

Sexuality: Sex and the City and Beyond

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Introduction

This essay aims to critically discuss the American TV series Sex and the City which has become a cultural icon with its six hilarious seasons along with two movies. This series is based on Candace Bushnell's book, Sex and the City, which exhibits an example of the sexual ability of women aged above 35 years. The idea presented in the series and movie was based on the premise that the chances of finding true love are significantly reduced for women after the age of thirty-five years. The series called for enormous viewership by the audience as it presented the ideas of finding love even after the age of thirty-five. Furthermore, the show is centred on women who are extremely beautiful and successful in their career and are in their mid-thirties. In this essay, a critical debate has been presented on the sexuality represented in the series as it represents the American culture.

Sex and the City have changed the perceptions of a lot of women with respect to sexuality as they now have a language through which they can talk about their experiences and sexual relationships with men. It has presented how female friendships are more important for women than anything else. The entire series has presented a range of sex toys, engorged breasts of women and vibrators. It is a debate as for how women choose to have sexual pleasure in order to express their sexuality. Before this show, no one really talked about female sex toys and masturbation but Sex and the City highlighted a completely different aspect of women sexuality.

Discussion

The Sex and the City were dubbed by this name as previously Candace Bushnell named it Love and the City as it would attract more readers and viewers towards it. However, the content of the show deeply focused towards sexuality of women who loves to have sex as they are over thirty-five years of age. In most part of the shows, the relationship between sex and love is dichotomized, although the characters were married or in a monogamous relationship at the end of each series. If the first season of the show is concentrated on, the women have sexual encounters with their partners along with the glorification of their dates.¹

The women perspectives on having relationships and sex have been changed since the 19th century significantly. However, in the present situation, women have become more broad-minded in the essence of dating, casual sex, relationships and they are also likely to view openness in the sexuality as normal. The television series named as Sex and the city gives a different perspective with respect to the 21st century on the grounds that a group of single women living in the vicinity of Manhattan loves to have sex even at the age of thirty-five years.^{2,3}

The show has presented the idea that beautiful and successful women can have sex and can talk about sex like men. This gives a hype to the argument that women can express their sexuality regardless of their ages and their promiscuity can be excused because sexual vulgarity is portrayed as the comic gimmick in the show. This devalues the myth that only men can think

¹Lena Edlund "Sex and the City." *The Scandinavian Journal of Economics* 107, no. 1 (2005): 25-44.

²Kuhn, Annette. *The power of the image: Essays on representation and sexuality*. Routledge, 2013.

³Robinson, Penelope. "Mobilizing postfeminism: Young Australian women discuss Sex and the City and Desperate housewives." *Continuum* 25, no. 1 (2011): 111-124.

of or have sex or can sleep around with women as the women can also have sex with men according to their sexuality and wish.⁴

It is also debatable that the characters in the series have different perspectives on sex but they all share a similar mindset that having casual sex with men is acceptable. However, in a book by Deborah Jemyn, it was critically presented that the show never breaches their actual mindset as the world is filled up with sexually aggressive women who are considered sexy by men. If the episode “Sex and the City” is taken into consideration of season 1 which was aired on June 6, 1998, their sexuality can be well highlighted. As in the birthday party of Miranda aged thirty-something, Carrie and her friends vow to stop worrying about a perfect partner for marriage and started thinking “like a man” as they think of having sex only. In one of the dialogues by Samantha in the birthday party represents the true meaning of sexuality which is as follows:

SAMANTHA: Listen, you're successful saleswomen in Manhattan. You have two choices in your life: either you can bang your head on the wall or try to find a relationship which you can screw later and just have sex like a man. To which Carrie got a hilarious reply:

Carrie: With Dildos?

Samantha: No.... I mean without getting involved in a serious relationship! Just go and have fun.

Carrie: But I used to sleep with handsome boys at the age of twenty, how can I get a good looking handsome guy at this age?

