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A New Look Each Day.  
Representations of Female  
Identities in *Sex and the City*

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## INTRODUCTION

*Sex and the City* is one of the most successful TV series of our time and it presents the lives of four successful single women living in New York City. In the series questions of contemporary womanhood are addressed and discussed by the four main characters. *Sex and the City* can be classified as a postfeminist text as it deals with the struggles and the problems women are confronted with today. Postfeminism serves as the theoretical framework of the series. The term postfeminism led to many discussions and controversies among scholars and feminists. It can be stated that postfeminism cannot be easily defined and definitions can vary according to the writer's individual meaning and use.

In this thesis postfeminism refers to women's different identities after feminist achievements. The principle of postfeminism is that established binaries between personal and professional and feminine and feminist do not exist anymore. Postfeminism emphasizes individualism and sexual freedom and it promotes the idea that women can combine all their desires and can 'have it all'. Some critics condemn the ideas of postfeminism and claim that feminism makes women unhappy and that they should give up their desires to 'have it all'. These critics consider single women as a social problem and they accuse them of neglecting their feminine duties. In the TV series *Sex and the City* the single lifestyle of women is promoted and is introduced as an alternative lifestyle opposed to marriage and parenthood.

The main interest of this paper lies in the question of how female identities are constructed in *Sex and the City* and how the four main characters succeed in achieving their postfeminist goals. Identity "refers to the sense of self and allegiance to a particular gender, sexual preference, race, religion, class, country, etc." (Street 106). The main argument is based on the assumption that the female identities are constructed through the characters' identification with values, through their sexuality and through their fashion style. All these factors contribute to the construction of the four main characters and underline their personality. The representation of the women's female identities will be analyzed throughout the series and compared to each other.

The thesis examines how the characters' female identities correspond to the gender norms established in society. Concepts such as singledom, marriage, romance and friendship will be taken into consideration. As *Sex and the City* favours singledom, it subverts traditional notions of femininity and presents a new image of women. The TV series addresses female themes and there are discussions about sex, relationships, femininity and marriage. *Sex and the City* reflects the zeitgeist of the period and it deals with controversial topics, such as female sexuality, masturbation, abortion, infertility and cancer. The four main characters participate in overt sex talk and share their most intimate experiences. For the first time female sexuality is put on screen and is no longer considered as a taboo. Women's right to sexuality and sexual pleasure is encouraged in *Sex and the City*. The TV series is not only groundbreaking in dealing with taboos established in society, but it also rejects the negative image of single women and the myth of romantic love and the male hero.

The importance of fashion will be discussed. Fashion constructs identity and signals group affiliation, culture, gender, sexuality and lifestyle. The four women express their character through fashion. Each character is different and has a different way of dressing, therefore the characters cannot be exchanged. Furthermore, they distinguish themselves from others through their fashion style. It can be argued that fashion signals messages of who the characters are and underlines their female identity. Furthermore, fashion has an existence of its own within the TV series. *Sex and the City* set fashion trends and made particular fashion items and brands popular, such as Chanel, Gucci, Manolo Blahnik, Dolce & Gabbana and Ralph Lauren. The TV series influenced the fashion world and society. The characters' fashion styles were copied throughout the world.

# 1. POSTFEMINISM

## 1.1. WHAT IS POSTFEMINISM?

The term postfeminism can take on many different meanings. There are three possible definitions. Firstly, postfeminism can refer to the period after second-wave feminism of the 1980s and 1990s, namely to our present. Weedon describes second-wave feminism with the following words:

Second-wave feminism [...] made gendered subjectivity a central focus of feminist politics alongside the struggles for equal pay, education, an end to sexual double standards and the exploitation of women in all areas of life. (111)

Secondly, some writers define postfeminism as backlash against feminism. They believe that feminism is not important anymore, because equality has been achieved. Thirdly, some writers broaden the meaning of postfeminism and see it as a frame of reference with other movements, such as postmodernism, post-structuralism and post-colonialism (Kim 321).

Despite the different definitions for most writers postfeminism refers to the period after second-wave feminism. According to them, postfeminism goes beyond second-wave feminism and deals with women's different identities and their struggle to combine them. Some writers use the term third-wave feminism instead of postfeminism. Gerhard defines postfeminism as follows:

[...] postfeminism explores the new possibilities afforded to women in the wake of feminist legal gains while at the same time reasserts and re-naturalizes what in the nineteenth century was framed as the separate spheres of gender. Separate spheres for our historic moment are not defined through physical spaces along the public/private divide, but through ideas about the distinctive psychological reality of women. In its emphasis on women's unique reality, one that takes place alongside that of men's and children's, this definition of postfeminism marks a change in, or restoration of, heterosexual power relations [...] The PFW wants to 'have it all' as she refuses to dichotomize and choose between her public and

private, feminist, and feminine identities. She rearticulates and blurs the binary distinctions between feminism and femininity, between professionalism and domesticity, refuting monolithic and homogeneous definitions of postfeminist subjectivity. (98)

Genz takes a similar view and she draws attention to the tensions between women's different subject positions:

The postfeminist landscape generates complex and ambiguous portrayals of femaleness, femininity, and feminism, exploring the contingent and unresolvable tension between these subject positions. In particular, the PFW navigates the conflicts between her feminist values and her feminine body, between individual and collective achievement, between professional career and personal relationship. (98)

Genz concludes that postfeminist singles strive to satisfy all their desires despite difficulties:

The postfeminist singleton endeavors to find a subject position that permits her to hang onto the material and social gains achieved by the women's movement as well indulge in her romantic longings. (102) [...] For the twenty-first-century woman, 'Having it all' is a distinct possibility and reality but, simultaneously, an unavoidable dilemma that the PFW has to confront and struggle with. (115-116)

It can be stated that postfeminism presents a new woman that is sexually confident and accepts the sexual difference (Kim 325). Tukachinsky argues that postfeminism "shifts the focus on gender differences and plurality of women voices" (188) and "examines the women's difficulties once they have achieved many of the goals of the second-wave feminism" (Gamble qtd. in Tukachinsky 188). Hammers points out that the element of choice is important and claims that "postfeminism moves away from the power of collectivity so central to second-wave politics and emphasizes individual choice" (qtd. in Southard 152). Postfeminism is characterized by its individualism and its emphasis on choice with regard to marriage and sexual freedom (Henry 75). However, Genz draws

attention to the controversies of postfeminism and notes that postfeminism cannot be easily put into practice by believing that

the most challenging and controversial depictions of postfeminism's project to 'have it all' consider the PFW's struggle to integrate 'it all' into her life and combine her job aspirations and material success with her desire for a rewarding home life, her feminist beliefs in agency and independence with the pleasures of feminine adornment and heterosexual romance. (98)

*Sex and the City* can be seen as a postfeminist text, because it deals with feminist struggles between the individual and the collective, feminism and femininity and agency and victimization. The main characters are confronted with these struggles and they are part of their female identities. Moreover, the TV series challenges social norms (Southard 149). *Sex and the City* explores women's relationships to power, it represents feminist solutions and activism and it presents gender and sexuality as flexible categories (Lotz 115-116). Tukachinsky points out that *Sex and the City* "takes women's financial independence for granted and integrates women in men's sexual discourse" (183) The characters can consume men and clothes, because they have achieved economic, intellectual and sexual freedom (Richards 148).

The television show presents more complex representations of sexuality and the choices women have to make between work and family compared to other TV series (Press 139). Within the TV series the four characters have to make decisions concerning sexual partners, marriage, motherhood and careers (Henry 72). Henry observes that "central to the show's appeal among female viewers (and critics) has been its frank discussion of female sexuality and its refreshing representation of the lives of contemporary women" (66). She explains that

in its bold representation of women's pleasure, *Sex and the City* offers a refreshing alternative to mass-media depictions of female sexuality. *Sex and the City* reflects an important – if limited – vision of female empowerment, a feminism that mirrors contemporary third wave attempts to celebrate both women's power and women's sexuality, to create a world where one can be both feminist and sexual. (82)

Arthurs concludes that *Sex and the City* can be seen as an example of a “post-feminist, woman-centered drama produced for prime-time network television in the US (*Consumer Culture* 83) and points out that “*Sex and the City* explores [...] feminine identity in a postfeminist, postmodern consumer culture” (*Consumer Culture* 88).

## 1.2. THE NOTION OF THE POSTFEMINIST SINGLE

Genz describes the postfeminist single as

[a] young, unattached, and mostly city-dwelling woman who is caught between the enjoyment of her independent urban life and her [...] yearning to find “Mr. Right” with whom to settle down [...] The postfeminist singleton moves *across* binary distinctions and she is unwilling to compromise on her joint desires for job and romance, her feminist and feminine values. (99)

The subject of the postfeminist single has been taken up in a wide range of different texts, for example in print, broadcast and film texts. These texts deal with the experiences of single, successful women in cities (Genz 99). Postfeminist texts portray women’s struggles of contemporary womanhood and their contradictory aspirations (Genz 102). Genz argues that “the postfeminist singleton expresses the pains and pleasures of her problematical quest for balance in a world where personal and professional, feminist and feminine positions are mutually pervasive” (104).

However, the representation of singles in postmodernism has also been criticized. Some people blame feminism for the lack of control of women’s lives and encourage women to give up their ambitions and their project to ‘have it all’ (Genz 104). Genz comments on this critique and notes that “the single status [...] is pathologized as a deviant and deficient problem” (99). Furthermore, some scholars criticize feminism’s achievements and are opposed to a feminist struggle (Kim 320). These feminist critics claim that

working women are too feminist to be feminine and, in their search for professional success on male terms, they are bound to end up single, unloved, and fraught with neuroses. (Genz 104)

Faludi points out that feminism provides women with more choices than ever, which troubles their relationships with men (qtd. in Genz 104). In her bestselling book “Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women” the author challenges the women’s movement and its achievements and she claims that women are unhappy despite the women’s liberation. Faludi describes this phenomenon as the backlash to feminism and states that

the press, carried by tides it rarely fathomed, acted as a force that swept the general public, powerfully shaping the way people would think and talk about the feminist legacy and the ailments it supposedly inflicted on women. It coined the terms that everyone used: “the man shortage”, “the biological clock”, “the mommy track”, and “postfeminism.” Most important, the press was the first to set forth and solve for the mainstream audience the paradox in women’s lives, the paradox that would become so central to the backlash: women have achieved so much yet feel so dissatisfied; it must be feminism’s achievements, not society’s resistance to these partial achievements, that is causing women all this pain. (77)

Moreover, Faludi expresses her negative attitude towards powerful women and Gerhard describes her central message as follows:

Women get too powerful; men, via the hegemonic force of media, launch campaigns to convince women of feminism’s failure, represented in Backlash as day care crisis, a corporate glass ceiling, the difficulty of finding men, and other false issues drummed up by ‘the man’ to keep women down. (40)

Single and successful women are frequently stigmatized in society. They are presented as evil and neurotic and they are accused of not giving enough care to their female duties. They are opposed to traditional housewives and they are seen as a menace to the family unit. However, in most postfeminist texts the stereotype of the single woman is subverted. Single women reject the negative description of unmarried career women and they try to combine their feminine, public and

private desires (Genz 104-105). Genz describes the postfeminist single with the following words:

The postfeminist singleton is unwilling to compromise on her job and relationship ambitions and, despite discouraging setbacks, perseveres in her attempt to realize her utopian project. Armed with a feminist consciousness, she is alert to the tyranny of femininity that constructs the female subject as a passive object of male desire. Yet, simultaneously, she is also aware of her feminine power and its potential to be deployed in new and liberating ways. Similarly, she rejects backlash representations of the abject and psychotic singleton [...] (108)

### 1.3. THE FOUR POSTFEMINIST SINGLES IN *SEX AND THE CITY*

*Sex and the City* describes the conflict between work and private life that the protagonists are confronted with. All four main characters are economically independent (Arthurs *Consumer Culture* 84-85). Sarah Jessica Parker draws attention to the relationship between the women's movement and the characters' life choices and identity by observing that

these characters, and the actresses playing them, reap enormous benefits from the women's movement. The characters have sexual freedom, opportunity, and the ability to be successful ... If you grow up with the right to choose, vote, dress how you want, sleep with who[m] you want, and have the kind of friendships you want, those things are the fabric of who you are. (qtd. in Sohn 24)

Carrie writes her newspaper column at home and integrates her own sex life and that of her friends into her research. Samantha works in public relations. Charlotte works in an art gallery and Miranda works as a lawyer (Arthurs *Consumer Culture* 84-85). The characters of the TV series *Sex and the City* are multifaceted and they do not correspond to tropes, such as the bitch, the slut, the good girl and the working woman. Gray describes the TV series and the four main characters with the following words:

The series, a comedy with sharp writing, centers on the four main characters: Carrie, an intelligent, fashion-forward columnist for the



fictional New York newspaper; Miranda Hobbes, a smart, self-assured, seemingly cynical lawyer; Charlotte York, an optimistic, prim and proper, one-time art dealer; and Samantha Jones, a confident, high-powered, sexually adventurous public relations executive. (401)

Richards notes that “these women are highly successful in their chosen careers and embrace the intellectual and sexual freedom, and independence that their success has given them” (147). The critic T. Edwards states that the four women “live the supafly life and discard men quicker than last season’s bag and shoes” (37). Baxter takes on a similar view and describes the four characters with the following words:

The characters were shown as agentic controllers of their own destinies, searching for a life of their own, professionally powerful, financially independent, exulting in consumerism, sexually active and yet apparently free from moral judgement. (91)

Kristin Davis says: “I love that the four of us are so different, that we can have the variety of choices displayed without saying, ‘This is the right one’ or ‘This is the wrong one’ “ (qtd. in Sohn 44). Vause claims that the four women are “varied as their fashion tastes, but each faces obstacles intricately tied to gender” (76). Bruzzi and Gibson suggest that

both Carrie and Charlotte are unwaveringly feminine, while Samantha and the fourth protagonist Miranda are less consistent gender roles [...] Samantha, through her power suits, her attitude to sex, and her fleeting lesbianism, is coded as having masculine attributes that are somewhat at odds with her voracious sexuality [...] Miranda’s fashions are determined by her professional persona. (*Fashion* 122)

A similar view is hold by Kuruc who comments on the different personalities of the four characters and argues that

the ladies of Sex and the City are diverse in many ways [...] Carrie’s ‘wacky’ ensembles connote her multi-faceted persona; while Charlotte’s conservative attire symbolizes her conventionality and predictability.

Samantha and Miranda depict [...] women as promiscuous ‘cougars’ and women as successful through masculinization (212).

Nevertheless, Vause observes that all four characters reject the traditional concept of femininity by stating that

sensitive and expressive Carrie Bradshaw [...], cynical and down-to-earth Miranda Hobbes, riotously funny and sexually progressive Samantha Jones [...], and even sweet and straitlaced Charlotte York [...] defy traditional femininity in ways that would make the Christian right boil in indignation (76).

Kim compares the female character of *Sex and the City* to other characters of TV programs and comes to the conclusion that “*Sex and the City* [...] offers more complex, innovative, and ‘destabilizing’ representations of women through the politics of sexuality” (320). She claims that

HBO’s *Sex and the City*, for example, displays (gloriously) and debates (complexly) women’s desire – for men, for work, for satisfaction. [...] the women in *Sex and the City* don’t just fantasize in a surreal world. They don’t just talk, they do; and they don’t just think, they act. They also make mistakes and learn and move on and continue to make choices. All the women in *Sex and the City*, Carrie, Miranda, Charlotte and Samantha, are on display: their professional choices, their choices in lovers, their clothes and their bodies. (323-324)

The women are satisfied with their lives, although they are complicated and imperfect (Kim 330). The four characters in *Sex and the City* do not try to achieve an ideal or search for perfection. The women accept their lives and enjoy their friendships (327). Kim points out that

the women in *Sex and the City* wield control textually as well as performatively, perhaps because they are not in pursuit of an elusive ideal. Carrie, Miranda, Charlotte, and Samantha have imperfect (albeit pretty glamorous) lives and are not seeking perfection. Instead, contrary to the postfeminist angst represented in larger culture, although sometimes

troubled, in the end these postfeminist women are shown as satisfied with their lives and, more important, with their friendships. (327)

### *1.3.1. CARRIE*

Carrie Bradshaw is a columnist who writes weekly articles called “Sex and the City” for a newspaper. She has a on and off relationship with Mr. Big (Brasfield 130). Carrie splits up with Mr. Big, when she finds out that he does not like her as much as she likes him. She wants him to tell her that she is “the one”, but he does not. Carrie believes then in finding someone for whom she will be the right one (Episode 12 “Oh Come All Ye Faithful”). She reunites with Mr. Big for a brief time, but finally decides to leave him. When he marries another woman, Carrie is shocked. She comes to the conclusion then that Mr. Big cannot deal with complex women and she appreciates her independence again (Cramer 417-418).

Maybe some women aren't meant to be tamed. Maybe they need to run free until they find someone just as wild to run with. (Episode 30 “Ex and the City”)

When Carrie moves to Paris with Alexandr, her boyfriend, it seems rather cold, dirty and unpleasant and does not correspond to a fairy tale. Carrie loses her identity, although she receives expensive gifts from Alexandr (Thornham 35-36). This is also shown symbolically when Carrie actually loses her nameplate necklace (Handyside 416). Paris is for Carrie an isolating and lonely place (417). Carrie reflects on her present situation then:

It's time to be clear about who I am. I am someone who is looking for love – real love – ridiculous, inconvenient, consuming, can't-live-without-each-other love. And I don't think that love is here, in this expensive suite, in this lovely hotel, in Paris.

When she meets her fiancé's ex-wife, the woman says to her: “Alex tells me you were a writer in New York”. Carrie replies then: “I am a writer”. Finally Carrie acknowledges her losses, which include love, her work as an author and friendship. She knows then that she can have all she wishes for in New York.

