

Sex and the city and the single american girl



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Sex and the City was a television show that ran on HBO from 1998 to 2004, but it was also a revolution in thought because it touched a cord in so many working, post-feminist women. It is a show that not only affected how young, single women viewed themselves and their lives, but it was also cutting edge in how explicitly it portrayed sex from women's perspectives. Based on a popular novel by Candace Bushnell, the series tells the story of a group of thirty-something female friends living in New York City, and details the minutia of their everyday lives, their love lives in particular.

The stories that make up the episodes of Sex and the City are told from the perspective of its main character, Carrie Bradshaw (played by Sarah Jessica Parker, who has since gone on to a lucrative career in modeling and acting). Carrie is a writer of a sex advice column for a New York publication, and each episode is structured around her writing about her own life: finding a question or problem in her life or that of one of her friends, and spinning a philosophical question and column out of it. For example, in one of my favorite episodes, Carrie observes that different relationships have different things to offer - an exotic experience or comfort, something unexpected or else a feeling that brings you back to feeling at home; but the most important relationship for her is that which she has with herself, or self-love. In all the searching for the perfect partner (which is the main endeavor of all of the characters, but in different ways), what Carrie realizes is that it is her own relationship with herself that is most important. This is the kind of insight that each of the episodes offers, and which leaves the viewer a sense of satisfaction, that they learned something, even as they tune in primarily

to be entertained and for the guilty pleasures of a modern day, glossy soap opera.

We see the world through Carrie's eyes, and through her we meet her motley crew of female friends: Samantha (she is the only one who is not thirty-something but is in her forties, but she acts the youngest of them all), Charlotte, and Miranda. Miranda Hobbes (played by Cynthia Nixon) is a lawyer, and she represents the dreams and aspirations of the second wave generation of feminists. She put her career before her personal life, and is now a successful lawyer (we see her getting Partner in her law firm during the show), but her life is empty of meaning. She is suspicious of men, and guards herself quite fiercely. By the end of the show, she has become accidentally pregnant and ends up enjoying motherhood more than anything, and seems to have found happiness with the father of her baby, despite her resistance to settling down with him throughout the last few episodes. Charlotte York is the ingénue, seemingly innocent character played by Kristin Davis.

It is not clearly stated, but we get the feeling that she comes from a wealthy family, and that her career as an art dealer is how she fills her time. She is a WASP who converts to Judaism during the show, in order to wind over a man. She is very conservative socially (though in a totally inoffensive way), but she falls in with a lesbian group of artists at one point. In short, she embodies the contradictions of having and holding on to very traditional and romantic views of womanhood in the context of the post-modern world. She is like royalty in a world that only acknowledges differences in class, so many of her adventures have to do with trying to uphold the class status by

<https://assignbuster.com/sex-and-the-city-and-the-single-american-girl/>

marrying the right man. Finally, Samantha Jones (played by Kim Cattrall) is the sexually liberated, blond bomb-shell who refuses to accept the conventions of womanhood or being a “good girl,” and fully embraces her sexuality.

She finds her power by being sexually empowered, and we see her having many affairs with men – often very explicitly. She is least cynical, happiest, and most adventurous of the circle of friends, trying out everything from the usual sex acts to fetishes. She seems to be Carrie’s closest friend, and they seem to share a special intimacy of friends. The show has made a big impact, especially on the women who have watched it, and has had a long life in re-runs even after the show’s end. This is the case despite rigorous critiques of the show about how it portrays modern American womanhood, the single life, or New York City itself.

Sex and the City represents its female characters as the evident results of the feminist movement. All these women are free and have a lot of choice in their lives, although this doesn’t necessarily mean they are happy. They have everything they could possibly have – jobs, friends, relationships, and the City – but they are still not satisfied. (The one things they don’t seem to have are families.) The implicit criticism is that today’s post-feminist woman is not really satisfied when she sacrifices her personal relationships with men in particular. Work and career are not enough.

When we look at how Carrie ends up with “Mr. Big” who has not treated her very well through the show, but who is nonetheless portrayed as the romantic equivalent of prince charming. Miranda, the most forwardly

feminist and critical of men, ends up finding her satisfaction in the very motherhood she resisted (and only accidentally stumbled on). In short, the moral of the stories, collectively, is that women sacrificed something essential to their happiness when they embraced feminist values of independence, career, sexual freedom, and choice. Another critique of the show from this same perspective is that the show represents women in a very limited way where it comes to class or race/ethnicity issues - that the show is elitist, at best.

All the women are white, all the women are fairly affluent, and all the women have fabulous wardrobes and impeccable tastes in everything but men. These women's lives are not realistic in spite of the attempt of the show's writers to take on some significant social and political issues. The women's living quarters are expansive and overdone, where New York City imposes minimalism on anyone living as a writer (to take Carrie) in this most expensive of cities. Carrie's addiction to shoes and nice, girly clothes would be beyond most single women's budgets. The show just doesn't add up, is unrealistic; and yet, this is the point.

Even the most ardent feminist who finds the treatment offensive might still enjoy the show - these characters have a way of getting under one's skin in spite of one's best judgment. All these critiques are true, but fans still enjoy the show because it is well done - it is well written and witty, and it paints us a world that we want to live in. The show works because women all over the planet (and not just the U. S.

) saw themselves in these characters and embraced this view of American womanhood, or wanted to be one of them. (No doubt some women sought to emulate Carrie and her friends.) There is just enough variety of character to be appealing to a mass audience, and nothing to offend, unless one counts the explicit sex scenes. Of course, the soft pornographic images are exactly why this show got a reputation as being pleasurable to watch for women who have been raised in a world where sexual images, and porn itself, has become increasingly acceptable. Sex and the City contributed to that acceptability, being one of the most risqué shows on T. V.

when it came out. But it wasn't just sexually explicit, it was explicit about what women thought about sex. That is, sexuality is Comopolitanized and portrayed from the women's perspectives, with special attention paid to penises and penis sizes. In one of the most remembered episodes ("Old Dogs, New Dicks"), Charlotte gets squirmy about a man's uncircumcised penis.

In another, the friends joke about the size of one man's penis over breakfast. In another, a man's penis size is spoken of in admiring tones. A whole episode is devoted to Samantha's affair with a man who is known for his expertise and love of giving women head. (I'm sorry to be so explicit, but this is the level of explicitness of the show.

)Sex and the City appeals to both women and men's nostalgia for a lost womanhood, for its reassertion, in a post-modern context, and for women's empowerment specifically through their sexuality and through their friendships. But in spite of it being a show about female friendship,

ultimately the implicit moral is about the insufficiency of female friendship. That the show does this in the name of feminism (or at least post-feminism), that Carrie Bradshaw was praised and embraced as a new icon of feminism, only goes to show how far we still have to go.