

‘ sex and the city’,  
‘ally mcbeal’ and  
‘bridget jones’ diary’  
essay sample



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For years females over twenty have been called spinsters, and have had to deal with the stigma attached to this lexeme. This was until the publication of Helen Fielding's novel "Bridget Jones' Diary", which coined the phrase 'singleton'. This phrase has now become commonplace and used by the media and the public to describe single women in their late twenties to early thirties. Moreover, since this term is relatively brand new it carries minimal connotation, and is a welcome replacement of the stereotyped spinster.

Fielding says that she hoped the word would be used for both male and female and carry no negative connotation. This shows that not only is the gender gap disappearing, but also that the media has responded to this, showing that it is possibly the most rapid and largest growing industry in the world. However, the term is still only used to describe females and does carry some negative connotation but this is miniscule in comparison to that associated with spinster. Men have always managed to escape negative connotation when it comes to terms for them.

They are bachelors, and it is acceptable for them to do what they wish when they want. Whereas women are spinsters, and old maids, who are confined to a life of solitude and caring for other peoples children, as they can not have any as they are not married. There are numerous examples of this throughout literature Jayne Eyre was unmarried and went to become governess for Mr. Rochester. If the story had been different and she had been married before she went to work for Mr. Rochester she would probably have had her own children, and would therefore had to stay at home and look after them.

However, the singleton challenges the archaic oppression set upon women by the term spinster. This new breed of female is independent, successful, and liberated yet they still have their insecurities, and this is what makes these characters so loveable. The characters presented to us through the media, have changed the social landscape, so that the single status rarely incurs the same social stigma it did twenty years ago. Females are now more likely to look for a partner, but put off marriage until they have had their share of all night parties, and climbed higher up the ladder in their chosen career.

People are beginning to see the benefits of being single, having no ties like children to feed and clothe mean that they have extra money to spend on themselves. The 'original' singleton is Bridget Jones, the character from which the term was coined. The popularity of the novel was so great that it was quickly turned into a film that made around \$70845805 at the box office. Bridget is a single woman in her late twenties living in London battling to find Mr. Perfect, whilst juggling her job, friends, her parents separation, dieting and all the other dilemmas the world throws at her.

Perhaps the reason she is so popular is because the audience of the book is predominantly female and most will associate with some of Bridget's misfortunes. Moreover the author Helen Fielding used details from her real life, and friends' life to give Bridget that 'real' element to her character. A BBC review of the movie describes Bridget as a "nineties heroine", this suggests that she is more of a role model than perhaps Jayne Eyre was when the novel was first published.

This is because when Jayne Eyre was published it is likely that the novels audience thought Jayne's character to be radical, and at the time did not appreciate the story to be way ahead of its time and classic as it is considered today. Yet the same review describes Bridget as " chain-smoking, wine-swilling, and man-hunting" which shows the negative connotation associated with being a singleton. This description reflects some aspects of the new social climate, for example binge drinking is a new phenomena, which is frequently publicised through the media as a health risk.

Moreover, the rate of heart disease and number of cancer cases are ever increasing in Britain due to smoking and passive smoking. By describing Bridget as man hunting connotes that the character is obsessed with men, and it makes the audience assume that she goes straight from one man to another, suggesting that Bridget is promiscuous. Which is not something that reflects well on the ' real' singletons, and is definitely not something that a mother would want her daughters to become, negating the role model status that these characters have.

This is perhaps the opinion of one person, and it is possible and probable that the article was written by a man, and therefore biased. As the books audience is mainly female a male may not appreciate Bridget's character, and her obvious hate for the stereotypical bachelor. Philip French of The Observer tries to sum up the singleton, " Now we have the airhead heroine, usually a natural blonde, vulnerable, a terrible warrior, riven by doubts in a post-feminist manner, still looking for a rich Mr. Right".

This is obviously a biased man's view and again doesn't reflect well on the real singletons of today. There are also other examples of the singleton however; these examples are imported from America. The one example most similar to that of Bridget's is Ally McBeal. This is a sitcom about a single woman in her early twenties to late thirties, in a high-powered job as a lawyer. Ally is blessed and cursed with eccentric colleagues, an exceedingly overactive imagination. Just to makes things worse for the character it seems that the love of her life and childhood sweetheart is now married and not to Ally.