Carrie's identity is restored and she states in the voice over: "But the most exciting, challenging and significant relationship of all is the one you have with yourself. And if you find someone to love the *you* you love, well, that's just fabulous" (Thornham 36). Carrie breaks off her relationship with Alexandr and continues her relationship with Mr. Big (Baxter 92). Handyside says about Carrie that "in New York, she has found someone to love the part of herself she loves – i.e. the part of her that she can be true" (417).

### 1.3.2. *MIRANDA*

Miranda Hobbs is a career woman and succeeds in becoming partner at her law firm. She is the first one among her friends who becomes pregnant. After birth Miranda is a single mother for a few months. She has got a cynical attitude towards relationships and is the reasonable one in relation to her friends (Brasfield 131). It is surprising that she becomes mother, because she does not like children. This attitude is made evident when she takes for example a packet of condoms to Laney Berlin's baby shower (*Maternal Instinct* Akass).

When Miranda has a baby, she wants to be an ideal mother, but is worried about not becoming one. She discovers that she is pregnant when Charlotte is told that she is infertile (Tropp 863-864). When Miranda finds out that she is pregnant, she takes an abortion into consideration, which reminds Carrie of her own abortion when she was younger. Carrie regrets it and is very sad about it. Miranda changes her mind in the end and decides to keep the baby. She becomes a single mother and is supported by her friends (Press 145). Vause claims that "the show takes an unapologetically pro-choice stance" (77). Miranda decides to keep the baby, but she does not give up her professional career for her baby. She has problems combining childcare and her job as a lawyer (Tropp 865).

Miranda has got a longer relationship with Steve, a bartender. He is also the father of her son Brady. The two of them get married, because Miranda proposed to Steve (Martin 17). When Steve is diagnosed as having testicular cancer, Miranda looks after him and supports him. She gets pregnant after Steve's testicular operation (Tropp 870).

### 1.3.3. SAMANTHA

Samantha Jones has got a notorious reputation for her sexual experiences and represents a male attitude towards sex and relationships. She is also the oldest one among her friends. Samantha is successful in public relations, but she does not like conventional relationships with emotional involvement. However, at the end of the series she is in a long-term relationship with a younger man (Brasfield 131). Vause draws attention to the fact that “like Miranda, Samantha seems to have difficulty with intimacy and emotional expression, a factor that may partially explain her character’s phobia of relationships” (78). Turner takes a similar view and describes Samantha with the following words:

Samantha embodies female sexuality in excess with her constant dirty talk, voracious sexual appetite, and endless chain of non-monogamous relationships. She seems to buck conventions of sexual piety and the feminized oversentimentalizing of relationships.

Samantha can be seen as the ‘slut’ of the TV series (Atwood *Sluts and Riot Grrrls* 233). Vause argues that “Samantha constantly battles accusations of ‘slut’ and ‘tramp’ “ (78). The word ‘slut’ is defined in the Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary as “a woman who has sexual relationships with a lot of men without any emotional involvement”. Slut is often used in the Madonna-Whore dichotomy to refer to women’s sexuality.

However, the meaning of the word ‘slut’ can be re-evaluated and can take on a positive meaning (Atwood *Sluts and Riot Grrrls* 233-234). In some texts sexual promiscuity is interpreted as good (233-235). Shamburg for example defines a ‘slut’ as a “woman who takes her pleasure as a man does ... without guilt or remorse” (qtd. in Atwood *Sluts and Riots Grrls* 235). Sutton draws attention to the fact that the revision of the word ‘slut’ can also serve the purpose of “trying to construct a new societal identity that does not conform to traditional definitions of femininity” (qtd. in Atwood *Sluts and Riot Grrls* 236). Kipnis and Reeder consider overt female sexuality as a “new school of feminism” and as “playing with femininity”. They reject traditional definitions of feminism and draw attention to the fact that “you can be a bombshell and wear black panties and still

be really smart”. Attwood concludes that ‘slut’ is “a space of resistance, change and new possibility” (Attwood *Sluts and Riot Grrrls* 244). Kim points out that Samantha “represents woman’s full and passionate desire, unleashed and unpunished” (329).

When Samantha has an argument with Carrie, because she judged her behaviour, Samantha defends herself and her defiance of social norms by saying: “I will not be judged by you or society. I will wear whatever – and blow whomever – I want as long as I can breathe and kneel!” (Vause 78). Samantha does not become sentimental over relationships and she does not become emotionally involved in sex (Turner). Vause describes Samantha’s character as follows:

Samantha’s wild sexcapades and brazen frankness make her an ever-present source of comic relief, as well as the most radical character. She’s happy to bed men of every classification (businessmen, firefighters, college students, monks, elderly millionaires, rap artists, you name it). (77)

Samantha does not want to have a baby and is happy about remaining childless. Samantha enjoys sex, but she never wants to become pregnant (Tropp 864). Fernández-Morales claims that “Samantha is presented as the ultimate non-mother” (677). She does not like children and she does not feel comfortable in their presence (Fernández-Morales 677). This is made evident when Carrie persuades Samantha to look after Miranda’s son (Episode 72 “Critical Condition”). Samantha uses her own vibrator to calm down the baby, because the vibrator chair is broken (Tropp 864). In another scene Samantha complains about the noise of a child in a restaurant and gets spaghetti thrown all over her (Fernández-Morales 677-678). Samantha justifies her choice by saying: “There are lots of fabulous things in life that don’t include babies”. According to Fernández-Morales, Samantha is “proud of her life choices and always full of self-esteem, not needing motherhood to complete her identity” (678). In one scene Carrie calls Samantha a “powerful hybrid: the ego of a man trapped in the body of a woman” (678).

During the series Samantha finds out that she has got breast cancer. Fernández-Morales comments on Samantha’s illness and her character by pointing out that

“the illness story fit[s] for her, because she was strong, independent, and stoic [...] she is the one that can deal with it; the protagonist with the most potential for surmounting difficulties and coming out alive and fabulous” (683). She compares Samantha to the other characters and notes that: [...] in Samantha’s position, Charlotte would probably start pouting, Miranda would be very likely to become numb, and Carrie would live in denial [...]“ (683). Furthermore, Fernández-Morales draws attention to the fact that Samantha’s disease has an effect on her character and her identity by arguing that

from a feminist perspective, the connection between the body and the self is undeniable, and there are certain elements in a woman’s physique and gender identity that are more vulnerable than others to the cancer threat. Living in a youth- and beauty-obsessed world, [...] Samantha can[not] avoid discomfort when [her] treatments start having visible side effects that push them away from the mainstream beauty pattern [...] [she] find[s] [her] own ways into and out of the problems, providing new paths to deepen their characterization [...] (683)

Gray takes a similar view and notes that “Samantha exudes her characteristic strength and confidence throughout this experience [...]” (403). Samantha finally faces her disease and does a symbolic striptease at the breast cancer charity. She stucked to the patriarchal norms before that women have to look perfect and should not show their bodily functions, but she finally accepts the reality and rejects the stereotype during her speech at the charity (Fernández-Morales 684). Samantha’s speech is stiff until she removes her wig and is just herself (Gray 403).

Samantha not only *has* a body; she *is* the body in full function: she sweats, has hot flashes, shakes nervously, and finally takes off her wig in a brave gesture applauded and imitated by other victims in the room [...] within the cancer narrative of SATC this is the moment with the highest potential of empowerment for the female audience, part of which has pointed at the increased awareness, inspiration and hope they derived from this storyline (H. Edwards qtd. in Fernández-Morales 684).

When Samantha’s oncologist tries to find possible reasons for Samantha’s disease, her sexual activities and her childlessness become an issue. As there is no

case of cancer in her family, her oncologist tells her that her lifestyle might be the reason for her tumour. Samantha is furious and leaves the office to find a woman doctor who can understand her. When she tells Carrie about the incident, she shouts: “He’s basically saying that I’m a whore who deserves chemo!” Then Samantha refers to the virgin/prostitute dichotomy and says: “I’ve always chosen sex over babies, and that’s apparently why I got cancer!” The male doctor represents the patriarchal model and the victim-blaming discourse which can be found in science and popular culture (Fernández-Morales 679-680). Wilkinson and Kitzinger note that “the basic argument [...] is that we give ourselves cancer because of unhealthy attitudes, personality and behaviour” (129). Samantha thinks that she is punished for being sexual active until she meets a Catholic nun at the oncologist. The nun is childless and suffers from breast cancer too. Carrie concludes in the voiceover: “Samantha felt a little better knowing that saints and sinners, despite their habits, get the same treatment when it comes to cancer” (Fernández-Morales 679-680).

#### *1.3.4. CHARLOTTE*

Charlotte York runs an art gallery until she decides to leave the job in order to have a family. She is the most conservative one among her friends and longs for a traditional relationship and romantic love. However, Charlotte gets divorced and remarries in the course of the series (Brasfield 131-132). In the final season she marries the divorce lawyer Harry (Martin 18). Vause observes that

Charlotte – who is obsessed with marriage, motherhood, and propriety, and who even converts to Judaism to garner a proposal – is probably the most difficult character for a feminist to stomach. (77)

Charlotte is very happy when she becomes pregnant after her second marriage. When she suffers a miscarriage, she is unable to leave the house. Only when she sees a documentary about Liz Taylor, she finds her inspiration again (Vause 77). Vause draws attention to the fact that Charlotte’s character is



deepened by making her infertile and putting her through a protracted divorce, forcing her to define herself outside of the limitations of the categories men and motherhood. (77)

Charlotte is the only one who is embarrassed by the sex talk of her friends. She absolutely wants to get married and have children. She sees a husband in every man she meets. For example when Charlotte is a bridesmaid, she meets a groomsman and imagines asking him how many children he wants to have (Episode 19 “The Chicken Dance”). Another example is when Charlotte is together with her married friends instead of her single friends in order to be introduced to possible husbands (Episode 31 “Where There’s Smoke”).

Furthermore, Charlotte is the only one among her friends who wants to fulfill the traditional household chores such as cooking and cleaning (Montemurro). When Charlotte is married to Trey she even gives up her career and her job (Episode 55 “Time and Punishment”). When she tells her friends, they are not happy with her decision and ask her about her reasons. Charlotte’s friends cannot understand her decision to stay at home. For them it is unthinkable to give up her job in order to do meaningless things. They see the domestic domain as something negative (Montemurro).

Carrie: But you love your job.

Charlotte: I know. But there’s so much more I could do with my life.

Miranda: Like what?

Charlotte: Well, soon I’ll be pregnant and that’ll be huge. Plus I’m redecorating the apartment and I always wanted to take one of those Indian cooking classes. And sometimes I’ll walk by one of those Colour Me Mine pottery places and I’ll see a woman having just a lovely afternoon glazing a bowl. That’d be a nice change.

Carrie: Well the cooking and the pediatric AIDS stuff is great. But uh, Color Me Mine, sweetie, if I was walking by and saw you in there, well, I’d just keep on walking ... Are you sure you’re not just having a bad work week?

Charlotte: No, that’s not it. I’m quitting, th-that’s what I want to do, yup.

Samantha: Well, be damned sure before you get off the ferris wheel. Because the women wanting to get on are 22, perky, and ruthless.

The next morning Charlotte calls Miranda who is the most feminist character. Charlotte wants her friends' support to make an important decision. In the end, she feels firm in her position through the honest opinions of her friends (Episode 55 "Time and Punishment").

Charlotte: You were so judgmental at the coffee shop yesterday. You think I'm one of those women. One of those women we hate who just works until she gets married. The women's movement is supposed to be about choice. If I choose to quit my job, that's my choice.

Miranda: The women's movement? Jesus Christ I haven't even had coffee yet.

Charlotte: It's my life, and my choice ... Admit it, you're being judgmental! [...]

Miranda: You get behind your choice.

Charlotte: I am behind my choice. I choose my choice.

## 2. THE SUCCESS OF FEMINISM IN *SEX AND THE CITY*

'Can women have sex like men?' Samantha argued that instead of trying to find a long lasting relationship, women should 'just go out and have sex like a man ... without feeling.' Miranda noted that men don't 'want to be in a relationship with you but as soon as you only want them for sex, they don't like it.' Charlotte refused to 'give up on love,' and Carrie asked, 'Are we really that cynical? What about romance?' The roles were defined, the dialogue urbane, and au courant: all the elements were in place. (qtd. in Kuruc 203-204)

The TV series *Sex and the City* was broadcast on HBO for six seasons from 1998 to 2004 (Brasfield 130). Each season consists of 20 episodes and was broadcast in English and in translation in many different countries (Baxter 94). A movie with the same title was released in 2008 (91). The sequel *Sex and the City 2* followed in 2010.

The series portrays the lives of four women in their thirties and forties. The main topics dealt with in *Sex and the City* are relationship dilemmas and dating (Brasfield 130). Tropp comments on the reversal of traditional values in the TV

series and points out that “part of the fascination of *Sex and the City* for viewers, critics, and scholars is that it attempts to challenge traditional notions of sexuality and femininity” (861). Vause draws attention to the portrayal of a different lifestyle for middle-aged women in the series and observes that

for every woman who senses the sinister show of sisterhood hovering beyond the 35-year mark. *Sex and the City* is a valuable antidote. [...] In an entertainment industry where older women are so rarely portrayed beyond minimal roles as wives or married mothers, we cling eagerly to examples of alternative lifestyles for middle-aged females. (78)

As HBO is a private cable channel, more explicit sexual scenes could be included (Rodie 59-60). *Sex and the City* was not restrained by government regulations and by advertisers (Arthurs *Consumer Culture* 88). Sex and nudity were shown on television (Stern 1). The series won the Emmy for Outstanding Comedy Series in 2001. It is claimed that *Sex and the City* became successful, because it covered a niche market. The series is targeted to a specific audience, namely to women (89). Stillion Southard observes that *Sex and the City* “has received both critical acclaim and notable censure, its ability to challenge social norms is significant to its success” (149). Michael Patrick King, the series writer-director-producer states: “I think *Sex and the City* was an expression of something people had been thinking but no-one said. We were just ahead of the curve. We were right about to say it, and we just opened the door [...]” (qtd. in Lawrence and Witcher 115).

Fernandes-Moralez points that the TV series is “amongst the most discussed by feminist cultural critics” (674). The TV series was dealt with in many articles and publications. It led to discussions concerning fashion, sex and relationships, marriage, femininity and masculinity and feminism (Akass and McCabe qtd. in Markle 47-48). Even today *Sex and the City* still enjoys great popularity. Cramer comments on the popularity of the TV series and notes that

it has also incited copycat columns on several college campuses and spurred such commercial spinoffs as tours of New York City where show locations are sites on the itinerary, shopping sprees with discounts on

show-related products, and related books – both about the series and by the stars of the show. (412)

The series was adapted from Candace Bushnell's book. The author is a journalist from New York and her book is based on the writing of a newspaper column (Arthurs *Consumer Culture* 89). The column appeared in the *New York Observer*. *Sex and the City* combines autobiography, newspaper column and lifestyle magazine. It can be said that *Sex and the City* reflects the zeitgeist and portrays the single lifestyle of four women in New York (Attwood *Intimate Adventures* 10). The first person mode is used in the book and it could be kept in the series by employing voice-over. Throughout the series Carrie asks questions and suggests personalized and witty solutions (Arthurs *Consumer Culture* 89).

Can women have sex like a man? ... Are men commitment phobes? ... In New York has monogamy become too much to expect? ... Is motherhood a cult? ... Can sex toys enhance your sex life? ... Does size matter? (qtd. in Arthurs *Consumer Culture* 89)

The TV series is a situational comedy and each episode deals with a particular theme, which it tries to resolve (Gennaro 253). Carrie acts as an expert on sex and she promotes her newspaper column with the words "Carrie Bradshaw knows good sex". For writing her column she draws on her personal experience and her discussions with her three friends. Vause notes that

in every episode, Carrie and the gang ponder the complexities of dating as they sit in a stylish accouterments in chic little New York cafés or in their swanky little New York apartments [...]. (76)

When Carrie first meets Mr. Big, he asks her about her job and the following conversation takes place between them:

Mr. Big: What do you do for work?

Carrie: I'm sort of a sexual anthropologist.

Mr. Big: What, like a hooker?

