwhile, refers to a tendency using humor to irritate someone with jokes, make them look silly, or control them through the use of sarcasm. In this study, it was discovered that there are negative and aggressive forms of humor. Humor is a person's way of making others laugh and conveying a humorous impression. It's because research has shown that the masculine humor in this comic series, violence is more overtly displayed, and mockery of body parts is encouraged.

It can be inferred from the various types of humor that men frequently inject humor into every sentence they utter. The study's findings, which showed that men were more likely than women to find humor amusing, made this conclusion clear. But among the four types, self-enhancing humor was one in which women used it more frequently than the others. It occurred because, in general, women have more polite feelings and language than men. Women typically find the humor in the clauses in this comedy series better than men do. The men enjoyed using humor, especially sexist humor, in their group in order to convey a sense of superiority over the other group that was being despised. It makes sense that his peers would respond favorably to this brand of humor, strengthening their friendship in the process. Men's desire to be accepted by their peers, gain recognition in their environment, and develop closer relationships with their friends was really their only motivation for using sexist humor. Collins' theory, which asserts that sexism is a way of thinking or a set of beliefs that thinks that a state where men are viewed as being superior to other genders (women). This is evident in the way that men speak to one another and in their monologues about women, where it is implied that women are unattractive animals or that they are figuratively represented as having things of low worth.

---

<sup>12</sup> Martin, R. A., Puhlik-Doris, P., Larsen, G., Gray, J., & Weir, K. Individual differences in uses of humor and their relation to psychological well-being: Development of the Humor Styles Questionnaire. *Journal of Research in Personality*. 2003.



## 4 Conclusions

It is determined that the comedy series "Friends" uses one of the four categories of humor defined by Martin et al. They were aggressive, affiliative, self-defeating, and self-enhancing. Since self-defeating humor was a person-centered strategy, it became common in comedy series where humor is used as a poor kind of defense to mask someone's emotions. People who mock themselves are making fun of themselves. Men use self-deprecating humor more frequently than women. It might be inferred that the main theme of the comedy series "Friends" was the achievement of intrapersonal rewards. Men tend to employ comedy in every sentence they make and engage in spontaneous humor, according to the sorts of humor. This was clarified by the research's findings, which showed that men had a far larger percentage of humor than women did. But of the four varieties, self-enhancing humor was one in which women used it more frequently than the others. It occurred because, on general, women have more courteous feelings and language than men. In this comedy series, women often find the scenarios to be funnier than males do. It was to generate a sense of superiority over the other group that was being reviled that the men enjoyed employing comedy, especially sexist humor, in their group. It makes sense that his peers would respond favorably to this brand of comedy, strengthening their connection in the process. Men really had more of an incentive to use sexist comedy than to denigrate women; they only wanted to stand out, fit in, and develop closer relationships with their buddies. The evidence supports Collins' argument, according to which sexism is an understanding or belief system that maintains that a phenomenon in which some genders (men) were superior to others, is real (women). This can be heard in the way that men talk to one another or in their monologue about women, where it is intimated that they are disgusting creatures or that they hold both actual and figurative objects that are offensive to them.

**Acknowledgement.** I would like thank Dr. Widya Andayani, S.S. M.Hum and Dr. Anni Holila, M.Hum for serving as my advisors. For their insightful and helpful comments during the planning and development of this study work. It has been really appreciated that they have been so eager to donate their time.

## References

- [1] Groch, A. Joking and appreciation of humour in nursery school children. *Child Development*. 1974 ;45, 1098-1102.
- [2] Kramarae, Cheris. *Women and men speaking: Framework for analysis*. Rowley, MA: Newbury. 1987 52-63.
- [3] Mullet, D. R. A general critical discourse analysis framework for educational research. *Journal of Advanced Academics*. 2018 Feb 29;116-142.
- [4] Fairclough, N. *Critical discourse analysis and critical policy studies*. *Critical Policy Studies*. 2013 7(2), 177-197.
- [5] Yue, X. D., Leung, C. L., and Hiranandani, N. A. Playfulness Adult styles, and subjective happiness. *Psychological Reports*. 2016 119(3), 630–640.
- [6] Martin, R. A., Puhlik-Doris, P., Larsen, G., Gray, J., & Weir, K. Individual differences in uses of humor and their relation to psychological well-being: Development of the Humor Styles Questionnaire. *Journal of Research in Personality*. 2003 37, 48–75.

- [7] Holmes, J. *Women, Men and Politeness*. London: Longman. 1995.
- [8] Lakoff, R. *Language and Woman's Place: Text and Comentariss*. New York: Oxford University Press. 2004.
- [9] Creswell, J.W. *Educational research: Planning, conducting and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research (Fourth Edition)*. United State of America. Person Education Inc. 2012.
- [10] Fairclough, N. *Critical discourse analysis: The Critical Study of Language (2nd ed.)*. Longman. 2010.