Similarly to Bridget, Ally is juggling her own emotions, along with her friends, later on in the series a daughter, her job and of course the dancing baby! She begins to see this dancing baby when she thinks her biological clock is running out. This is something that every female faces the idea that eventually she wont be able to have children. The scariest thought for the singleton is that they've had their chance and missed it, not because they didn't want a child but because they haven't found Mr. Perfect.

The idea for a singleton that their biological clock is running out may still be scary but there is the comforting fact that thanks to technology and medical advancement, women can now have fertility treatment if they can afford it. This luxury would not have been available in Jayne Eyre's era, and would mean that Jayne would have had to settle down early so that she could have children. Moreover, in Jayne Eyre's era to have a child out of wedlock was quite scandalous, and often in literature is give to the barren sister to bring up. Another point of discussion about Ally and Bridget's characters, are the clothes they wear.

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It often commented on the nonexistent micro minis worn to the office by these characters. The question is though that is it not the medias fault that these characters are dressed like this as forty two percent of all pictures of females in newspapers are celebrities. These people will be the same role models to the average woman, and therefore the role models that Ally and Bridget also have. Another set of singletons challenging the traditional stereotypes of women from across the Atlantic, are the females featured in "Sex and the City".

The main characters of this show consist of four main females, and the show shows the different aspects of their lives in New York. The characters names are Carrie Bradshaw, Miranda Hobbs, Samantha Jones and Charlotte York. All four women have fairly influential jobs. Carrie is a successful writer for a New York newspaper; Miranda is a corporate lawyer at a large firm with prospects of becoming a partner. Samantha works in P. R. and is a very successful executive, having a number of famous clients for whom she works, and Charlotte works as a dealer at an art museum.

However throughout the seven years for which the show has been running these careers have been affected. Carrie has written for 'Vogue' magazine, had two books published but had to use the bus instead of a taxi because she couldn't afford it. Samantha has had film star Lucy Liu as a client who fired her for swearing, and Richard Wright with whom she had an affair and could no longer work with. Miranda has had to give up hours and the prospect of becoming a partner as she has given birth to a baby boy.

Charlotte has given up working all together to start a family, which has been unsuccessful.

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Again these characters have many garish flaws that have affected their jobs and lives, but because there is such a variety within all four women, the audience can connect with them and therefore this will increase ratings. Another aspect that is reflected in all three shows is the openness that all the characters have about their sex lives. This reflects the change in social trends as people have become more relaxed about discussing sex. In Jayne Eyre's era it would have been more of a taboo than today. Moreover, the shows also include gay characters that tend to be best friends with the main character.

In Bridget Jones' Diary this character is Tom, Bridget's best friend, and in Sex and the City it is Stanford Blatch, again Carrie's best friend. The females in Sex and the City seem to have many sexual encounters with men and women, but this is probably assumable from the title of the show. However, these women seem to use sex as a method of power, especially Samantha. As I have already stated Samantha had an affair with a client, and has possibly slept with every straight man in the show, and also at least two women. It seems that Samantha uses this as way of getting to the top of her game.

It could definitely be said that Samantha has inhabited many of the traits shown by the stereotypical man. By being extremely dominant, slightly ruthless, proud and sometimes cold-hearted Samantha has defeated the most hard-nosed businessman. So it would seem that the singleton by becoming more empowered is reversing roles with the bachelor. Currently there are many programmes showing on both British and American television discussing the effect that Sex and the City have had on the social

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scene, as the final season of the show draws to a close. One programme on channel four discussed the effect it has had with real New Yorkers.

The women interviewed said that not only had the show changed fashion and style in New York, but it has also made being single cool again. One woman described being single before the show as a having a 'scarlet' letter, but now it is considered cool to single. So the singleton has not only revolutionised the stereotype of the single woman from dowdy spinster to professional and aloof singletons. But it has also made it easier for both male and especially females to be single. There is no longer the need for some one to settle down and marry, and can now follow the examples of our relatively new heroines and work their way up the ladder.

Moreover, these characters have explored the fact that it is not unacceptable to have flaws, and by showing them they have empowered other females to correct and embrace their flaws. This new breed of woman is more confident, sexually and professionally, competitive, and courageous. Therefore by acquiring traits commonly seen in the stereotypical man the gap and negative connotation between the sexes is being reduced. Perhaps future generations will not have to be faced with as much stigma attached to the categories, that the media instil us into, with thanks to these pioneering characters flaunted by the media.