Carrie: No, I write a column. (Episode 1 "Sex and the City")

Carrie always reflects on her experiences and all episodes are based on individual questions she asks herself and she tries to find answers to. Examples include “Are all men freaks” or “Can there be sex without politics?” Carrie is open to new experiences and adventures (Attwood *Intimate Adventures* 11). Richards compares Carrie’s role as a narrator to the role of a voyeur and claims that

whilst *Sex and the City* is concerned with all four women’s sexual adventures, the programme concentrates mainly on the character of Carrie. She is the show’s observer and commentator, typified in her career as a newspaper columnist. To earn a living she writes about events that have happened to her and her friends in the city. The occurrences that happen within the programme are told from her point of view, which is emphasized by the use of her voiceover narration. Carrie is not an omniscient narrator, but she is the viewer’s guide to life in the city. She is a voyeur who flits from place to place, event to event, sometimes walking the city streets to bring us views of contemporary New York City, its inhabitants and their daily lives. (148)

Carrie is surrounded by her three friends Samantha, Charlotte and Miranda who represent very different roles. Samantha embodies sexual promiscuity, Charlotte stands for sexual naivety and Miranda embodies sexual bitterness (Brunnemer 10). HBO describes the different characters with the following words:

Carrie Bradshaw writes a column about sex and relationships in New York City. With three of her closest friends Samantha Jones, a big time publicist who is more interested on being “on the spot” than in a long term relationship; Miranda Hobbs, a cynic lawyer, who refuses to accept the possibility of being single and fights society against the social pre-concepts to keep a relationship alive and Charlotte McDougal, an art gallery curator who is a bit prudish when it comes to sex, but hasn’t yet lost her faith in finding true love. (qtd. in Gennaro 248)

What makes the TV series successful is the fact that it is woman-centered and that it brings sexual discourse on screen. The protagonists of the series are women and female themes are addressed. Nevertheless, it must be stated that *Sex and the City* only shows the lives of liberal, heterosexual, white, metropolitan, career women (Arthurs *Consumer Culture* 83). Monk holds a similar view and points out that many recent films only focus on visions of “the young, white, wealthy,

narcissistic [...] cleansed of the urban poor, the homeless and ethnic minorities” (195). McHugh, on the other hand, argues that *Sex and the City* is progressive and interrogates common discourses despite the restricted group:

Carrie’s questions and observations organize each episode, contrasting the very different opinions, experiences, and tastes of her friends on an array of different subjects (safe sex, breaking up, telling all), thereby giving sexual agency and voice to a variety of female sexual proclivities represented by this group of white, affluent, heterosexual women. One might wish that the representative group was not so exclusive, but the show does use female narration to make significant interventions in moralistic discourses concerning female sexuality and lifestyle choices. (195-196)

Stern holds a similar view and observes that

[...] no show before or since *SATC* has portrayed women so openly and honestly or focused so closely on female friendships over the male-female dynamic. Yes, men are stereotyped on the show, and yes, women of *Sex and the City* might only be representative of the white, middle-class population. But the series’ viewers found incredible importance in its themes and representations. (17)

Sexual adventures are important in the TV series to portray women’s sexuality and female sexual identity (Attwood *Intimate Adventures* 11-13). Attwood points out that “in *Sex and the City* sexual adventuring becomes a source of reflection and self-development” (14). Whelehan notes that *Sex and the City* shows women’s inner thoughts and feelings about sex and therefore the TV series is in “in dialogue with feminism” (qtd. in Attwood *Intimate Adventures* 16). *Sex and the City* deals with many different feminist issues and perceptions of femininity (Vause 76). Moreover, the TV series addresses controversial topics (Kuruc 201). Stillion Southard holds a similar view and draws attention to the progressiveness of the TV series by pointing out that

the women of *SATC* continue to disrupt standards of femininity through their public, frank discussions about sex [...] confronting taboo issues makes way for political progress. Although the title of the show implies

that sex is a common topic of discussion, SATC's dialogue has braved issues such as abortion, miscarriage, menopause, breast cancer, single parenthood, interracial relationships, and loss of a parent. Sex-centered issues such as homosexuality, bisexuality, masturbation, phone sex, golden showers, sexually-transmitted diseases, sex in public, and impotence (male and female) are discussed explicitly [...]. (160)

Furthermore, the series questions and criticizes the dominant culture and promotes intellectual thinking (Arthurs *Consumer Culture* 95). The TV show differentiates itself from other TV series and movies, which are often based on the marriage plot. *Sex and the City* interrogates traditional attitudes towards sexuality and the public discourse and it foregrounds women's friendship and intimacy (Lee). The TV series goes beyond the norms of marriage and children and it promotes the advantages of an independent lifestyle (Turner).

The TV series shares similarities with reality television, because the dialogues presented in *Sex and the City* resemble real intimate conversations between women about sex. An example for such a conversation is the dialogue between Carrie and Samantha at Miranda's son first birthday party (Episode 86 "One"). Samantha is worried about her first grey pubic hairs by telling Miranda: "No one wants to fuck grandma's pussy" (Gennaro 254). Bignell comments on the self-reflexivity of the show and compares it to other genres by suggesting that

in its subject matter, the sitcom draws on techniques derived from women's magazines, the role of confession, sexual identity, and consumerism. However, its humor allows for an ironic and reflexive treatment of femininity. *Sex and the City* owes something as well to the confessional talk show that thrives on problems, proffers advice, and solicits the viewer's participation. (169)

### 3. HAVE IT ALL - THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FEMALE IDENTITIES AND TRADITIONAL VALUES IN *SEX AND THE CITY*

#### 3.1. THE REVERSAL OF THE PUBLIC IMAGE OF SINGLE WOMEN

### 3.1.1. BEING SINGLE AND SUCCESSFUL

Mabry discusses the conservative image of women and their place in society and compares the TV series *Sex and the City* to traditional romance films and novels. She notes that

television shows like *Sex and the City* [...] point to an important shift in women's popular texts, particularly in the ways they examine women's experiences and desires. Through various narrative and ideological shifts, chick novels and films give contemporary women voice and allow them to express desires that may lie outside of the 'happily-ever-after' marriage to Prince Charming. (192)

*Sex and the City* is not a romantic comedy that shows women's desire to get married. Charlotte is the only character in the series who wants to get married, but even her romantic beliefs are destroyed when she does. She saves herself for her husband and finds out on the wedding night and that he is impotent and attracted to porn (Episode 45 "Hot Child in the City"). Charlotte's plan to save herself until the wedding night goes wrong (Nelson 90). Carrie then tells Charlotte: "Who wants to be a virgin again? It's bad enough the first time" (Episode 38 "The Big Time").

When Carries and her friends are invited to a baby shower, they are glad when they can return to their single lives again. The four women are shocked by how motherhood changes women. Most of the women attending Laney's baby shower have children themselves and Miranda tells her friends that they want to convert them by "forcing them to separate from the herd and picking them off one by one". Laney even tells Charlotte: "You have to get serious and settle down – life is not a Jaclyn Susann novel – four friends looking for life and love in the big city (Episode 10 "The Baby Shower") (Arthurs *Consumer Culture* 85).

Not only the clash between motherhood and singledom is portrayed, but also the clash between marriage and consumed singledom. This becomes evident when Carrie loses her \$475 Manolo Blahniks at Kyra's baby shower. Kyra wants to replace them, but when Carrie tells her the actual prize, Kyra gives her only \$200. Kyra then criticizes Carrie for her lifestyle and tells her: "They're just shoes"



(Lee). However, in the end Carrie registers at Manolo Blahnik for the lost pair of shoes and is happy (Gillingham et al. 27). Gillingham et al. point out that “moral righteousness is removed from the equation” (27).

As all four women are single, they are often confronted with stereotypes in society and in their daily life. In one episode Miranda asks the question: “Why do we get stuck with old maid and spinster, and men get to be bachelors and playboys?” (Episode 69 “Luck Be an Old Lady”). In another scene a married woman explains the four characters: “Some people like me choose to grow up, face reality, and get married. Others choose to, what [...] live an empty haunted life of stunted adolescence?” (Episode 3 “Bay of Married Pigs”). These examples demonstrate that society does not acknowledge women’s social and economic status and only judges their inability to have a partner (Nelson 88). Another example that shows the stereotypes single women are confronted with is when Miranda decides to buy her own apartment. She is asked questions about why she lives on her own and whether her father pays for the flat. Miranda then tells her friends: “I’ve got the money. I’ve got a great job and I still get, ‘It’s just you?’ ” (Episode 17 “Four Women and a Funeral”).

However, *Sex and the City* promotes a single lifestyle and does not reinforce stereotypes about single women. This is evident when Samantha spends a nice evening with Carrie, Miranda and Charlotte (Episode 40 “All or Nothing”). After she yells out the street: “You see us, Manhattan? We have it all” (Negra). Nelson comments on the positive portrayal of the single woman in the TV series by claiming that

while it does not have all the answers, *Sex and the City* saves the stereotypical spinster from a sad death, even as it presents her with new challenges. Far from presented as the sad pathetic, childish or whorish creatures of times past (and present), these women are proud and protective of their individual accomplishments. (94)

It can be stated that the series *Sex and the City* rejects the public demand for respectable women and it promotes the image of single and sexually active women. Furthermore, *Sex and the City* questions the representation of single

women in society and the media pressure put on women to get married. When Carrie appears on the cover of a magazine looking haggard accompanied by the headline “Single and Fabulous?”, the four characters talk about the negative media image of single women. The episode concludes that women do not have to feel ashamed when they are single and do not have to fake that they are happy with a man. In the final scene Carrie eats in a restaurant on her own without reading a book and reinforces the message that one can be single and fabulous (Arthurs *Consumer Culture* 85).

In addition, the series shows the fun and the freedom of a single lifestyle. Sex is portrayed as a fun activity without commitment (Cramer 415). Corral and Miya-Jervis conclude that *Sex and the City* reverses traditional concepts of marriage and relationships and suggest that

feminism’s messages of self-reliance and critique of heterosexuality ... transformed the way we see relationships: We wrestle with marriage’s sordid social and economic history ... We no longer see singlehood as some limbo to be rushed through headlong on the search for a mate. We no longer see those mates as necessarily male. We seek out romantic commitments for the personal and emotional satisfaction they can bring – not to avoid ‘spinsterhood’. (ch.18)

### 3.1.2. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NEW YORK AND SINGLEDOM

It is interesting that New York and in particular Manhattan represents singledom and sexual possibility and not romance and commitment. Married couples either leave the city to move to Brooklyn or Connecticut as the four characters’ former friend Laney or they get divorced as in the case of Charlotte and Trey and Mr. Big and Natasha (Handyside 406). Samantha comments on this situation by asking Carrie: “No one actually makes these relationship thing work, do they?” Carrie tells her then: “Sure they’re the ones leaving New York” (Episode 66 “I Heart NY”). Miranda once wonders that an island like Manhattan can contain all their ex-partners by stating: “Who would have thought an island that tiny would be big enough to hold all our ex-boyfriends?” (Episode 31 “Where There’s Smoke”) (Rodie 61). Richards draws attention to the close relationship between the women and New York and its significations by observing that

the city plays an active part in giving these women their freedom. More often than not it seems impossible that they could enjoy and indulge in such sexual freedom in any other American city. Indeed, New York appears in the series as a 'singles ghetto' [...] married people, especially married women, are transported to the exclusive suburbs of Connecticut or the Hamptons once their wedding ceremonies are over. (148)

Carrie herself identifies herself with the City of New York. When Mr. Big wants to move to California, she says to him: "You, me, New York – you owe it to us! And by us, I mean New York and myself" (Episode 66 "I Heart NY"). In fact, it can be stated that Carrie and the City of New York belong together and they blur (Rodie 61). Richards even compares Carrie to a flaneuse by saying that

Carrie's position as a flaneuse is assured by her ability to enter and move freely throughout the postmodern city by her status as a detached single girl and anthropologist. Her visibility in this role of flaneuse is emphasized simultaneously by her career as a journalist and her wardrobe. Like the traditional flaneur of the modernist period. Carrie likes watching and to be watched. (154)

The notion of the flaneur goes back to Michel de Certeau's idea of the streetwalker. He defined a streetwalker as a person who walks the street in order to find a subject to write about (Richards 149). In postmodernism the figure of the flaneur was taken up. The flaneur is similar to the figure streetwalker and referred to a person who observed the street life in Paris (150). Richards describes the flaneur as follows:

The flaneur was typically seen to be a detached loafer, but one who had the time and the wealth to wander aimlessly around the city, just looking. (150)

Later on some critics interpreted the flaneur as a journalist or society columnist who wrote for the feuilleton section of a newspaper. In fact, Carrie can be seen as a flaneuse of the postmodern era. Carrie explores aspects of society and asks herself questions. As a flaneuse she observes and explains problems, but she does

not try to solve them. Carrie's role is that of an anthropologist in order to discover the mysteries of New York City. Carrie embodies both the role of a flaneuse and the role of a journalist (Richards 154-155). However, some writers reject the idea of a female flaneuse by arguing that

the flaneuse is an impossible concept because the public space of the modern city, and the right to look, belonged solely to men. It was unacceptable for women to wander freely along the streets, and if they did so they were seen as fallen women, as streetwalkers and prostitutes. (Wolff and Pollock qtd. in Richards 151)

Nevertheless, other critics claim that there is space for both a male flaneur, but also for a female flaneuse in today's cities. The critic Parsons for example claims that

the postmodern city is an open and migrational one, available to female as well as male walkers of the city street. (9)

In the TV series the City of New York is divided between single and married people. While married women leave the city, single women such as Carrie can walk around freely in a city dominated by men (Richards 151-152). Richards explains the relationship between Carrie and New York with the following words:

Carrie is able to move through a still gender-divided, postmodern city because she is a single girl who, try as she might otherwise, always remains so – detached and un-engaged. (154-155)

Not only Carrie has a close relationship with the City of New York, but also her friends. Handyside points out that "Carrie and her friends' freedom to walk around Manhattan at any time of night or day is to be celebrated" (413). Samantha proclaims once that "this is the first time in the history of Manhattan that women have had as much power and money as men" (Richards 148). Handyside also draws attention to the fact that Carrie and her friends can enjoy the Manhattan lifestyle without being dependent on male company (413). The city offers the four characters "fashion, culture, [...] freedom" and an "aspirational lifestyle" (407).

Manhattan is presented by the series, however, as a kind of magic space which allows Carrie and her friends the freedom to behave as they wish. They partake of an elite Manhattan lifestyle of new and exclusive restaurants, designer boutiques, gallery openings, ballet, opera, and museum gala events, all without needing men to escort them. (Handyside 413)

The countryside, on the other hand, is presented as “dull, stifling and distinctly glamour-free” (Handyside 407). Furthermore, the countryside is portrayed as an unwelcoming place for singles (406-407). In one scene Carrie tells Aidan: “I’m a bona fide city girl, a girl about town”, because she does not want to spend a weekend on the countryside (Episode 57 “Sex and the Country”). Carrie’s trip to the countryside resembles a disaster, when she sees a squirrel and freaks out. It can be said that the countryside is opposed to the lifestyle in New York (Handyside 406-407).

### 3.2. THE SUBVERSION OF TRADITIONAL GENDER ROLES

#### 3.2.1. REVERSAL OF MARRIAGE AND THE BRIDAL MYTH

Mabry draws attention to the fact that *Sex and the City*

represents the desires and attempts of many-real life contemporary women to investigate the mysteries of modern sexual relationships and gender roles on their own terms and do determine their place within these relationships for themselves. (200)

The TV series criticizes myths, such as the bridal myth. At her wedding day Charlotte tries to forget her husband’s impotence and decides to get married (Episode 42 “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”). Carrie explains her behaviour by saying: “Charlotte was 34, single, and standing in a \$14,000 dress. She was getting married”. This marriage subverts the ideal of romance (Negra). Before Charlotte’s wedding, Samantha states: “Marriage doesn’t guarantee a happy ending. Just an ending” (Episode 42 “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”).

In fact, Charlotte is the only one among her friends who wants to get married. This is made clear when the four women go to the wedding of a friend and let the bride bouquet fall on the ground (Episode 19 “The Chicken Dance”). They do not try to reach it and they do not pick it up. Charlotte’s marriage comes to an end, when she cannot deal with her husband’s impotence any more. Samantha resists the institution marriage and does not want to get married. Miranda has a baby, but she does not get married to the father. When Aidan proposes to Carrie, she even gets sick when she sees the engagement ring (Episode 60 “Just Say Yes”) (Henry 74).

Moreover, the ideal of women as perfect wives and mothers is rejected when Carrie prepares to get married to Aidan (Episode 63 “A Change of Dress”). When Carrie puts on various wedding dresses with Miranda in a bridal store, she suddenly has got a panic attack. Friese points out that entering the bridal store is the first step for women to become a bride (57) and that

one could regard the physical crossing of the doorstep of a bridal store to be the tangible equivalent of the emotional crossing of the intangible boundary a bride experiences when leaving her social group of single women. (58)

This scene demonstrates that Carrie does not want to be a bride. Carrie questions the institutions of marriage (Vause 76-77). When Miranda helps her out of the dress, she tells her: “My body is literally rejecting the idea of marriage ... I’m missing the bride gene” (Episode 63 “Change of a Dress”). After the incident she interrogates the image of femininity and asks herself the following questions (Rodie 63):

As progressive as our society claims to be, there are still certain life targets we’re still supposed to meet – marriage, babies, a home of your own [...] Do we really want these things, or are we just programmed?

Vause argues that Carrie is

unwilling to give up her treasured independence, personal space, and frequent girls' night out [...] she slowly begins to embrace the idea that perhaps she is simply 'not the marrying kind'. (77)

Nelson comments on Carrie's behaviour and draws attention to the fact that "women's uncertainty about marriage is informed by the belief that it requires sacrificing too much of one's individuality" (90). This is evident when Carrie decides to wear her engagement ring around her neck and asks herself: "To be in a couple, do you have to put your single self on a shelf?" (Episode 62 "All That Glitters ..."). In another scene Carrie misses her single life and says: "I miss walking into my apartment with no one there ... and I can do stuff you do when you're totally alone" (Episode 61 "The Good Fight").

In one scene Carrie talks about the biggest day of her life (Episode 71 "Plus One is the Loneliest Number"), but the idea of marriage as women's primary aspiration is rejected. Carrie describes her career success as the biggest day of her life by using the language of weddings. Her book party represents a wedding for her (Henry 74).

There is one day even the most cynical New York woman dreams of all her life ... she imagines what she'll wear, the photographers, the toasts, everybody celebrating the fact that she finally found ... a publisher. It's her book release party. (Episode 71 "Plus One is the Loneliest Number")

In another scene the image of the traditional wedding ceremony is reversed. When Carrie and Aidan go to a Black-and-White ball, he looks like a groom in black and she looks like a bride in white (Episode 63 "A Change of A Dress"). Friese suggests that "the colour white [...] became a symbol for purity and innocence of girlhood" (61). When Aidan proposes to Carrie that night by saying that "people fall in love, they get married, that's what they do", she refuses to marry him by replying "not necessarily". The scene ends with Carrie's voiceover stating: "We had left the world of black and white and now everything was grey". The series rejects the image of a white dress to signify bride. *Sex and the City* presents another alternative to the world of marriage. Carrie wants to remain independent

and she does not want to commit, which are masculine characteristics. The scene demonstrates that even if Carrie is dressed in feminine clothes, she still embodies masculine features. Traditional gender roles are subverted (Rodie 63-64).

