



Why One of the Highest-Rated 'Friends' Episodes Made NBC Nervous



By Rachel Sandell

Updated May 6, 2024, 5:56 PM EDT

Rachel Sandell is an experienced editor and proofreader with a love for language and storytelling. A graduate of the creative writing MFA program, The Rainier Writing Workshop, she is the author of five short stories and analyzes the different facets of fiction her spare time. She's also a huge...



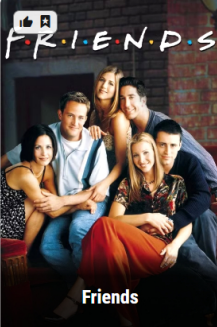
See more Collider stories on Google.

Add us on Google

SUMMARY

- "The One With the Lesbian Wedding" episode of *Friends* was controversial at the time, but became the top-rated episode in the US, with 31.6 million viewers tuning in.
- The episode approached the topic of a same-sex wedding with a focus on Ross' character growth, rather than politics, centering around his relationship with his ex-wife Carol and her soon-to-be wife Susan.
- Despite the fear of backlash, the episode was a success and remains a memorable moment in *Friends* history, becoming a significant turning point for Ross and his romantic relationships.

When it comes to sitcoms, there's nothing quite as iconic and timeless as *Friends*. Whether it's the will-they-won't-they romance between Ross (David Schwimmer) and Rachel (Jennifer Aniston), the quirkiness of Joey (Matt Le Blanc) and Phoebe (Lisa Kudrow), or the growth between Monica (Courteney Cox) and Chandler (Matthew Perry), *Friends* kept viewers glued to the TV for 10 years and 236 total episodes, winning several awards and gaining incredible ratings. It's no wonder the show is a classic. **With how popular *Friends* is**, and how highly it's regarded now as a fundamental sitcom in the history of the genre, it's strange to realize that during the time of airing, NBC faced some controversy regarding one of its highly-rated episodes. Here's what happened and why.



TV-14

Comedy

Romance

Release Date

1994 - 2004-00-00

Network

NBC

Showrunner

Marta Kauffman

Directors

Kevin S. Bright, Gary Halvorson, Michael Lembeck, James Burrows,...

Writers

Jeff Astrof, Mike Sikowitz, Brian Boyle, Patty Lin, Bill Lawrence, R...

Franchise(s)

Friends

Cast

Jennifer Aniston

Rachel Green

Courteney Cox

Monica Geller

WHERE TO WATCH



Powered by  Expand

College prep made easy



Shop now 

What Is "The One With the Lesbian Wedding" About?

Just two years after the pilot aired, **NBC aired Season 2**, Episode 11 in 1996, "The One With the Lesbian Wedding." In the opening scene, Ross meets with his ex-wife Carol (**Jane Sibbett**) and her girlfriend Susan (**Jessica Hecht**). Ross has had an awkward relationship with Carol ever since she came out as gay and their marriage ended in divorce, and Ross and Susan have had an especially strained relationship as well. As a romantic, Ross's failed marriage is something he struggles with throughout the first portion of the series, so he becomes distressed when **Carol announces her and Susan's engagement**.

WHAT TO WATCH



July 20, 2025

The 72 Best Movies on Netflix Right Now

Filtrete

AIR FILTERS

18x20x1

Filtro de aire para...

\$37.91 \$45.99

Subscribe & Save 18%

prime

TRENDING NOW



HBO's Harry Potter Officially Returns to Hogwarts 2 Weeks Early



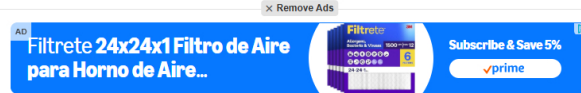
Ridley Scott Is Officially a "Cinematic Hero" in New Sci-Fi Movie Sneak Peek



3 Near-Perfect Netflix Series To Binge This Weekend (Aug

Ross and Carol's divorce, however painful at the moment, was mostly amicable, and they have kept their friendship ever since. So, **Carol invites Ross to the wedding** (her hesitations just before telling him of her and Susan's engagement imply that she's not sure how Ross will take the news, and it takes Susan nudging her to actually tell him). Ross tries to play it off, but it's obvious that he still has feelings for Carol and remains bitter that their relationship ended while Susan gets to live his dream.

15-16



Ad

Back at Monica's apartment, Ross makes it clear that his problem with the wedding, and the reason he refuses to attend, has nothing to do with Carol and Susan being gay and everything to do with Carol being his ex-wife. Even though he and Carol have remained friends, attending the wedding would be painful and awkward for him. But **the wedding is impossible to escape**: when the caterer for the wedding is injured, Carol hires Monica as a replacement, and Ross is roped into helping out with the food for his own ex-wife's wedding.

Carol and Susan's Wedding Is a Major Turning Point for Ross on 'Friends'



Ad

Ross reaches a turning point, though, when Carol visits the apartment, saying that she might have to call the wedding off. Her parents don't approve of her relationship with Susan, and they have refused to attend. Her insecurities from this rejection started a fight between Carol and Susan, leaving Carol to second-guess herself. Refusing to be another person in Carol's life who doesn't support her, Ross swallows his pride and sets aside his pain for a moment to have an actual conversation with her. He agrees with Susan (a rare moment in and of itself) that the wedding is for Carol and Susan, not for anyone else, and that if they truly love each other, then the wedding should continue as planned. Carol responds positively to the pep talk, and **Ross ends up going to the wedding out of support for Carol**, even walking her down the aisle in place of her parents — which adds a new layer of meaning to the tradition of giving the bride away.