It is debatable here that the nature of the dialogue between the characters represents that women have more sexuality than men as they reach the age of maturity. However, it can be asserted that casual sex is just a strategy in order to find true love or live an independent life. It most ironic that how the sexuality of women is represented in this episode as the sex with men

⁴Deborah Jemyn. *Sex and the City*. Wayne State University Press, 2009.

was planned in order to think same as men do about sex.⁵ Furthermore, Carrie in this episode also talked about using sex toys to fulfil their sexual desire, on the other hand, Samantha asked her to make with men for just having fun rather involving in a serious relationship. Generally, the society talks about men and their sexuality, where the series of Sex and the City focused on the feminist empowerment, as they really talked about men. Moreover, the character also discusses lesbianism and heterosexuality due to the insecurity that other women will steal their men.⁶

The second episode of Series 1 is titled “Models and Mortals”. This episode has critically presented different aspects of sexuality which represents a critique of stereotypical sexuality in women characters. This episode also addressed the use of fashion and hyperbolic sexuality which is known as a comprehensive attempt to clarify the points as to whether Carrie was obsessed with men or her age. In one of the scenes of episode two, the sexuality can be asserted by the conversation between Carrie, Nick and Miranda as,

Carrie: Last Night my best friend Miranda was invited by a successful sports agent Nick Waxler at a dinner party who once told her that she has got some nice and seducing legs.

Nick: Okay! So should I call you an old movie star who loves to fuck when they were young?

Miranda: Dead or Alive?

Carrie: He was so gay, Miranda!

Miranda: I adore him.

From the dialogues, it is highly debatable that the real issue in this episode is the sexuality of men as to some characters, Nick was seen to be gay which does not make him gay actually. The real issue here is the female identity within the essence of romance as men can be in a heterosexual relationship while women cannot as they can also get attracted towards female

⁵Phil Hubbard. *Sex and the city: geographies of prostitution in the urban West*. Ashgate Publishing, 1999.

⁶*Sex And The City*, 1st ed. (AlbinMichell, 2017).

which portrayed in this episode. However, central to the series, the women can negotiate over their dating scenes with men as a “toxic bachelors”. It can also be made evident that men are objectified while women are multidimensional.⁷

To critically present the ideas, the construction of characters and their attitude towards having sex in the mid of thirty’s is considered as normal for them. Moreover, from this episode, it can be asserted that Carrie can date anyone she wants and also can have sex with the men but the question again strikes as who is Mr Right for Carrie? The episode has a groundbreaking representation of sexuality and sex which is again ideal for lesbianism but on the other hand, considered as mainstream in the American culture.⁸ In the next scene, Samantha and Barkley were having sex when Carrie stepped in:

Carrie: (Samantha was having ultimate validation sex with Barkley)

Samantha: (While looking for the camera), so where is that?

Barkley: what?

Samantha: the CAMERA?

Barkley: Who told you about that? Your friend?

Samantha: Uh-Huh

Barkley: Don't worry, I won't tape you! I tape only models while having sex.

Samantha: I won't mind getting taped.

The dialogue above explains that women are so much obsessed with sexuality that they do not even care even if they are getting taped while having sex. Their sex obsession has made them fearless about the feeling of getting respect from the opposite gender. The entire focus of

⁷Jane Arthurs. "Sex and the City and consumer culture: Remediating postfeminist drama." *Feminist Media Studies* 3, no. 1 (2003): 83-98.

⁸Rebecca Brasfield, "Rereading: Sex And The City: Exposing The Hegemonic Feminist Narrative", *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 34, no. 3 (2006): 130-139.

the episode is towards getting taped while having sex where the previous episode was focused towards using sex toys for fulfilling the sexual desires. However, the lifestyle of the characters in Sex and the City revolves around socialising with the friends and building a particular identity.⁹¹⁰

In the third episode of Sex and the City Series 1 entitled as “Bay of Married Pig” is one of the hilarious episodes in which Carrie was invited at Hampton’s beach house by Peter. In the morning, Carrie bumped into the room of Peter where she found out Peter was not wearing any underwear. However, the episode presented that Patience and Peter was one of the perfect married couples as they were fun loving and smart. As in the dialogues for episode 3,

Peter: Married women are threatened as they can have sex anytime with anyone they want.