### 3.2.2. REVERSAL OF THE MYTH OF MOTHERHOOD AND THE TRADITIONAL FAMILY

It can be said that *Sex and the City* does not only reverse the myth of marriage and romance, but also the myth of motherhood. Tropp claims that

in *Sex and the City*, the over-sexualized Samantha and the prissy Charlotte pose extreme attitudes about motherhood, playing on the paradox to make us laugh. In fact, these two characters represent the two extremes of the Whore/Madonna dichotomy. Charlotte represents the desexualized ‘good’ woman and potential mother, while Samantha is the oversexualized ‘bad’ antimom. Miranda, though, struggles with definitions of what is a good mother and what she feels are her limited skills in achieving an ideal motherhood. (863)

Charlotte wants to have a baby desperately. At a baby shower she is very upset when she finds out that the pregnant mother has taken her name for a girl. When Charlotte discovers that she cannot have a baby, her marriage with Trey comes to an end. For her, having a baby is more important than anything else in life. Charlotte is obsessed by her wish to become mother and she does not want to have a successful career. She thinks that she can only be happy when she has got a baby (Tropp 863-865).

Samantha, on the other hand, organizes a “I don’t have a baby” shower. She tells Charlotte that she does not want to have children and rejects the biological discourse. Tropp argues that Samantha “celebrates the joy of sex (Whore) while rejecting its original purpose: conception (Madonna)” (864). It is ironical that Miranda finds out that she is pregnant when Charlotte has got fertility problems. Miranda thinks that it might be her last chance to have a baby and therefore she decides not to abort it. However, Miranda wants to combine her professional and her private life in contrast to Charlotte (Tropp 864).



When the baby is born, Miranda has to work hard to become a good mother. Motherhood is not sentimentalized or glorified, but problems are addressed in a realistic manner (Tropp 867-869). Tropp observes that “Miranda struggled with the burden and challenges facing her during pregnancy and motherhood” (861) and that “*Sex and the City* avoids sentimentalizing pregnancy by having Miranda face real, uncomfortable symptoms” (867). Akass adds that *Sex and the City* “explodes taboos about motherhood” (*Maternal Instinct*). Miranda is confronted with many problems during and after her pregnancy.

Miranda has not only difficulties controlling her desires, but she also struggles with giving up her independence and private life. In one scene Miranda is in the middle of a sexual activity, as Bradie starts crying. She then replies: “Mommy’s coming” (Episode 71 “Plus One is the Loneliest Number”). The double meaning of the phrase shows Miranda’s situation of being torn between her sex life and her role as a mother (Tropp 872). Her lover is shocked when he hears the baby cry and leaves abruptly. Dating becomes very difficult for Miranda when she has the baby (Vause 77).

Moreover, *Sex and the City* does not only subvert the myth of motherhood, but it mocks the ideology of the traditional family consisting of two parents. When Steve proposes to Miranda, she laughs at him (Episode 60 “Just Say Yes”). Miranda even asks Carrie to choose a wedding dress for her (Episode 63 “Change of a Dress”) (Tropp 870). Steve suggests a shotgun wedding when he finds out about Miranda’s pregnancy. Miranda is shocked about his suggestion and asks him: “Are you crazy?” Miranda wants to remain a single mother at the beginning and she even draws up a contract for time-share (Tropp 870). Vause draws attention to the fact that Miranda “refus[es] to fold to narrow definitions of what constitutes a family, she recognizes the importance of not stifling herself in a misguided marriage when alternative models of parenting exist” (77).

### 3.2.3. REVERSAL OF THE ROMANTIC IDEAL AND THE MALE HERO

Bushnell points out that romance is no longer seen as important in New York in the 1990s: “There’s still plenty of sex in Manhattan but the kind of sex that results

in friendship and business deals, not romance” (3). In Manhattan women can enjoy sex without commitment and they can derive the same pleasure from their sexual encounters as men (Kiernan 209). *Sex and the City* does not only reject the myth of the male hero, but also romance. Kiernan compares the series to the dominance of love and romance in classical chick lit and argues that

*Sex and the City* maps out new narratives of desire that can be read as signaling a shift away from the primacy of romantic closure in traditional romances [...] the heroines often demonstrate a greater concern for getting sexual kicks than for getting hitched [...] *Sex and the City* is about the pursuit of sexual liberation through power. (207)

Bushnell describes the women’s triumph with the following words:

We were hard and proud of it, and it hadn’t been easy getting to this singular position – this place of complete independence where we had the luxury of treating men like sex objects. (qtd. in Zeissler)

It can be said that *Sex and the City* rejects the romantic narrative and that the characters are subversive (Tukachinsky 192). The four women do not accept the image of womanhood to be supportive, loving, and romantic. Furthermore, they do not need men in order to complete their existence. In the TV series many scenes do not submit to romantic conventions and subvert the classic romantic ideal (187).

In one scene Charlotte says about her lover: “He’d recently stopped calling: he wanted to read me poetry and I wouldn’t let him”. When Carrie dates the twenty-five-year-old artist, romantic ideals are also subverted. When Barkley disappears with another woman, the following conversation takes place between Carrie and him on the phone (Kiernan 210):

Barkley: “I didn’t sleep with her. I didn’t even kiss her. I don’t care. I’ll never see her again if you don’t want me to.”

Carrie: “I really don’t give a shit.”

Carrie is not shocked by her boyfriend's infidelity and she shows her emotional unattachment. This stands in contrast to traditional mating games (Kiernan 210). Kiernan draws attention to the inversion of gendered codes and observes that Barkley's "planned performance of 'playboy of the Western world battles with needy woman for independence' is undercut by Carrie's pithy response" (210).

In one scene Alexander dates Carrie and takes her to the opera. Carrie feels overwhelmed by the romantic acts and faints. They leave and go to McDonald's where they dance in the food-court (Episode 88 "The Ick Factor"). Carrie is unable to deal with too much romance and the night out in a fast food restaurant causes a break in the narrative and it lacks romance (Tukachinsky 187).

In one episode Miranda's boyfriend gives her a present, but has to leave due to an emergency call. Miranda opens the present and finds a biscuit saying "I love you". She eats the biscuit, but does not pay much attention to the inscription. Miranda is not the type of person who can say "I love you" (Episode 86 "One"). The scene with Miranda portrays the opposite of traditional gender roles, because normally men have problems showing their feelings. Miranda's self-confidence is threatened by her boyfriend's love confession and she does not know how to handle the situation (Tukachinsky 186).

In one scene Samantha does not want to hold hands with her boyfriend Smith. She feels disgusted by this romantic gesture, but she does not know how to tell him (Episode 85 "The Domino Effect") (Tukachinsky 184). Samantha rejects holding hands as a symbol for creating intimacy between partners. She does not want to express her feelings towards her partner. Samantha only accepts to take her partner's hand, when she falls into a pile of watermelons. Then she agrees, but only says: "Fine. But only until my foot heals". Samantha still insists on having the last word. Samantha considers holding hands as an instrument and not as a romantic symbol (187).

Even Charlotte who is the most romantic among her friends cannot put her romantic ideas into practice. Charlotte wants to marry Harry, but he only wants to marry a Jewish man. Then Charlotte decides to convert to Judaism. When she prepares a Sabbath dinner, Harry does not acknowledge her effort (Episode 78 "Pick-A-Little, Talk-A-Little"). This scene dismisses the myth that love can

overcome religion and class (Tukachinsky 184). The scene is based on the idea that love should lead to self-sacrifice (190). Furthermore, Tukachinsky claims that “[Charlotte’s] sacrificing her wishes on the altar of love is seen as an ‘obsession’ leading to the loss of individualism (191).

Not only the image of romance is rejected in *Sex and the City*, but also the image of the male hero (Handyside 407). In one scene Carrie deconstructs the fairy tale *Snow White* by asking herself in the voice-over:

I got to thinking, what if Prince Charming never showed up? Would Snow White have slept in that glass coffin forever? Or, would she have eventually woken up, spit out the apple, gotten a job, a good health care package, and a baby from her local neighborhood sperm bank? (Episode 31 “Where There’s Smoke”)

Carrie reverses the fairy tale and the image of the passive woman waiting for her prince. She offers an alternative ending which includes work, health care and motherhood without male help (Stillion Southard 156). Vause observes that “for Carrie, as for many women, rejecting the ridiculous fairy tales of being ‘saved’ by a man proves a difficult but also empowering task” (77).

The traditional romantic image of the male hero who saves a lady in distress is subverted when Samantha asks the receptionist to see the oncologist on behalf of a nun, who suffers as Samantha from breast cancer. As the assistant has Samantha’s lover as a screensaver, Samantha gets what she asks for when she tells the assistant that Smith will come to one of her appointments. Carrie comments on Samantha’s boyfriends’s role by saying that “Smith turned out to be more than a screensaver: He was a lifesaver”. The independent Samantha accepts male help in this scene for the first time in the TV series and never informs Smith about it (Fernández-Morales 680). Fernández-Morales describes Smith’s role with the following words: “[...] he is ironically presented as the *unknowing savior* of the lady in distress within a gynocentric narrative that tends to subvert the traditional romantic structure” (680). Di Mattia comments on the reversal of the male hero in *Sex and the City* and states that

*Sex and the City* renders a landscape where the rules of heterosexual relations are in state of flux – with women no longer content to adopt traditional models of femininity, and men unsure what is expected of them in both public and private roles. Faced with a newly independent, sexually liberated woman, hegemonic masculinity repositions itself as an unstable identity in need of revision. As a result, the formula for the ideal romantic hero has become imprecise. (18)

In another scene of the same episode the fairy tale of the white knight is mocked. The characters have different perspectives concerning women's roles. Samantha embodies sexual liberation, whereas Charlotte has a rather conservative attitude.

Samantha: I just wanted to let you know that my fireman was every bit the fantasy I had in mind.

Charlotte: I think it's wrong to sleep with a man to fulfill a certain fantasy.

Samantha: All the men we sleep with fulfill a certain fantasy ... You fantasize a man with a Park Avenue apartment and a big stock portfolio. For me, it's a fireman with a nice, big hose ...

Charlotte: I've been dating since I was 15, I'm exhausted, where is he?

Miranda: Who? The white knight?

Samantha: That only happens in fairy tales.

Samantha decides to make her fireman fantasy happen and goes to a fire station's garage topless. The voice-over comments on her behaviour and tells the viewer: "Samantha's rescue fantasy was suddenly something she needed to be rescued from." Charlotte is rescued by Arthur, but finds out that he likes to break people's noses. The voice-over tells the viewer that "Charlotte's white knight changed into a white nightmare" (Stillion Southard 162). Stillion Southard concludes that "despite Samantha's sexually aggressive behavior and Charlotte's patient waiting, both women were left unsatisfied" (162) and that "perhaps Samantha will hesitate to take such charge of satisfying her sexual appetite, and perhaps Charlotte will be empowered to pursue men, or more so, not desire to be rescued by them" (162-163).

Carrie and Miranda, on the other hand, resist being rescued and experience a feeling of satisfaction. Miranda refuses help from her boyfriend after an eye

surgery and says to him: “No rescue”. Carrie resists being rescued when she dates a prince-politician. She turns down an invitation and when she decides to come, she tells him: “I’m very independent, this isn’t a date”. When he offers her a drive home, she refuses his offer and wants to take the last ferry back to Manhattan. However, Carrie loses one of her shoes and misses the ferry. Carrie and Miranda accept help only to some extent. In the end, Carrie allows the politician to drive her home and Miranda embraces Steve (Stillion Southard 163).

Even though the TV series rejects the romantic ideal and the ideal of the male hero, all four characters settle down with a partner at the end of the series. This conforms to the traditional image of women to find the right man and to marry and stands in stark contrast to the subversions within the TV series. Carrie leaves New York and goes with Alexander to Paris (Episode 93 “An American Girl in Paris”). Finally she reunites with Mr. Big and starts a new life with him. Miranda ends her relationship with Robert, the black doctor and returns to Steve, the baby’s father (Episode 86 “One”). Charlotte converts to Judaism to marry Harry (Episode 76 “Great Sexpectations”), the Jewish lawyer. Samantha chooses a monogamous lifestyle and settles down with Smith (Episode 85 “The Domino Effect”) (Gennaro 262-263).

The end of the series seems to imitate a romantic comedy. Miranda and Charlotte get married, Samantha is in her first long-term relationship and Carrie starts calling Mr. Big John as a sign of a more serious relationship (Harzewski). The end of the series was criticized by scholars and Sprio for example argues that “it is not until all characters find their romantic other that the series can come to an end. *Sex and the City* is more Mills and Boon than *Pride and Prejudice*, which is frustrating since in many ways this series has helped to define a generation” (194).

#### 3.2.4. REVERSAL OF MASCULINITY

Stern notes that the gender roles are reversed in the TV series and that the four characters of *Sex and the City* are more assertive than men:

The emergence of sexually empowered and forward women on *Sex and the City* parallels the show's representation of men as sex objects. The series reflects a societal shift in power and control from men to women, specifically in sexual situations and discussions. (16)

In *Sex and the City* the four characters stereotype and label men. The leading man character is never addressed by his name, but only called "Mr. Big". Other male characters are introduced as "Mr. Cocky", "the 'we' guy", "Catholic guy", "the marrying guy", "Manhattan guy" and "Mr. Pussy". These men are characterized through their physical features and their sexuality and they are presented as objects. When the four protagonists have a more serious relationship with men, then they are addressed by their name. However, these men are presented as commitment phobics, childish and impotent (Cramer 421). Nelson claims that

on *Sex and the City*, however, the women have evolved and expect men around them to evolve as well. One way the series captures this is by leveling the playing field, by making the single men on the show as vulnerable as single women are often represented to be. (93)

Moreover, masculinity is subverted and ridiculed in the TV series. The male characters in the TV series often have perfect bodies, apart from sagging buttocks and fatness, but they have hidden internal faults (Greven 37). *Sex and the City* criticizes male power and is pro-woman (47). Greven suggests that the TV series

has its men and eats them, too – it both gets to indulge in intense fantasies of the acquisition and consumption of deliriously desirable, Olympian models of white male physical perfection and aggressively kicks these gods off their cloud nine perches. (38)

According to Tiefer, the sexual assertiveness of the four main characters leads to male fears and he observes that

*Sex and the City*, the television comedy hit series about four single, sexually active women in New York, began in the United States in June, 1998, escalating many men's anxiety over women's new sexual expectations and attitudes of entitlement. (279)

Women's achievements make their relationship with men difficult (Nelson 89). This is evident when Miranda participates in a dating service and frightens men off by saying that she is "a lawyer, who went to Harvard" (Episode 42 "Don't Ask, Don't Tell"). Later on she tells her friends that "men are threatened by powerful jobs ... they don't want a lawyer. As a partner, I got zero dates, but as a stewardess, I got one". Steve leaves Miranda once, because he cannot deal with the fact that she earns more than him (Episode 22 "The Caste System"). When she wants to buy a suit for him, he tells her: "No way. I'll start to think of you as my mother ... You need to be with someone more on your level". Miranda then replies: "Fuck the suit. I'm being punished for being successful". Miranda's success as a lawyer complicates her relationship with men (Nelson 89).

### 3.3. THE EMPHASIS OF FEMALE FRIENDSHIP

In the TV series the relevance of close friendships is emphasized. Carrie draws attention to the importance of friendship by noting that "the most important thing in life is your family [...] in the end, they're the people you always turn to. Sometimes it's the family you're born into and sometimes it's the one you make for yourself" (Episode 27 "Shortcomings"). *Sex and the City* presents the advantage of enjoying one's friendships when being single. Jermyn claims that "for all four women in *Sex and the City*, the one place where they can be sure 'love and security' resides is in their friendships" (210). The concept of family presented in the TV series is always as the four women (Henry 68). Carrie says:

I was a woman who was not only capable of obsessing about my relationships with men; I was a woman who was capable of obsessing about my relationships with women. (Stillion Southard 164)

Friendships are considered to be more important than having a partner (Cramer 416). The TV series claims that female friendships are superior to sexual and romantic friendships and that women can be each other's life partners, which men cannot be (Henry 68) and that women's relationships with each other can



substitute family and relationships (Henry 67). This is evident in the following conversation:

Charlotte: Maybe we could be each other's soul mates. And then we could let men be just these great nice guys to have fun with.

Samantha: Well, that sounds like a plan. (Episode 49 "The Agony and the 'Ex'-tasy")

In fact, *Sex and the City* refuses the image of men as a source of emotional and sexual satisfaction. The relationship of the four protagonists is consistent and does not change (Arthurs *Consumer Culture* 93-94). In a conversation between Samantha and Carrie, Samantha gives Carrie the following advice:

We are all alone, honey, even when we are with men ... My advice to you is go through life enjoying men but not expecting them to fill you up. (Episode 16 "They Shoot Single People, Don't They?")

Indeed, the characters' friendships are presented as their "primary community and family, their source of love and care and [...] their economic support" (Henry 67). Gray observes that "the program's often feminist slant and attitude that males are welcome, but not necessary, parts of independent female existence" (411-412). Stillion Southard notes that "SATC characterizes female agency as the power to choose friends and self over men" (163).

The show supports the idea that women can reach independence by relying on bonds with other women (Gerhard 46). In all conversations the four women express and discuss their thoughts and sometimes they question each other's viewpoints (Henry 68). Cameron points out that women's talk "becomes subversive when woman begin to attach importance to it and to privilege it over their interactions with men" (157). In addition, Richards comments on friendship as the best form of relationship by claiming that

[...] as evidenced by popular texts such as [...] *Sex and the City* [...] contemporary culture is now validating friendship-based relationships in which sexual desire is removed from the equation and replaced with affection or 'safe eroticism'. (537)

The characters are satisfied with their friendship and they are not dependent on men's satisfaction. All four characters keep in contact, although they have their own flats, lives and jobs. All conversations between them which either take place on the telephone or in person are intimate and the main characters derive pleasure from them. Every time the women meet, they reflect on their lives and their experiences. The four friends meet regularly to discuss their problems (Gerhard 43). They meet often for lunch to talk about their experiences. Carrie describes their meetings as "our Saturday morning ritual: coffee, eggs, and a very private dish session" (Henry 67). Gerhard points out that

at each gathering, the friends appear in different outfits and are ready to discuss the latest chapter in the chronicle of their sexual and romantic problems. [...] Shared meals, in conjunction with the never-ending conversations function as the pauses where the women make sense of their lives, where they sort out what matters and what does not. They measure themselves against each other, listening in sympathy or outrage to how one of their friends might handle the situation. (43)

The characters also have to solve conflicts and crisis (Henry 69). In one episode Carrie and Samantha argue over Samantha's promiscuity, but in the end they solve their problem and Carrie says: "Sometimes it takes a friend to make a picture perfect. But a picture-perfect friendship, well, that's just in books" (Episode 70 "Cover Girl"). The four main protagonists use humour to cope with difficult issues, for example heartbreak, divorce, impotence, infertility, STDs and abortion. Furthermore, their laughter stands for feminism (Henry 69). Reincke observes that "the threat to male dominance isn't women laughing at men; the threat is women laughing with women" (36). Henry draws attention to the presence of friendship in every episode of the TV series:

No matter what has transpired over the course of an episode's half hour, *Sex and the City* routinely concludes with the four women together, laughing and talking and supporting each other (67).