During the reception, Susan responds to Ross's support of Carol by extending an olive branch herself. She thanks him for helping to calm Carol's nerves and to be her support system during the wedding, then goes one step further by offering Ross a dance. Ross agrees. **This episode represents a big turning point for Ross** concerning one of his biggest conflicts in **the Friends' early days**. Giving Carol away helped him to move on from this stage of his life and ultimately embrace a new relationship, much farther down the line.

Ad

Ad

Why Was This 'Friends' Episode Controversial for NBC?



In 1996 when the episode first aired, **NYC was still fifteen years away from legalizing gay marriage** (marriage licenses for same-sex weddings weren't made available until 2011), so the topic was approached with a level of caution. **"The One With the Lesbian Wedding" was only the second sitcom to portray a same-sex wedding.** According to writer and producer **Marta Kauffman, NBC executives were preparing for the worst** as they anticipated backlash over the controversial material, but the complaints they received weren't nearly as numerous as they expected. In fact, despite the topic of a gay wedding being controversial at the time, "The One With the Lesbian Wedding" became the top-rated episode in the US: **31.6 million viewers** tuned in to watch.

Ad

While the majority of *Friends* viewers enjoyed the episode and few complaints made it to NBC executives, **some networks refused to air the episode at all.** There's always bound to be some pushback when it comes to topics seen as controversial, and *Friends* wasn't exactly subtle with the episode's message. Nevertheless, the episode survived the backlash and remains a memorable moment in *Friends* history, if for nothing else, then for Ross's character growth.

"The One With the Lesbian Wedding" Continues To Be Well-Received



When it comes to representation in media, *Friends* has never been the most diverse. Some topics, like that of Chandler's transgender parent, are handled with immaturity, and **some jokes definitely wouldn't make it on air if they were written nowadays.** However, this episode in particular approaches the subject with **more of a character focus** than a political one (even though the political aspect is absolutely and inherently present).

Ad

Rather than debating the politics surrounding gay marriage, *Friends* **focuses on the relationship between Ross and Carol** – most notably, how Ross is handling his situation now that Carol is moving on, and he's still stuck in the past. No matter gender or sexual orientation, breakups and divorces are unfortunately prevalent and relatable experiences, with the struggle to move on even more so.

This episode centers around Ross's acceptance of his own situation and coming to terms with where he's at

in life (an overarching theme for the *Friends* series as a whole, with our six main characters exploring different stages of adulthood). Carol herself is more of a character than an archetype as she wrestles with her insecurities and her lack of a support system. This episode represents **the end of an era for Ross and Carol**, as they both officially move on.

Ad

Friends is still insanely popular, even nearly 20 years after its finale, and it's always enlightening to look back and study the milestones that these characters reach in their lives. **Despite the fear of backlash**, "The One With the Lesbian Wedding" depicted a moment in time when the majority of viewers were glad that Ross cleared this first hurdle – and that he was now free to pursue other romantic relationships, taking a great step forward in the **Ross/Rachel will-they-won't-they storyline**.

Friends is available to stream on Max in the U.S.

WATCH ON MAX



Google is updating how content is shown. Don't miss our industry-leading content, written by humans, by setting [Collider as a preferred source](#).

TV Features



Like

Follow

Share

Add Us

THREAD

Manage Your **Collider** Account

We want to hear from you. Share your perspective in the comments below, and please keep the conversation respectful.



Be the first to post

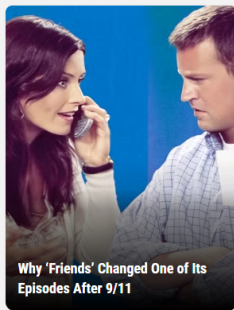


This space is open for discussion.
Be the first to share your thoughts.

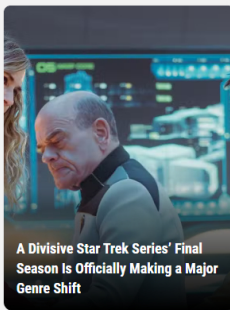
Ad

[Terms](#) | [Privacy](#) | [Feedback](#)

RECOMMENDED



Why 'Friends' Changed One of Its Episodes After 9/11



A Divisive Star Trek Series' Final Season Is Officially Making a Major Genre Shift



57 Years Later, the Best Sitcom Ever Made Still Deserves a Reboot



The Best Rock Song of Every Year of the 1990s

Ad

Collider
Part of the **Vaernet Publishing Group**

SUBSCRIBE

EXPLORE

Movies
TV

ABOUT

Join Our Team
Our Audience

CONTACT

Contact Us
Careers

The best of Collider, directly in your inbox.

Email Address

By subscribing, you agree to receive newsletter and marketing emails, and accept our [Terms of Use](#) and [Privacy Policy](#). You can unsubscribe anytime.

FOLLOW US



Music

Gaming

Screenings

Collider Signature

Streaming Guides

Lists

Reality TV

Reviews

Interviews

FYC

Trailers

Videos

Got A Pitch?

About Us

Press & Events

Media Coverage

Subscribe to Premium

Advertising

Have a News Tip?

LEGAL

Terms

Privacy

Policies