Carrie: We can?

Peter: And they are afraid that they can have sex anywhere with their husbands.

Carrie: Uh-Oh! But I can never sleep with a married man.

This episode is one of the hilarious episodes of Sex and the City as it interrogates over the groundbreaking representation of sexuality and sex. This appears to be an ideal place where a continuous process of exploration about lesbianism and the mainstream culture of the gay relationship were focused on. The lesbianism emerged as the fashion trends in American culture while gay relationships are celebrated as pride in America.¹¹

The question arises that gay men can build a large fan following. In this theory, the fashion world is the paradigm which provides opportunities to the individuals to represent

⁹H. Kokko and D. J. Rankin, "Lonely Hearts Or Sex In The City? Density-Dependent Effects In Mating Systems", *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 361, no. 1466 (2006): 319-334.

¹⁰Butler, Jess. "For white girls only?: Postfeminism and the politics of inclusion." *Feminist Formations* 25, no. 1 (2013): 35-58.

¹¹Astrid Henry. "Orgasms and empowerment: Sex and the City and the third wave feminism." *Reading sex and the city* (2004): 65-82.

themselves in the way they want. In this episode, the female characters are continuously trying to reconstruct their identity through their external appearance and through their dressing styles.

Carrie is presented as the oldstyle fashionable lady who also symbolises the American culture and fashion. She cannot stop herself from being sexy and having with other men same as her erotic femininity is presented through her dresses which cause her modesty and exposure.¹²

In episode 4, the Sex and the City season 1 “Valley of the Twenty-Something Guys” were another series of social events in which Mr Big and Carrie bumped together in the social event which further leads to organising “first drink” event. However, on a night out, Carrie meets Timothy Olyphant for a chuck, which turns out to be glamour for Carrie in the daylight.¹³

This episode was much focused towards the female friendship phenomenon, togetherness and solidarity. Moreover, this episode was more special for Carrie as she was having a crush on Mr Big and wants to carry on with a serious relationship with Mr Big. The sexuality of Carrie made her obsessed with Mr Big as she wanted to move forward in a relationship with Mr Big as he was a business tycoon and a tall handsome guy.¹⁴

Conclusion

It can be observed from that the characters in the series Sex and the City want nothing more than sex. Their characteristics are also associated mainly with the male sexuality. The main characters of the series were highly professional and successful female who wanted to thrive and excel in their lives more than men. Similarly, they wanted to think about sex and express their

¹²Jane Gerhard, "Sex And The City", *Feminist Media Studies* 5, no. 1 (2005): 37-49.

¹³Lorié, Áine F. "Forbidden fruit or conventional apple pie? A look at Sex and the City's reversal of the female gender." *Media, Culture & Society* 33, no. 1 (2011): 35-51.

¹⁴Imelda Whelehan. *The Feminist Bestseller: From Sex and the Single Girl to Sex and the City*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

sexuality as men generally do. The series also addresses the issues of women's sexual freedom as compared to men.

By analysing the episodes of the series 1, it is difficult to state that both sexes are treated equally. Women still fall victim to stereotyping in terms of sexuality while men can think of having sex whenever they want. Women need to be granted respect, authority, freedom and power in various communication forms and media without feeling ashamed of it. They need to act bravely and should be embraced by the society with open arms.

Considering the immense popularity of Sex and the City among women, the discussion on female sexuality proves that there have been marked feminine footsteps in the series, which has encouraged women to increase their voice from different perspectives of women empowerment. The analysis of the episodes emphasised the importance and diversity of female sexuality which is considered problematic in various social circles.

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