Gray holds a similar view and points out that

ever present are the relationships among the four women and their support for each other, which remain stable even through life changes and progression in their relationships. (401)

Friendships give women support and offer them an alternative to the world of men. In fact, friends serve the function of an alternative family (Gerhard 44). The relationship between the characters is very intense and they share their hopes and fears. An example of the value of friendship can be seen when Samantha falls ill and none of her boyfriends takes care of her (Episode 40 “All or Nothing”). However, Carrie nurses her, consoles her and tells her that they have got each other (Gerhard 45-46).

When Samantha finds out that she has got breast cancer, she is afraid of getting older (Gerhard 46). Carrie cannot accept Samantha’s diagnosis for a long time and is afraid of losing her friend. She describes Samantha with the following words: “My friend, my family, my insides; she has to be okay. That is how much she means to me”. (Fernández-Morales 683, Gray 408). Carrie holds her hand when Miranda marries Steve. The series promotes the idea that the four characters’ friendship is similar to the structure of a family and makes life worth living, even without husband and child (Gerhard 46). A similar view is hold by Richards who comments on the importance of friendship in the TV series and concludes that

Carrie and her three friends provide a support network for each other and although a family is desirable eventually, it is currently not needed. (148)

During Samantha’s chemotherapy Carrie and her friends want to make her laugh and reverse the negative connotations of chemotherapy. Carrie explains that they want “to make Samantha’s chemo lounge as close as possible to a cocktail lounge” (Fernández-Morales 688). Gray discusses Samantha’s disease and the interaction between the four characters and draws attention to the fact that “the women do not judge Samantha or offer advice during her illness, but provide unconditional support, such as accompanying her to chemotherapist treatments and listening to her disclosures” (405). Samantha is characterized as a strong

woman who does not give up. Gray draws attention to the fact that Samantha can fight against cancer due to her character strength and the support of her friends:

The narrative, however, does offer an illustration of the importance of social support in coping with illness, in that Samantha's positive experience is shown to be due not only to her own strength, but to the support of her friends and her significant other. (410)

When Samantha is still in chemotherapy, she thinks about the next social event and says: "I'm going to kick cancer and that red carpet's ass!" (Fernández-Morales 688). Akass and McCabe argue that the characters' laughter "allows these women to engage in a confirmation process that grants legitimacy to, and confers meaning to, each other's stories and experiences" (*Ms Parker* 187). Fernández-Morales concludes that "[...] watching four women laughing, living, crying and facing such a scary disease as cancer together must have an empowering effect [...]" (689).

The connectedness between the four characters is evident when Charlotte gets married (Episode 40 "All or Nothing"). Charlotte is afraid of negotiating her prenuptial agreement with her future mother-in-law and asks her friends for advice at her engagement party. In the end, Charlotte follows her friends' advice and insists that she is worth \$1 million instead of \$500,000. However, her marriage brings her away from her friends. When Charlotte dances with her fiancé, the voiceover says: "It was then that each of us realized that we didn't have it all because we no longer had Charlotte ... and then, there were three." At Charlotte's wedding Carrie proclaims that "it's hard to find people who love you no matter what – I was lucky enough to find three of them" (Stillion Southard 156-157). Mabry notes that the series finally ends with an image that underlines the relationship between the four women and notes that

the episode ends at Miranda's wedding reception, but not, as we might expect, with a shot of the bride and groom. Instead, we see the four women sitting at a table together, comforting and supporting each other during an uncertain time. (204)

### 3.4. OVERT FEMALE SEXUALITY

#### 3.4.1. *SEX TALK*

Cornella comments on the portrayal of female sexuality in *Sex and the City* by observing that

HBO's hit series *Sex and the City* debuted in the summer of 1998 and was quickly embraced by viewers for its entertaining and voyeuristic glimpse into the dating rituals and sex lives of four single, professional women in New York City. For perhaps the first time in television history, female sexuality – or at least a version of white, heterosexual, female sexuality – was presented to audiences as a legitimate topic of public conversation, rather than something to be whispered about in private or tucked away in the pages of *Cosmo*. Along with the perfect \$500 Manolo Blahnik stilettos, sex was something that the show's style obsessed and trendy foursome could pursue with gusto and endlessly discuss with unabashed enthusiasm and candor. (109)

The series is sexually explicit, because not only sex with various partners is presented, but also sex talk. The characters talk to their friends about their sexual experiences, their sexual preferences and desires (Gerhard 45). Holden compares SATC to other TV series and notes that

never in an American film or television series has sophisticated girl talk been more explicit, with every kink and sexual twitch of the urban dating game noted and wittily dissected. (qtd. in Kuruc 201)

In addition, Arthurs points out parallels between the characters of the TV series and women's magazines and states that

*Sex and the City's* treatment of sexuality can be understood as a remediation of the content and address of women's magazines for television. These women are updated versions of the "Cosmo" woman who is dedicated to self-improvement and economic independence [...] *Sex and the City* dramatizes the kind of consumer and sexual advice offered by women's magazines. This is a sphere of feminine expertise in which it has been argued that women are empowered to look – not only at consumer

goods but also at their own bodies as sexual subjects. (*Consumer Culture* 89-90)

All Cosmopolitan magazines are concerned with fashion, beauty, love and lust. They give women advice on how to improve their look, their relationships and their sex life. Furthermore, the magazine includes a section on women's most intimate confessions and various sections on shopping information and advertisements can be found throughout the magazine. It can be said that women's magazines, such as Cosmopolitan deal with self-adornment, self-improvement and collective feminine identities.

The TV series *Sex and the City* shares with women's magazines three aspects, namely the discourse of confession, the importance of sexuality as part of identity and commodity fetishism. Within the different episodes Carrie asks herself questions about her attractiveness, her relationships with friends and lovers, her future and her moral behaviour. The TV show implies in the same way than magazines that learning and self-improvement are essential. In *Sex and the City* discourses of confession and self-doubt play an important role. In each episode a new problem is discussed by the four characters, which is similar to 'problems of the month' addressed in women's magazines. The characters' happiness in sexual relationships structures the individual episodes and dialogues. The four women discuss sexual pleasure, but also the unavailability of sex. The TV series reinforces the assumption that the characters' identities are expressed through their sexuality (Bignell 164-165). Henry draws attention to the fact that the TV series focuses on female sexual interest and female erotic satisfaction:

This focus on pleasure [...] is also the principle ethic of *Sex and the City*. In episode after episode, Carrie, Samantha, Miranda and Charlotte are not punished for being sexually active; they are not treated as 'fallen women' who must ultimately encounter some terrible fate. (75)

The four women act as confident narrators and talk about their sexual experiences (Attwood *Intimate Adventures* 7-11). Foucault states that "talking about sex relates immediately to power and knowledge" (qtd. in Akass and McCabe *Ms Parker* 181). Jermyn observes that "women's sexual candour [...] has become a

distinguishing feature of the programme, a positive shift by which women publicly stake their claim to the previously 'male' territory of sexual frankness and sexual language" (211). Bignell emphasizes that sex talk serves as "learning and self-improvement, confession and self-doubt" (165). The women can express their opinions freely in feminine discourse, because the other women share their perceptions and respect their opinions (Brown 206). They do not only enjoy sex passively, but they give each other advice and derive meaning from what was said (Akass and McCabe *Ms Parker* 185). Akass and McCabe point out that

the series is firmly embedded in our culture's continual psychic investment in virtuous heroines and (sexually) potent men can be of little doubt, but how these women are interrogating those narratives reveals how the female narrative voice is engaged in the process of creating new discourses. It makes one aware that there is more to what Darren Star calls the women's 'journey' of 'self-discovery and personal empowerment' [...] (*Ms Parker* 198).

The four women try to make sense of each other's stories and experiences. Sometimes they do not know how to deal with particular situations and incidences. The characters act as each other's confidants and help each other (Akass and McCabe *Ms Parker* 187). In one scene Miranda tells her friends that she does not feel comfortable with her lover's bed talk and discusses it with her friends (Episode 14 "The Awful Truth").

Miranda: I'm in an intimate relationship right now and I can tell you that the level of verbal discourse has become a little too intimate.

Carrie: What's the problem?

Miranda: Because sex is not the time to chat. In fact it is one of the few instances in my overly articulate, exceedingly verbal life where it is perfectly appropriate, if not preferable, to shut up ... suddenly I have to be stumped for conversation. No thank you.

Charlotte: Just keep talking about his cock.

Samantha: Correction. His big beautiful cock.

Carrie: We are using the 'C' word now?

Miranda: I can't use adjectives.

Carrie: A simple 'You're so hard' is often quite effective'.

Charlotte: Sometimes men just need to hear a little encouragement.

Miranda: Such as?

Charlotte: Yes stud. That's right. Don't stop. Just like that. Come on fucker. Don't stop.

Miranda: You're kidding me, right? (laughter)

The four women find pleasure in talking about sex and in sharing their confidences. The friends address taboos by making jokes about women's experiences. Another reason that contributes to the friends' laughter is the fact that Charlotte as the most prudish character knows how to talk dirty to men. Charlotte represents the feminine ideal including appropriate dating etiquette, sexual propriety and domestic bliss (Akass and McCabe *Ms Parker* 188-189). Nevertheless, Charlotte plays with patriarchal norms and modifies them. She attends tantric-sex workshops and buys herself self-help manuals to learn about the art of seduction (189).

It can be stated that *Sex and the City* brings female sexuality into public discourse, because it is no longer restricted to intimate communication. In *Sex and the City* sexuality is not an individual matter, but it is a topic for group discussions and analyses (Markle 46). Sexual activity is discussed and analysed in detail (Lee). The characters' conversations with each other are more intimate than those with their actual sex partners. They also try out sexual behaviours and practices they have discussed with their friends.

The TV series addresses sexual experiences and questions social norms (Stillion Southard 158). Akass and McCabe argue that the women's sex talk "challenges prohibitions and breaks the silence, so that women can begin to tell their stories and speak about sex differently" (*Ms Parker* 196). Beck claims that the four women "frequently breached the bounds of good taste and politeness as they talked about such taboo topics as sexual harassment, premenstrual syndrome, menopause, single parenting, religion, and women's sexuality" (148). Stern draws attention to the fact that "[...] Carrie Bradshaw and company pushed the limits of what women can do and talk about on television" (Stern 5). Gerhard points out that



these women are shown enjoying intercourse in an array of positions with numerous partners. The characters love penises and the men who bear them. They love feeling desirable. The pleasure they take in sex, in which they narrate to each other in conversation, both bind them to each other and erotically to heterosexual pleasures. This must be seen as an important contribution the show makes – these women are the subjects of heterosexual sex, not its object. (45)

Gilbey comments on the presentation of sexuality in the TV series and notes that

before the HBO series *Sex and the City* began its six-year run in 1998, the world had suspected that women were enjoying guilt-free sex [...] But until the show came along, this idea has never been expressed in such an unapologetic manor on mainstream television. (45)

In the TV series sexual experiences are made public and explicit. Linda McDowell draws attention to the fact that the women in *Sex and the City* cross boundaries between gender and space and reverse the traditional gender distinctions by observing that

[...] there is a messier and more complicated set of relationships to be uncovered since so many activities transgress the clear associations between femininity and privacy on the other hand, and masculinity and public spaces on the other. (150)

McDowell explains that

these women are not masquerading nor are they impersonating men; instead, they are experiencing urban space and participating in urban spectacle and taking (postfeminist) pleasure in it. (155)

The four women talk about their private life in public and violate feminist norms, which classify sexual experiences as private affairs and label them as a taboo (Stillion Southard 160). At a breakfast scene Samantha talks about her sexual experience with a firefighter, Charlotte tells her: “Will you be quiet? People at the next table have a child”. Samantha just replies: “Well, that’s their choice”. Stillion

Southard notes that “in the process of bringing private, taboo issues into the public sphere, SATC both challenges and reifies conventional feminine behaviours” (161). McHugh comments on the shift from the private to the public discourse in *Sex and the City* by pointing out that “Carrie’s [musings] are destined for a very public audience [...] Carrie’s profession involve making the very private very, very public” (196). A similar view is taken by Markle who claims that

the comedy series has been widely hailed as ground-breaking in its depiction and candid discussion of female sexuality. *Sex and the City* challenges commonly held cultural beliefs about what constitutes appropriate sexual desires and behaviours for women. (45-46)

Thus, social norms are interrogated through the use of rhetoric and Campbell draws attention to the fact that “confrontative, non-adjustive strategies [are] designed to ‘violate the reality structure’ ” (81) and that “these strategies not only attack the psycho-social reality of the culture, but violate the norms of decorum, morality, and ‘femininity’ of the women addressed” (81). Socially accepted behaviour concerning sex is questioned. In a dialogue between Charlotte and Samantha the different attitudes towards sexuality in public spaces are shown. Samantha feels comfortable about sex talk, whereas Charlotte is more restrained. When Charlotte tells her friends that her boyfriend shouted obscenities at her during his orgasm, Samantha finishes the sentence for Charlotte (Stillion Southard 160).

Charlotte: When he, you know –  
Samantha: Came, orgasmed, shot his wad?

Samantha is the most sexually active character and women’s right to pleasure is reflected in her character (Henry 76). She panics for example when she cannot have an orgasm for the first time and tells her friends openly about it (Episode 56 “My Motherboard, My Self”).

Samantha: I lost my orgasm  
Carrie: In the cab?  
Charlotte: What do you mean, lost?

Samantha: I mean, I just spent the last two hours fucking with no finale.  
Carrie: It happens. Sometimes you just can't get there.  
Samantha: I can always get there.  
Charlotte: Every time you have sex?  
Carrie: She's exaggerating. Please say you're exaggerating.  
Samantha: Well, I'll admit I have had to polish myself off once or twice, but yes, when I R.S.V.P. to a party, I make it my business to come.  
Charlotte: Sex can be great without an orgasm.  
Samantha: That's a crock of shit.  
Carrie: She has a point.

### 3.4.2. SEXUAL FREEDOM AND MASTURBATION

The TV series does not only present explicit sex talk, but it also encourages female sexuality and questions existing meanings of gender. In an episode Carrie poses the question: "Are we simply romantically challenged or are we sluts?" The word 'slut' is used as opposition to romance and refers to women's sexual behaviour (Attwood *Sluts and Riot Grrrls* 238). *Sex and the City* explores the lines of respectability, vulgarity and prostitution. All characters were influenced by feminism, but they did not take part in the queer culture. They are heterosexual, although they have experiences with gay, lesbian and bisexual partners. Samantha has for instance a relationship with a lesbian and Carrie has a relationship with a younger bisexual man (Episode 34 "Boy, Girl, Boy, Girl...") (Arthurs *Consumer Culture* 92).

The TV show questions the patriarchal society by breaking bourgeois conventions. The difference between the social groups is made evident when Charlotte attends a reunion dinner and meets her friends from university. She talks about her frustration about her husband's impotence by saying "Don't you ever feel like you want to be fucked really hard?" (Episode 46 "Frenemies"). The other women only look at her in disgust (Arthurs *Consumer Culture* 91). In bourgeois circles uncontrolled sexual behaviour and loose speech are associated with wild women. Such women subvert the gender relations, because they have sex like men (92).

However, the four characters never become unruly and lose control over their behaviour. *Sex and the City* subverts the opposition between virgin and whore,

which was established in a patriarchal society (Arthurs *Consumer Culture* 92). Arthurs draws attention to the fact that the TV series rejects the boundaries between virgin and whore and claims that

*Sex and the City* rejects the traditional patriarchal dichotomy of virgin and whore, insisting in its explorations of the women's multiple sexual experiences their rights to seek sexual satisfaction without shame. (*Consumer Culture* 93)

It can be stated that *Sex and the City* encourages sexual freedom. Examples include Charlotte's sexual relationship with a bald, hairy divorce lawyer, Samantha's sexual promiscuity, Carrie's sexual intercourse with Mr. Big when he is married, Miranda's date with a black doctor and her intense relationship with her vibrator. All these examples oppose the norm established in society (Gennaro 261-262).

Furthermore, the TV series discusses female masturbation and sexual self-discovery. *Sex and the City* encourages women to go to a sex shop and to buy a vibrator (Cornella 112). In society masturbation is not discussed and masturbation is associated with sexual shame and secrecy (111). When Miranda shows Carrie and Charlotte the vibrator the Rabbit in a sex store, they both decide to buy it and try it out. Charlotte then tells Carrie that she has "broken her vagina", because she overused the vibrator. She confesses that she has an orgasm every time with the Rabbit and is anxious that she might never find pleasure in having sex with a man again. Charlotte becomes addicted to her vibrator and even stays at home with it. Carrie and Miranda decide to intervene and confiscate the sex toy in Charlotte's apartment.

This example shows that a shift of the cultural signification of sex has taken place, because sex is no longer linked to emotion. The vibrator is used as sexual practice and female sexuality is represented as active and healthy in the TV series *Sex and the City* (Attwood *Fashion and Passion* 395-396). Juffer comments on the change of meaning of sex toys by stating that

they have become 'toys' just as sex has lost its significance as a form of reproduction or relationship and become a form of 'play' and individual

liberation through bodily pleasure. (qtd. in Attwood *Fashion and Passion* 396)

In fact, sex is not longer considered as a system of reproduction or as a part of a relationship, but also as pleasure. Masturbation is seen as active female sexuality (Attwood *Fashion and Passion* 400). Attwood describes the new sexuality by noting that “playing by (with) oneself is refigured as a form of recreation for women and as a way of producing post-femininity” and that the “pleasures of the body and of feminine auto-eroticism are simultaneously a form of hedonistic indulgence, of consumerism, sexual display and self-fashioning” (*Fashion and Passion* 400).

*Sex and the City* does not only address female masturbation, but it also breaks taboos about female genitals (Akass and McCabe *Ms Parker* 191). When Charlotte attends the latest collection by the artist Neville Morgan, she is shocked by his new works. Morgan tells Charlotte about his inspiration and says: “The most powerful force in the universe. The source of all life and pleasure and beauty. The truth is only found in ‘The Cunt’ “ (Episode 5 “The Power of Female Sex”). *Sex and the City* breaks the discourse of vulgarity, because the word ‘cunt’ is associated with prohibition and is interpreted by many people as abusive and offensive. When Charlotte decides to pose for Morgan, his wife comes in and tells her: “I bet you have a beautiful cunt dear”. The word ‘cunt’ is given new connotations (191-192). In another scene Charlotte tells her friends that her new gynaecologist has given her anti-depressants for her vagina. When Charlotte says that she thinks her vagina is ugly, Samantha tells her to look at herself “thoroughly [and] preferably immediately”. When she looks at herself, she realizes that her vagina is not as ugly as she thought (Episode 50 “The Real Me”). In one episode Samantha is worried about her menopause and she decides to date a mature man. When she has sex with him, he tells her: “Baby, either you’re a virgin or Flo just came to town”. Samantha does not feel embarrassed, although menstruation is often treated as a hidden subject in society. In *Sex and the City*, however, menstruation is celebrated as a sign of vitality and sexual pleasure (192).

The TV series foregrounds female orgasm and questions dominant images of heterosexuality which represent female orgasm as inferior to male pleasure (Henry 76). Segal draws attention to the fact that female agency and women's right to pleasure serves to subvert heterosexuality by claiming that

every time women enjoy sex with men, confident in the knowledge that this, just this, is what we want, and how we want it, I would suggest, we are already confounding the cultural and political meanings given to heterosexuality in dominant discourse. There 'sex' is something 'done' by active men to passive women, not something women do. (266)

Cranny-Francis et al. point out that heterosexuality and female and male sexuality are social constructs:

[...] heterosexuality is a concept, used to delineate, and so regulate, the nature of contemporary sexual relations. It is not simply a biological category [...] Instead it is a social construct which has the power to regulate and (re)inforce not only particular kinds of sexual practice, but also the gender categories based on them. (20) [...] Female sexuality is marked as naturally masochistic, narcissistic and passive; male sexuality is inscribed as naturally aggressive, sadistic and active. (7)

These social constructs are broken in *Sex and the City*. The TV series introduces sex as something women do and the TV series suggests that women pursue their pleasure actively. The clitoris stands for female potency in the series and various episodes address female pleasure (Henry 77). In one scene Miranda dates a man who does not know about the mechanics of female orgasm. She asks him: "Do you know how the clitoris works? Do you know where it is? Then she says to her friends later on: "It's my clitoris, not the Sphinx". In the end, she ends the relationship with the man, because she has not got an orgasm (Henry 77). Stoller describes women's new sexuality with the following words:

In our quest for total satisfaction, we shall leave no sex toy unturned and no sexual avenue unexplored. Women are trying their hands (and other body parts) at everything from "phone sex to cybersex, solo sex to group sex, heterosex to homosex [...] we're more than ready to drag-race down sexual roads less travelled. (qtd. in Henry 77)

In fact, *Sex and the City* broadens definitions of heterosexuality, because it addresses a different range of sexual experiences and attitudes. The TV series presents for example oral sex, anal sex, rimming and men's straight desire to be penetrated. Furthermore, non-monogamy and casual sex are portrayed in the show (Henry 78). Samantha is open to sexual experimentation and once she tells Carrie: "Wake up. It's 2000. The new millennium won't be about sexual labels. It'll be about sexual expression. It won't matter if you're sleeping with men or women. It'll be about sleeping with individual" (Episode 28 "Was it Good for You?"). Samantha has got a relationship with a woman, which is one of her longest relationships in the series (Henry 79). The TV series shows lesbian sex and in one scene Maria ejaculates on Samantha's face during sex (Episode 52 "What's Sex Got to Do With It?"). It can be said that *Sex and the City* broadens notions of female sexuality, because female ejaculation is not addressed in lesbian magazines or feminist sex guides (Henry 79). When Samantha tells her friends about her relationship, the following conversation takes place:

Carrie: Wait a second! You're having a relationship?

Samantha: Lesbian is just a label like Gucci and Versace.

Carrie: Or Birkenstock.

Samantha: This is not about being gay or straight. Maria is an incredible woman. (Episode 52 "What's Sex Got to Do With It?")

Furthermore, the characters reject gendered sexual roles and have 'sex like a man', which means sex without feeling, for pleasure only and with no commitment (Markle 46). Fritz and Kitzinger describe the typical sexual scripts for men and women, which are subverted in the TV series:

The typical sexual script for men includes the active pursuit of sexual partners, peer validation of sexual activity, inability to control sexuality once aroused, and sex undertaken solely for the sake of pleasure. The typical sexual script for women, on the other hand, includes waiting to be chosen instead of pursuing a partner, feeling affection or love, and a wish to please men. (214)

Markle comments on the subversion of gender roles in *Sex and the City* by claiming that

in women-centered media like the series *Sex and the City*, discourses of appropriate sexual behavior are in the process of being rewritten. Cultural scenarios are being updated and sexual scripts are under revision. (50)

In one scene Carrie meets Kurt again, who she dated several years ago (Episode 1 “Sex and the City”). Her friend Stanford warns her not to get involved with him, because he thinks the relationship will fail. Nevertheless, Carrie agrees to meet him in his flat in the afternoon. After he performed cunnilingus on her, he tells her: “Okay, now my turn”. Then Carrie gets up, dresses and says that she has to go back to work. On her way out she feels powerful and tells herself: “I’ve just had sex like a man” (Markle 51-52).

The other three characters have sex without commitment too. When Miranda drinks in a bar, she meets Steve, a bartender (Episode 21 “Old Dogs, New Dicks”). After work, they go to Miranda’s flat and have sex. Carrie’s voiceover comments on this incident by saying: “Steve, the bartender, gave her two orgasms, straight up.” When Steve asks her for her phone number, Miranda refuses to give him her number and calls their night a one-night stand. Even Charlotte who embodies romance has got sexual encounters. One day she meets Schmeul, a Jewish painter in her art gallery (Episode 6 “Secret Sex”). She meets him in his studio to have a look at his work and they have sex on the floor.

Samantha herself is the most sexually active one among her friends and enjoys her guilt-free promiscuity. She has many sexual partners, for instance a Black man, a Brazilian woman, various younger men and her boss. She participates in a variety of sexual acts including threesomes and foursomes. She regards her partners as sex objects and rejects emotional commitment (Markle 52). In one episode Samantha even takes Viagra after a younger man uses it for recreational purposes and gives it to her. Samantha is at first surprised and tells him: “You don’t look like you need it”, but when he explains to Samantha that “[it] take[s] [him] to a rocket trip right through her solar system”, she decides to try it. After usage



Samantha is shown in “the throes of sexual ecstasy” (Vares and Braun 328). Samantha’s female use of Viagra disrupts gendered scripts (329).

#### 4. BEING FABULOUS - THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FASHION AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF FEMALE IDENTITIES

##### 4.1. THE INFLUENCE OF THE CULT SERIES *SEX AND THE CITY* ON THE WORLD OF FASHION

The *Sex and the City* creator Darren Star states: “I wanted fashion to be really important in this show” (qtd. in Sohn 67). König points out that “if friendship and sex are the two major components [...] then fashion is undoubtedly the camera-friendly third” (130). The TV series influences culture and creates fashion trends. The actress Sarah Jessica Parker playing Carrie has become a fashion icon and she can be found as a celebrity in women’s magazines and newspaper columns. In fact, all four leading characters were on the cover of major magazines like *TV Guide*, *Time* and *People* (Friedman qtd. in Stern 1). The series succeeds in setting trends for instance for Jimmy Choo stiletto heels and corsages (Arthurs *Consumer Culture* 90). The TV series influences and inspires people’s fashion choices all around the world (Kuruc 194). Sohn comments on this phenomenon by saying that

if one aspect of the show epitomizes its courageness and outrageousness, it is the fashion. What began as a whimsical and necessary asset to an already strong series has evolved into a style bible so trendsetting that its influence can be seen all around the country. (qtd. in Kuruc 201)

As female sexuality is emphasized in *Sex and the City*, erotic products, such as lingerie and sex toys can be successfully advertised (Attwood *Fashion and Passion* 392). Carrie encourages the popularity of little vests and big pants and of the nude balconette bra (Amy-Chinn 161). The TV series promotes Rampant Rabbit vibrator for women’s pleasure and the sales of the product increased dramatically (Attwood *Fashion and Passion* 393). Even Charlotte as the most

conservative of the four characters is excited when she sees the sex toy the first time and she says:

Look! Oh, it's cute! Oh, I thought it would be all scary and weird, but it isn't. It's ... it's pink! For girls! And look! The little bunny! His little face! Like Peter Rabbit!

Attwood describes this development as a “contemporary cultural trend towards representing women’s sexual pleasure as fashionable, safe, aesthetically pleasing and feminine” (*Fashion and Passion* 393). She draws attention to the fact that “sex toys have become stylish and the vibrator increasingly signifies as a fashion accessory” and that “as toy and accessory it now also references a more contemporary ideal of femininity associated with style, image and self-fashioning” (396).

Not only fashion accessories are promoted successfully in the TV series *Sex and the City*, but also a new fashion style is advertised. House of Fields who is responsible for the fashion look in the series, provide a mix of retro and new clothing, the avant-garde and the mass-produced. Even a purse in the shape of a horse’s head can be promoted successfully. In *Sex and the City* trash is transformed into something aesthetical and this can be interpreted as a counter-movement to mass culture (Arthurs *Consumer Culture* 90-91). Porter gives an example of the innovative style used in the series by observing that

one garment open to below the navel before swooping under the crotch, had an immaculate cut, even if the look was purposefully wanton [...] You could easily see Carrie giving the look a try, maybe out at the Hamptons<sup>1</sup>.

The TV series succeeds in promoting the latest fashion and brands, such as Chanel, Gucci, Manolo Blahnik, Dolce & Gabbana and Ralph Lauren (Gennaro 257). These labels are well-known and stand for classic European style (König 136). König notes that *Sex and the City* is “one of the most influential TV shows in recent years” (143). Field points out that the TV series is a “virtual how-to

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<sup>1</sup> place for married couples

manual for New York style” (qtd. in Sohn 148). Sohn adds that “designers and magazine editors often use the show’s wardrobe statements as inspiration for their own clothing lines or fashion spreads” (148). König describes this process with the following words: “Each time Carrie Bradshaw navigates the opening credits of *Sex and the City*, fashion commentators pay attention. Moreover, they seem to note every shoe, frock and bag, and turn these observations into fashion-page copy” (130).

Cartner-Morley from the British fashion press and British newspaper *The Guardian* writes about the impact of the TV series and argues that: “Sarah Jessica Parker and her co-stars in HBO’s hit TV show *Sex and the City* are without doubt having a fashion moment. The whole of New York wants to dress like *Sex and the City* [...] the whole of America wants to dress like *Sex and the City*”. In fact, *Sex and the City* succeeded in making fashion items popular and in making designer names famous (Bruzzi and Gibson *Fashion* 124). The TV series made less known fashion labels popular, such as Jean-Charles de Castelbajac, Matthew Williamson, Pierrot, Emanuel Ungaro, Alice and Olivia and Narcisco Rodriguez.

The TV series also tests different styles and goes beyond fashion boundaries (König 136). MacSweeney comments on the fashion style used in *Sex and the City* and notes that “outfits [...] can be drop-dead sexy or ‘ironically’ assimilate nerdy and ghetto-fabulous elements, such as dungarees and a faux-tacky name-plate necklace and earrings” (171). Bruzzi and Gibson claim that fashion plays not only an important part in the TV series concerning characters, but also the narrative in general:

In ‘Sex and the City,’ there exist two parallel but mutually referential trajectories. The first involves central characters through costume; the second introduces the notion of fashion being given a separate identity within the series’ overall narrative. (*Fashion* 116)

#### 4.2. FASHION ITEMS AS SATISFACTION OF DESIRE AND EXPRESSING FEMALE SEXUALITY

The four characters feel self-confident and enjoy their relationship with other women. They are not emotionally dependent on men to experience satisfaction.

On the contrary, men are portrayed as disappointment (Arthurs *Consumer Culture* 93). Arthurs argues that

[...] men in *Sex and the City* are the only objects of desire that create consumer dissatisfaction. The women treat men as branded goods – the packaging has to be right but the difficulty is to find one whose value lives up to the image. (94)

Instead, fashion items can serve as satisfaction. Carrie for instance is obsessed by designer stiletto shoes, which serve as a substitute for men (Arthurs *Consumer Culture* 93). In Carrie's life Manolo as a brand overshadows the presence of her boyfriends. Carrie gives women the advice in the final season to get married to themselves in order to maintain their independence. Carrie then signs up for the Manolo flagship store and Manolo can be considered as her soulmate (Harzewski). Another example for the replacement of a fashion item for a male lover can be seen when Carrie and Samantha walk down the street and Carrie sees a pair of Christian Louboutin shoes in the window of a store (Episode 66 "I Heart NY"). She addresses them with the phrase "Hello Lover" (Lee).

The importance of fashion in Carrie's life is also evident when Aidan buys the adjacent wall to her apartment and breaks it down. Carrie who sees her apartment as her private fashion house and even possesses a Manolo showroom is shocked (Episode 63 "Change of a Dress"). She considers the act as an act of violence against her own person (Harzewski).

The TV series *Sex and the City* demonstrates that women are no longer dependent on men. The presentation of women being sexually dissatisfied with their male lovers has resulted in a rise of the sales of vibrators (Arthurs *Consumer Culture* 93-94). Nelson points out that "taken to the extreme, men aren't necessary to sex, given the wide variety of rabbits [...] available" (90). Some fashion items actually serve as the women's satisfaction of sexual desire. The Rabbit vibrator can be interpreted as a symbol for the women's active sexuality (Attwood *Fashion and Passion* 395). The episode dealing with vibrators starts with an animated discussion of the four friends about men, dating, marriage and sex (Cornella 111).

Carrie: "Can I date a man who doesn't want to be married?"

Miranda: "What's the big deal? In fifty years men will be obsolete anyway. I mean, already you cannot talk to them. You don't need them to have kids with them. You don't even need them to have sex with them anymore, as I have just very pleasantly discovered." Samantha: "Sounds like somebody just got their first vibrator." [...]

Carrie: "Ultimate. I think I am in love."

Miranda: "You say that but you haven't met the Rabbit."

Charlotte: "A vibrator does not call you on your birthday. A vibrator does not send you flowers the next day. And you cannot take a vibrator home to meet your mother."

Miranda: "Well, I know where my next orgasm is coming from."

Moreover, luxury accessories also reflect the characters' desires. Samantha sleeps with a man after being given Tiffany earrings. When Carrie gets an engagement ring of Aidan, which she finds not good enough, Samantha replies by saying: "Wrong ring, wrong guy" (Episode 60 "Just Say Yes"). Charlotte splits up with a man, because she does not share his taste in china. Charlotte marries Harry, a short and bald man, because he gave a 5.2. quality carats engagement ring to her (Harzewski).

Accessories cannot only create women's desires for men, but men are also seen as accessories themselves in the TV series. The image of the romantic hero is rejected. Samantha puts for instance a bottle of vodka between the legs of her boyfriend Smith Jerrod. Samantha restricts his role to that of her commodity and sex partner. She does not even address him by his name or changes it into Jerry Jerrod when she does (Episode 79 "Lights, Camera, Relationship") (Harzewski).

#### 4.3. FASHION AND FEMALE IDENTITIES

Turner comments on the importance and meaning of fabulousness in *Sex and the City* and states that

fabulousness – embodies in a web of cultural markers that signify status, wealth, style, confidence, attitude, glitter, and panache against the banal backdrop of everyday existence – plays a central role in the structure and

success of *Sex and the City*. The attainment of fabulousness opens up possibilities of gender performance beyond conventional heteronormative routes of marriage, children, and monogamous partnering, lending credence to an independent, career-driven, self-motivated existence as an enviable lifestyle.

Crane points out that “clothing, as one of the most visible forms of consumption, performs a major role in the social construction of identity” (1). Dress can have a variety of different meanings, for example signaling status, class and group affiliation (Wilson and de la Haye 1). Wilson and de la Haye draw attention to the fact that “fashionable clothing has become central [...] whereby individuals express themselves and construct identities” (1). The sociologist Jennifer Craik argues that “we can regard the ways in which we clothe the body as an active process or technical means for constructing and presenting a bodily self (qtd. in Wilson and de la Haye 2). Roach-Higgins and Eicher share the view that dress serves as a means of identification by observing that “dress [...] allows us to identify, classify, and describe both modifications of and supplements to the body” (*Dress and Identity* 16). Kuruc refers to the relationship between identity and culture and notes that fashion is a “signifier of both persona and cultural identity” (195). Another meaning fashion carries is gender. Eicher and Roach-Higgins point out that “dress functions as a powerful though often underestimated system of visual communication that expresses gender role, which is usually intertwined with age, kinship, occupational, and other social roles throughout a person’s life” (*Definition and Classification of Dress* 23). A similar view is held by Kuruc who states that fashion “connotes different aspects about a person’s lifestyle, gender, sexuality, and even status within a given culture” (195).

The series introduces a particular lifestyle, clothes and shoes that show the different moods and personalities of the characters. Fashion is represented as a choice to express the individual characters (Arthurs *Consumer Culture* 90). Fashion helps to construct the character’s identity and it offers its own discourse within the show. Each character in the series develops or is restrained by their fashion choices (Kuruc 213). The four different characters are described by König with the following words: “ [...] whilst Carrie has come to epitomize all that is fashionable, Miranda has become the pragmatic career woman, Charlotte the

sweet traditionalist, and Samantha the predatory sex bomb” (137). Fashion is a means of human communication and this also refers to the TV show *Sex and the City* (Kuruc 213). Patricia Field, the costume designer for *Sex and the City* comments on the importance of fashion as a means of communication in the TV series:

Everybody wants to watch the show and see what the girls are wearing. People get together, have dinner, and watch the show. Working on this show has made me understand more and more the power of television to communicate ... [Through fashion] if you have something to say, you have the opportunity to say it to millions of people. That’s exciting to me. (qtd. in Sohn 68)

Furthermore, clothes produce pleasure and help you to discover your identity (Calefato 106-107). Fashion serves as a means of self-expression and communication (Kuruc 197). Lurie claims that fashion can be regarded as a language to create meaning and notes that “we put on clothing for some of the same reasons as we speak to make our life easier, to proclaim and disguise our identity, and to attract sexual attention” (qtd. in Kuruc 198). Tucker and Kingswell draw attention to the fact that fashion includes clothing, accessories and hairstyles and serves as means to express one’s personality:

While no one could accuse fashion of being as serious as, say brain surgery or the quest for world peace, the clothes we wear are an enormously powerful statement that can reveal more about us than anything we may say or do. It is a form of tribalism and a way of giving clear messages about who we are, so it is not surprising that people can have abiding fascination with something as apparently superficial as a hat or a purse. (8)

The fashion style found in *Sex and the City* combines glamour, old-fashioned style, sexiness and disguise. The clothes are specifically designed for the individual characters. Carrie’s outfits go beyond natural femininity, but also the outfits of the other three characters are adventurous (Rodie 60). Wilson and de la Haye comment on the new meaning of second-hand clothing by claiming that

today, second-hand clothing is not just the preserve of the unemployed and those on social welfare, but also a fashionable and ecologically sound form of recycling clothes to achieve a unique personal style on a shoestring. (6)

The characters' personalities and roles are signified through fashion in *Sex and the City*. This helps the audience to identify the four characters and to become accustomed to their personalities and to their costumes (Kuruc 201). The characters are introduced through fashion and fashion contributes to their development (204). Kuruc explains that

for example, it would seem strange in an episode if Carrie, who has an eclectic fashion sense, were to wear one of Miranda's manly business suits, just as it would seem peculiar for Charlotte to dress in a highly sexualized ensemble more suitable for Samantha's character. (201)

According to Wilson fashion can also serve as means of liberation and expresses gender and sexuality (qtd. in Street 3). Carter takes a similar view and argues that "clothes are our weapons, our challenges, our visible insults" (237). Fashion distinguishes characters from each other, for example the characters Carrie and Natasha, Mr. Big's young wife are opposed to each other (Episode 29 "Twenty Something Girls and Thirty Something Women"). Carrie's overt sexuality stands in contrast to Natasha's innocent and pure femininity. When Carrie meets Natasha, the former one is dressed in bra, skirt and cowboy hat. Carrie looks very sexy and athletic, but when she hears the marriage announcement, she is first confused then sick on the beach. The active and sexy body of Carrie is opposed to Natasha's passive and sexless body. Carrie's body, her warrior figure and her sexual sensibilities are displayed, whereas Natasha's body is disguised (Rodie 64-65). When Carrie meets Natasha another time in the changing room, Carrie is in mismatching underwear, whereas Natasha is wearing a white dress (Episode 33 "Attack of the 5'10 Woman). Natasha's white dress underlines her role as Mr. Big's future wife, whereas Carrie's underwear is a symbol for her affair with Mr. Big. Wilson-Kovacs claims that "erotic lingerie [...] outlined [...] eroticism and sexual attractiveness" (160). Amy-Chinn and Attwood state that there is "a link between déshabillement and sexual activity" (*Fashion and Passion* 156) and that



“the preferred meanings of sexy underwear are those related to self-confidence, control, empowerment and playfulness” (*Fashion and Passion* 398). Jantzen and Ostergaard point out that “what underwear does is [...] to communicate [...] identity [...] but also to sense emotions” (qtd. in Amy-Chinn et al. *Doing and Meaning* 383) and they draw attention to the fact that underwear “connotes sexuality” (qtd. in Amy-Chinn et al. *Doing and Meaning* 394).

It can be said that the fashion style used in *Sex and the City* underlines the characters’ sexuality. The bohemian style does not imitate the hippie era of sexual liberation, but it goes beyond it and experiments with sexual connotations of leather, bondage and underwear as outerwear (Arthurs *Consumer Culture* 91). Street defines bohemianism as “an affinity with the arts; unconventional habits and flamboyant tastes” (105). Arthurs points out that “the bohemian movement[s] [...] has been to free white, middle-class women from sexual constraints required by bourgeois respectability” (86). She comments on the style used in *Sex and the City* and states that

the *Sex and the City* version of bohemian fashion is post punk, post Madonna; it incorporates an assertive sexualized imagery for women that consciously plays with the transgressive sexual connotations. (91)

A similar view is held by Rodie who claims that

Carrie and her three fellow single Manhattanites together constitute versions of femininity and womanhood which not only suggest construction and masquerade, but necessarily, by the superlative nature of their adventurous costumes, camp and the ‘uebersexual’. (60)

The characters distinguish themselves in their bohemian way of dressing from other social groups, in particular from bourgeois women. These women are restrained and their sexual behaviour is always controlled. An example of a bourgeois woman also represents Natasha, Mr. Big’s wife. She favours the colour beige, which symbolizes her sexual restraint and her boredom (Arthurs *Consumer Culture* 91). Barnes and Eicher point out the function of fashion by stating that

dress serves as a sign that the individual belongs to a certain group, but simultaneously differentiates the same individual from all others: it includes and excludes.” (*Introduction* 1)

## 5. THE PROTAGONISTS AND THEIR FASHION SENSE

### 5.1. CARRIE – THE FASHION ICON

With her intelligence, loyalty, mind-boggling fashion sensibility, and open heart, she is the best friend every girl wants and the girlfriend that every guy dreams of. (Sohn qtd. in Kuruc 205)

Carrie is obsessed with designer shoes. (Brasfield 130). She is the fashion icon of the series (Byers 43). Kuruc notes that Carrie has got “an eclectic fashion sense” (201). She continues that

Carrie is introduced to the audience in a leopard-print jumper, a vintage ring, and her famous Manolo Blahnik sandals; the eclectic compilation of the outfit signifies the multi-faceted personality of Carrie herself. (204)

The vintage stands for Carrie’s down-to-earth nature, whereas her Manolo Blahniks stand for the world of fashion and elitism Carrie participates in (Kuruc 204). Thompson notes that “*Sex and the City* turned trendy Manolo Blahnik stilettos into a household name” (2). Niblock claims that “Manolo Blahnik is considered the Michaelangelo of footwear, for the transformation his grand designs can wield on almost any pair of legs” (144) and that “each style embodies a fantasy narrative, the shoe enabling the wearer to access, in a Lacanian sense, a more ideal and complete version of herself” (145). The label Blahnik stands for metropolitan modernity and femininity. It allows women to redefine themselves and to reject bourgeois conventions (Niblock 145). Niblock notes that Manolo Blahnik shoes help “emancipated women to be attractive yet imperious and goddess-like” (145). Furthermore, the label presents a new version of femininity and Irigaray argues that through Manolo Blahnik “attention is drawn to the erotic

– and thus [to] female power, substance and pleasure” (qtd. in Niblock 146). König comments on the presence of the shoe label and the relationship between the label and the wearer by observing that

Manolo Blahnik shoes are given a prominent role within the show, raising the brand profile to vertiginous new heights and eliciting fashion-press statements such as ‘Carrie Bradshaw is a Manolo girl and her shoes play far more than a walk-on part in the series’. (137)

Carrie is the most liberated character concerning dress style, as she is a freelance writer and she is not restrained by dress codes. Bruzzi and Gibson point out that Carrie’s profession permits her the “conspicuous consumption of designer clothes, her violent yoking together of clashing satirical styles and her fetishisation of Manolo Blahnik strappy sandals” (*Fashion* 117). Bruzzi and Gibson comment on Carrie’s versatility and state that

Carrie is a composite of multiple, conflicting personae, a layered performance that comprises her romantic tendency, her child-like exhibitionism and her professional obligation to reconfigure herself repeatedly in her work, her column and the public domain. (*Fashion* 118)

The city of New York allows Carrie to express herself freely and to experiment with her fashion choices. Carrie combines expensive brand-fashions and vintage and second-hand items (Kuruc 206-207). Furthermore, she often wears eclectic accessories and vertiginous heels (Handyside 407). In the opening scene the possibilities New York offers are shown. The scene is divided in two parts, namely in Carrie walking down the street and in Carrie’s picture on the bus. Carrie wears a white tutu<sup>2</sup> and a pink top and ballerinas (Handyside 412). Akass and McCabe describe the opening scene and Carrie’s outfit with the following words:

The opening sets up the comedic premise for *Sex and the City*. Counterpointing Carrie’s *ingénue* self with her glamorous sexy image on the bus structures the joke. She may revel in trying on the virginal fairy-

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<sup>2</sup> a short skirt made of many folds of stiff material, worn by ballet dancers (Longman)

princess identity, but Carrie Bradshaw, who knows good sex, reminds us that she is not as innocent as her Degas-esque attire would have us believe. This joking structure is predicated upon a comedic play between gender identities and cultural performance, between fantasies and masquerade, and between the chaste fairy-tale heroine and the provocatively alluring siren. (*Ms Parker* 178)

Patricia Field bought the white tutu for \$5 and refers to it as “great-looking and attention-grabbing ... the tiered cupcake thing” (qtd. in Sohn 30). Bruzzi and Gibson suggest that “this outfit, through its shape and colour, emphasizes her quirky style and her romantic nature” (*Fashion* 118). At the corner there is a close-up of a bus wheel and a puddle and Carrie’s dress gets splashed. In the next scene a poster of Carrie’s column is shown saying “Carrie Bradshaw knows everything about sex (and isn’t afraid to ask)”. Thus, Manhattan stands for freedom and liberty (Handyside 412). Handyside claims that

the anonymity of the city opens up new possibilities of creating oneself, giving one the freedom to experiment with appearance in a way that would have been unthinkable in a traditional rural community. (143)

In fact, Carrie’s versatility is demonstrated in her choice of costumes. In one situation Carrie decides not to go on holiday with Mr. Big to the Bahamas. (Episode 12 “Oh Come All Ye Faithful”). When she waits for him outside, she is wearing a white top and a printed skirt. She has got a white vanity case, an orange elephant-print bag and bright mules. This scene refers to Audrey Hepburn and her role in the film *Sabrina*. Hepburn in Givenchy waits at the station and falls in love with William Holden. Carrie’s fashion style shows respect to Audrey Hepburn and at the same time her subdued costume reflects her unwillingness to make a decision concerning her relationship with Mr. Big (Kuruc 206-207). In another scene Carrie has lunch in restaurant with her three friends. Carrie asks a man for his phone number for her friend Miranda (Episode 45 “Hot Child in the City”). The scene resembles a high school setting where a group of friends talk about a man. Carrie’s outfit looks flirty, because she is wearing her hair in a bun and has a colourful bandana around it. Furthermore, she is wearing a colourful Chanel top, colourful tights and purple metallic heels. Her costume looks innocent, naïve and

happy, but the Chanel top demonstrates her class position. Carrie's outfit is more fun and laid-back compared to the scene above (Kuruc 207). When Carrie breaks up with Aidan, she starts wearing low-key pieces instead of her wild outfits (207). Sarah Jessica Parker comments on Carrie's character development and says: "I thought it was appropriate for Carrie to look more ladylike" (qtd. in Malcolm 21).

Carrie combines high-end couture and low-end vintage (Kuruc 208). Her style is a combination of styles derived from cinema and more contemporary sources (Bruzzi and Gibson *Fashion* 125). Carrie often experiments with different styles and is often influenced by Hepburn who embodies elegance. In one scene Carrie wears a sixties topknot and various pearl ropes (Episode 45 "Hot Child in the City"). In this scene Carrie mixes *Breakfast at Tiffany's* with Coco Chanel. Carrie de-mystifies couture by combining various styles, lines and fabrics and she also gives her outfits a personal note. Carrie combines for instance a Dior dress with an inexpensive nameplate necklace or she wears a Louis Vuitton top and a Chanel belt with denim hotpants and a corsage. Her style can be easily copied by the audience as most items are inexpensive and easy-to-copy (Bruzzi and Gibson *Fashion* 119).

## 5.2. CLOSE ANALYSIS OF CARRIE'S OUTFITS



FIGURE 1: CARRIE OUTFIT 1



FIGURE 2: CARRIE OUTFIT 2



FIGURE 3: CARRIE OUTFIT 3

Carrie's versatile character can be seen in all three outfits. They are very different and show that Carrie experiments with different styles. It can also be seen that Carrie often mixes high fashion and vintage. All three outfits show different sides of Carrie. She can be elegant, feminine, but also casual or masculine.

The first outfit consists of a white Dior dress and black Dior gladiator heels. What is striking about the dress is the oversize white and gold flower. The dress underlines Carrie's romantic and girly side, but at the same time the flower makes the dress special and grabs people's attention. The black shoes stand in contrast to the white flowery dress and make Carrie's outfit sexy. Her self-confidence is expressed through her extraordinary high heels. Carrie combines her dress with hardly any accessories apart from a gold bracelet. In general, the outfit shows Carrie's elitist position in New York's society.

The second outfit shows another side of Carrie. Compared to the first outfit it is more casual and street style. Carrie made the safari look urban and wears it in New York City. Carrie combines a high-waisted skirt with an oversize leather tote and gives her outfit a vintage touch. Nevertheless, Carrie emphasizes her femininity with a brown belt and black and white sandals. The expensive footwear is opposed to the vintage outfit. This outfit represents Carrie's taste for mixing and matching different styles. She is not afraid to try different styles out and the second outfit underlines her liberated character.

The third outfit is different from the first two outfits. The outfit is one the one hand classic, and also masculine. Carrie wears white trousers, a white vest, a pink shirt and a black tie. Carrie seems to play with her masculine side. Her fashion attire looks very businesslike, but the pink shirt and the funky brooch on the tie and the black peep toes give it a feminine touch. Carrie looks very smart, but there is still playfulness in her outfit.

### 5.3. MIRANDA – THE BUSINESS WOMAN

With her quick wit, pragmatism and deeply-held opinions, Miranda Hobbes represents the realist in all of us. (Sohn qtd. in Kuruc 208)

Miranda wears most of the time business suits as she works as a lawyer (Kuruc 201). She is the least feminine character and she works in a law firm that is dominated by men. Miranda shares some male characteristics. Moreover, Miranda is the only one among her friends who wears short hair, which underlines her masculine features (204). She does not wear typically feminine costumes, because she wears muted coloured pant suits and dark tailored ensembles. Even when Miranda is off work her outfits are more practical than the ones of her friends. She wears hardly dresses and skirts, although they would be acceptable as a business suit.

Miranda's wardrobe demonstrates her professionalism and her practicality (208). Within the series Miranda is shown most of the time in her business outfits and she

seems to be rather functional than sensual (Bruzzi and Gibson *Fashion* 122). Crane draws attention to the fact that Miranda's fashion choices underline her personality and states that

her costume choices are deliberate as they are intended to personify Miranda as an empowered and successful woman, who is capable of achieving goals and managing others, because here (in a business environment) women are likely to be presented wearing business suits and other costumes derived from masculine attire in order to showcase her success. (qtd. in Kuruc 208)

Research has shown that professional women often wear uniforms that are business suits that resemble men's business suits. These uniforms consist of jacket, blouse and skirt and should indicate success. However, if women's style is too masculine, they are confronted with various problems, such as loss of professional image and low chances for promotion (Johnson, Crutsinger, and Workman 133). The findings of research demonstrate that women are more likely to be promoted if they adapt only partly to masculinity and still stay within their gender role. If women do not depict a feminine gender role, they are considered to violate the gender roles of what is masculine and feminine (136). A self-help manual for business women by Molloy suggests that women should not dress too sexually, but they should give their outfits a feminine note (50). Miranda seems to conform to these rules, because she combines her dark suits with a contrasting shirt, a multi-stranded necklace or high heels (Bruzzi and Gibson *Fashion* 122).

However, Miranda's wardrobe changes in certain situations. When she becomes mother, her fashion style becomes more feminine and she identifies with her role as a mother and wife. When she gives birth to her son Brady and marries her boyfriend Steve, she starts wearing make-up and more feminine garments, such as brighter colours, softer patterns and skirt instead of suits. This change of style and fashion marks her new life (Kuruc 209). Field claims that Miranda is the least self-confident character of the four protagonists and not too much interested in fashion by noting that

clothes commonly intervene with her and come in the way of her eroticization. This is despite the amount of sex she is seen having and



despite her costumes being culled from comparable designer wardrobes to those of her fellow protagonists. (Bruzzi and Gibson *Fashion* 122)

#### 5.4. CLOSE ANALYSIS OF MIRANDA'S OUTFITS



FIGURE 4: MIRANDA OUTFIT 1



FIGURE 5: MIRANDA OUTFIT 2

Miranda has a very classic dress style and wears rather dark colours. Her outfits are stylish and smart and underline her professionalism. Both are outfits are practical, but still chic.

The first outfit consists a black business suit. Miranda wears a red top underneath and has a small handbag, which gives the business attire a feminine touch. She looks very elegant and self-confident in her role as a lawyer.

The second outfit is similar to the first outfit, but is is more feminine. Miranda wears a blue nautical dress and a red coat. She combines her dress with a white belt, white sandals and earrings. Miranda emphasizes her soft femininity, but still keeps her professionalism. The colours of her outfit are classic and match well together. Red and blue are an alternative to the more conservative black.

### 5.5. SAMANTHA – THE SEX BOMB

I'm a tri-sexual. I'll try anything once. – character of Samantha Jones  
(Sohn qtd. in Kuruc 210)

Samantha's attitude to sex is also reflected in her fashion style. Kuruc notes that she dresses in "highly sexualized ensemble" (201) and that "Samantha, together with her wardrobe, signifies outward sexuality and eccentricity" (205). Field describes Samantha's wardrobe as "more theatrical" compared to the outfits of her friends (qtd. in Sohn 74). Samantha wears bright and flashy colours and low 1980s cuts. Her fashion choices reflect her sexual liberation (Kuruc 205). Samantha's fashion model is Joan Collins and Samantha's dresses often make references to the seventies and eighties. She wears for example shoulder pads, plunging necklines for daywear and outsized earrings and she rejects contemporary fashion (Bruzzi and Gibson *Fashion* 121).

Samantha is the most sexual and promiscuous character, although she is the oldest one. The TV show subverts assumptions about the sexuality of older women. She is quite aggressive in her personality and this is also reflected in her clothes style (Kuruc 211). Bruzzi and Gibson state that Samantha is the "most straightforward example of erotic display in that her clothes consciously signal her physical assets and her sexual availability" (*Fashion* 121). Samantha's promiscuity is demonstrated in her outfits, which are excessive and exaggerated, because she

wears intense colours, large and flashy jewelry. Kuruc notes that Samantha's fashion choices are "reminiscent of high-end stripper outfits" (211). In a scene she wears a purple dress with tasseled breast decorations (Episode 11 "The Drought"). The dress resembles a stripper outfit and demonstrates her sexual aggressiveness. Samantha is aggressive in her job as a public relations executive and in the bedroom and her aggressiveness is reflected in her fashion choices, because Samantha possesses outrageous lingerie (Kuruc 211).

It can be stated that Samantha's outfits are extreme, because they often do not reflect the narrative situation. Samantha wears the lilac dress for a date with a rich young man and at Miranda's mother's funeral she wears a black dress displaying her shoulders and her cleavage (Bruzzi and Gibson *Fashion* 121). Bruzzi and Gibson point out that

Samantha is the most stereotypical character and the least flexible. Her clothes are not intended to reflect contemporary fashion and, while the other characters quite substantially by season five, Samantha's look remains constant. (*Fashion* 122)

Throughout the series Samantha does not change her wardrobe, even when she finds out that she suffers from breast cancer after an attempt to augment her breasts (Episode 88 "The Ick Factor"). She still wears her exhibitionist outfits and wears wigs to hide her hair loss. In one scene when Samantha is invited by her boyfriend to attend a movie premier, she cannot find the right wig (Episode 90 "Out of the Frying Pan"). Samantha wants to wear the perfect wig with the perfect costume. In the end, she realizes that there is no perfect wig and she decides to wear a pink wig. The colour pink shows her acceptance of the disease cancer and it stands for the disease itself (Kuruc 212).

## 5.6. CLOSE ANALYSIS OF SAMANTHA'S OUTFITS



FIGURE 6 : SAMANTHA OUTFIT 1



FIGURE 7: SAMANTHA OUTFIT 2



FIGURE 8: SAMANTHA OUTFIT 3

Samantha's fashion style is sexy and underlines her self-confidence and her sex-appeal. In every outfit she presents her womanly assets. Samantha wears power suits or dresses and she is not afraid to draw attention to her curves. Most of her outfits are excessive and extraordinary.

The first outfit consists of a bright yellow jacket with a very low cut. The jacket displays her cleavage and her black bra. Furthermore, Samantha's breasts are emphasized through the shoulder pads and the belt. It can be said that the outfit resembles the style of the eighties. Samantha combines her outfit with oversized earrings and black shades. Her outfit reveals her neckline and reflects her open attitude to sex.

The second outfit is similar to the first outfit, but it is more aggressive. Samantha wears a red top displaying her arms. She mixes her top with a tiger print skirt and matching tiger print bracelets. Furthermore, Samantha wears red lipstick to underline her luscious lips and oversized earrings in the form of stars. It can be said that the colour red and the animal print pattern stand for her sexual aggression and her wildness in bed. Samantha indicates through her wardrobe that she is a tigress in the bedroom and gets what she wants.

The third outfit is a bit different from the first two outfits and shows Samantha's glamorous side. The short glitter dress is flirty and sexy displaying Samantha's cleavage and her back. Nevertheless, it is not displaying too much and draws attention to Samantha's hourglass figure and her curves. Samantha wears soft make-up and hardly any accessories apart from creoles. The outfit is still sassy, but Samantha shows a more girlish and playful side compared to the first two outfits.

## 5.7. CHARLOTTE – THE FASHION PRINCESS

Women really just want to be rescued! – character of Charlotte York (Sohn qtd. in Kuruc 209)

Kuruc points out that Charlotte's "conservative fashion sense is complimented by her conservative attitudes towards dating, marriage, and men in general" (204). Field describes Charlotte as the "optimistic, ever-hopeful American girl" in "classic preppie" clothes (qtd. in Bruzzi and Gibson *Fashion* 119). In the first episode Charlotte wears a 1940s-style dress, which emphasizes her femininity and according to Kuruc Charlotte is "the most naïve and girly character" (204-205). Furthermore, Kuruc notes that Charlotte is opposed to "Miranda's masculinized character" and "Samantha's ultra-sexualized persona" (209).

Charlotte is conservative in her fashion style and she turns from an art curator into a stay-at-home wife. She believes in love and has got romantic desires. Charlotte's wardrobe reflects her character as she wears full skirts, pastel colours and accessories that match her outfit. Charlotte stands for femininity and elegance. In one scene she wears a grey belted cotton dress with a white collar and silver buttons (Episode 5 "The Power of Female Sex"). The outfit pays homage to Hollywood classics and it underlines Charlotte's conservatism and traditional viewpoints. Charlotte relies on brands, such as a Burberry Mac, pearls, a Cartier watch and an Alice band as a traditional and feminine character. The British label Burberry is Charlotte's favourite label and Charlotte often wears a trench coat or a purse by Burberry. The label Burberry stands for wealth, elegance, luxury and tradition and compliments Charlotte's character (Kuruc 209-210).

It is not very often that Charlotte leaves her conservatism behind and tries out something new. When Charlotte gets divorced, her friends take her to Atlanta City (Episode 69 "Luck Be an Old Lady"). There Charlotte buys a pink spandex dress, but in the end she is wearing her usual elegant outfits again (Kuruc 209-210). Bruzzi and Gibson describe the dress as a "hooker dress" (*Fashion* 120). Despite her conservative fashion sense, Charlotte has got sexual desires, which are displayed in her wardrobe. She wears halter-neck dresses and strapless, straight-across necklines. These outfits signal her repressed eroticism. Charlotte signals modesty and desire by displaying her shoulders and arms, but not her breasts (Bruzzi and Gibson *Fashion* 120). Laver refers to the connection between dress and women's sexuality and states that

clothes can only keep it alive by continually altering the emphasis, drawing attention to all aspects of the female body in turn, by exposure, semi-concealment or by other devices well-known to any dress designers. This altering of emphasis is ‘the shift erogenous zone’ and is the whole basis of fashion. (137)

## 5.8. CLOSE ANALYSIS OF CHARLOTTE’S OUTFITS

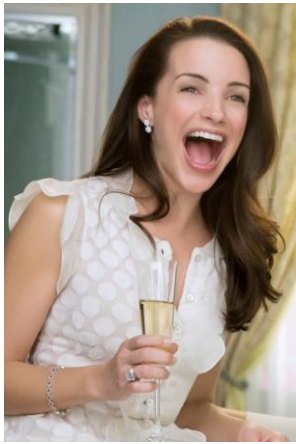


FIGURE 9: CHARLOTTE OUTFIT 1



FIGURE 10 : CHARLOTTE OUTFIT 2



FIGURE 11: CHARLOTTE OUTFIT 3

Charlotte's fashion style is sweet, classic and neat. She shows her feminine side in all her outfits. Her fashion style seems to be natural as she prefers playful prints, florals and soft colours. Charlotte loves to wear skirts and dresses to underline her femininity.

In the first outfit Charlotte wears a white classic dress. It has buttons and flowing sleeves. Charlotte combines her beautiful dress with matching silver accessories consisting of earrings, a bracelet and a ring. Charlotte wears hardly any make-up and underlines her lips with a soft pastel colour. The outfit is very natural and feminine.

The second outfit is more formal compared to the first one. Charlotte wears a black dress with straps consisting of a swinging skirt. She combines her dress with again with matching accessories, namely a watch, a ring and a pearl chain. The small chain underlines Charlotte's elegance and classic style.

The third outfit is different from the first two outfits and emphasizes Charlotte's sweet and girly nature. The dress consists of playful pink and red pattern and Charlotte does not wear any accessories apart from a small handbag in a different print. The dress stands for Charlotte's optimistic and happy nature.



## CONCLUSION

It can be stated that the TV series *Sex and the City* introduces a complex representation of the female characters despite the fact that all four women are heterosexual, white, metropolitan and career woman and are representative of a small restricted group. The series questions common discourses about femininity and sexuality, because the main characters are not portrayed just as wives and married mothers. The four women are single and successful and they can enjoy their lifestyle, which they do throughout the series. The main themes addressed in *Sex and the City* are singledom, overt female sexuality, the subversion of the myth of romance and the male hero and female friendship.

The four main characters are not sad to be single, but they are proud of it and they enjoy their single lifestyle. They reject society's negative image of singles and society's pressure put on women to get married. The four women have fun and enjoy the freedom in New York City and they discuss their sexual experiences and desires. Sex talk is made public and is no longer restricted to private conversations. The four characters have sex without commitment and explore their female sexuality. They break bourgeois conventions established in society and they dismiss the dichotomy between virgin and whore. The women are not morally judged for their behaviour in the series and their lifestyle stands in contrast to traditional relationships and happily-ever-after fairy tales. Moreover, *Sex and the City* challenges heterosexual gender norms, because Samantha has for example a relationship with a lesbian and Carrie dates a bisexual man. The women take pleasure in sex and enjoy their sexual freedom.

In the TV series not only the advantages of a single lifestyle are introduced and the marriage plot is rejected, but also the image of the white knight is reversed. The four women in *Sex and the City* do not need to be rescued by a man or wait for their white knight to come patiently. Traditional gender roles found in fairy tales are rejected and the conventions of marriage and sexuality are subverted. The four women enjoy their single lives and do not need men for satisfaction. They find pleasure in sex without emotional attachment and in female masturbation. In the TV series sex is no longer linked to emotion. Men are no longer seen by the

four characters as emotional and sexual satisfaction, but only as disappointment. The image of masculinity is reversed and men are considered as objects. In the series men are often not even addressed by their name.

The concept of romance is not the only one rejected in *Sex and the City*, but also the concepts of marriage and motherhood are reversed. Charlotte marries and gets divorced again, Miranda struggles to become a good mother and is a single mother for some time and Samantha does not want to have children at all and prefers pursuing her career. Motherhood is neither sentimentalized nor glorified, but portrayed in a realistic manner. The image of the natural mother is subverted and the conflicts between children and professional life are shown in a realistic manner. Furthermore, single parenthood is introduced as an alternative model to patriarchal families.

As the four women do not need men to complete their existence emotionally or sexually, female friendships are presented as being more important than having a partner. The four characters have intimate conversations, share their experiences and reflect on their lives. The women listen to each other, help and support each other. They create an alternative to the world of men and their relationship is similar to the structure of a family. *Sex and the City* shows successfully that friendship can substitute family and relationships. The characters are happy with their imperfect lives and their friendships. At the end of the series the four women settle down with a partner, but in the final scene the focus is on the friendship between these four people and not on the relationship with their partner.

The self-confidence and the female identity of the four characters are reflected in their fashion style. Fashion emphasizes the characters' personality and sexuality and it stands in contrast with the fashion style of other people and groups. The four characters distinguish themselves from other social groups which are more restrained in their behaviour, in particular from bourgeois women. There is a bohemian style used in *Sex and the City*, because the characters experiment with different styles and play with sexual connotations. Nevertheless, each character has a different way of dressing, which emphasizes their personality.

Carrie is the fashion icon of the series and has a very adventurous and multi-faced fashion style. She is a sexual anthropologist and discusses questions of dating,

love and sex in her newspaper column by drawing on her own experience and that of her friends. As a freelance writer she is not restrained by dress codes and she combines designer clothes and vintage or second-hand items. She is obsessed with shoes and her favourite shoe wear is Manolo Blahnik. Carrie is a very versatile character and her fashion style is a mixture of cinema and contemporary fashion.

Miranda is a cynic and successful lawyer and is the most feminist character among her friends. As she works in a male-dominated law firm, she wears business suits most of the time. Miranda often wears dark-coloured business ensembles and is hardly seen wearing dresses or skirts. Her fashion style underlines her personality as a successful business woman. Miranda is the least feminine character, which is emphasized by the fact that she wears short hair. When she has a baby, her fashion style changes and she wears make-up and skirts. Furthermore, the colours of her outfits become brighter.

Samantha is a successful public relations executive and she is the oldest one among her friends. She is sexually promiscuous and not interested in long-term relationships. She has got a very male attitude towards sex and relationships and constantly uses dirty sex talk. Consequently, her outfits are sexualized and signify her overt sexuality. Samantha wears bright and flashy colours and low cuts. Her clothes stand for sexual liberation, sexual aggressiveness and sexual promiscuity. It can be said that her outfits resemble stripper outfits and her fashion style does not change throughout the show, even when Samantha finds out that she has got breast cancer.

Charlotte works as an art dealer and is the most romantic character. Furthermore, she is the most prudish character and the most girly type among her friends. Charlotte often feels embarrassed by the sex talk of her friends, but she has a few sexual encounters herself. Her fashion style is rather conservative and it underlines her conservative attitude towards dating, marriage and men. Charlotte believes in love and her outfits can be called romantic. She wears full skirts, pastel colours and accessories that match her outfits. Some of Charlotte's clothes refer to Hollywood classics, which emphasizes her conventionality. She rarely tries out new fashion styles and her favourite label is Burberry, which signifies tradition and elegance and corresponds well to Charlotte's character.

It can be stated that the TV series *Sex and the City* presents a diversity and variety of female identities. Throughout the series conventional feminine behaviour is questioned and taboo issues are brought into the public space and discussed. Fashion reflects the characters' personalities and it allows the four women to express their independent existence beyond norms of marriage and children. The four women consider their bodies as sexual subjects and as active. The series promotes femininity, female friendship and female power and demonstrates that the four main characters can 'have it all' despite struggles and difficulties, because they rely on their friendships and on themselves.

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## GERMAN ABSTRACT

Die vorliegende Arbeit beschäftigt sich mit einer der erfolgreichsten TV Serien unserer Zeit mit *Sex and the City*. Die Serie handelt vom Leben von vier erfolgreichen New Yorker Singlefrauen. Ziel der Arbeit ist es zu erforschen wie die Identität der weiblichen Charaktere konstruiert wird. Es wird von der Annahme ausgegangen, dass die Identität der weiblichen Charaktere durch die Identifikation mit Werten, durch Sexualität und durch Mode geformt wird. Die Darstellung der vier Frauen in der Serie wird analysiert und die Charaktere werden miteinander verglichen.

Im ersten Teil der Arbeit wird das Theoriekonzept des Postfeminismus diskutiert. Der Begriff des Postfeminismus hat zu vielen Diskussionen zwischen WissenschaftlerInnen geführt und die Bedeutung des Terminus hängt oft stark vom Gebrauch des Autors oder der Autorin ab. *Sex and the City* kann als postfeministischer Text bezeichnet werden, da sich die Serie mit zeitgenössischen Frauenthemen und Problemen von Frauen auseinandersetzt. Innerhalb der Serie werden feministische Themen aufgegriffen und diskutiert.

Im zweiten Teil der Arbeit wird untersucht, ob die weiblichen Identitäten der Fernsehserie den in der Gesellschaft etablierten Gendernormen entsprechen. Konzepte wie Singlesein, Heirat, Romantik und Freundschaft werden in die Analyse miteinbezogen. Es soll erklärt werden, dass *Sex and the City* das Singlesein fördert und traditionelle Bilder von Weiblichkeit zurückweist und ein neues Frauenbild präsentiert. Soziale Taboos werden gebrochen und Themen wie weibliche Sexualität und Masturbation werden behandelt. Zudem wird der Mythos von Romantik und des männlichen Helden entlarvt.

Im dritten Teil der Arbeit wird gezeigt welchen Einfluss Mode auf die Identität der einzelnen Charaktere hat. Die vier Frauen drücken ihre Persönlichkeit durch ihren Kleidungsstil aus und unterstreichen ihre weibliche Identität. Jeder der vier Charaktere ist verschieden und besitzt einen eigenen Kleidungsstil, daher können die Kleidungsstile der vier Charaktere untereinander nicht vertauscht werden. Zudem nimmt Mode an sich einen wichtigen Stellenwert in der Serie ein und Marken wie Chanel, Gucci, Manolo Blahnik, Dolce & Gabbana und Ralph Lauren

konnten erfolgreich vermarktet werden. *Sex and the City* hat einen enormen Einfluss auf die Modewelt ausgeübt und der Kleidungsstil der einzelnen Charaktere wurde weltweit kopiert.



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