

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

On June 6th, 1998, the cable network HBO aired the pilot episode of *Sex and the City*, a new comedy series chronicling the lives and loves of four single women living in New York City. The show's creator, Darren Star, was best known at the time for producing the long-running Fox TV series *Beverly Hills, 90210*, and its spin-off, *Melrose Place*. For *Sex and the City*, Star switched coasts, loosely adapting a book by the same name by Candace Bushnell, compiled from a number of her columns for *The New York Observer*.

Bushnell has stated in several interviews that the Carrie Bradshaw in her columns is her alter ego; when she wrote the "*Sex and the City*" essays, she used her own name initially; for privacy reasons, however, she created the character of Carrie Bradshaw, played by Sarah Jessica Parker. Carrie Bradshaw, is the narrator of each episode. Each episode is structured around her train of thought which features a different question about sex, love and relationships while writing her weekly column, "*Sex and the City*", for the fictitious newspaper the *New York Star*.

Carrie is an open minded girl looking for love, but having fun in the process. Carrie experiences moments of both happiness in her independence and loneliness. Carrie has an on-off boyfriend namely John Preston a.k.a Mr. Big and finally they are engaged in the end of the episodes.

The second major character is Miranda Hobbes, a career-minded lawyer with extremely cynical views on relationships and men. The character of Miranda Hobbes is portrayed by Cynthia Nixon. Miranda is Carrie's best friend. She is very confident and voice of reason. In the early seasons, she is portrayed as masculine and borderline misandric. But after Miranda had a baby boy namely Brady from her ex-boyfriend Steve Brady at the end of the fourth season, she tries to be a good mother.

The third major character is Charlotte York, played by Kristin Davis. Charlotte works in an art gallery and has had a conventional upbringing. Charlotte has a refreshingly optimistic outlook on love and romance amidst the ever-complex dating scene of New York City. Charlotte York walks through life with a perfect sense of etiquette and a lot of idealism. For years, Charlotte had a crystalline vision of the life she wanted to have. First and foremost, she wanted to get married. She wanted true love. And she wanted her husband to be wealthy, handsome and belong to the social elite.

The fourth major character is Samantha Jones, portrayed by Kim Cattrall. She is the oldest and most sexually confident of the foursome. Samantha is an independent businesswoman, with a career in public relations. She radiates confidence in everything she does, whether it is landing a star client, getting a table at the trendiest restaurant or bedding the hottest guy in a room, and calls herself a "try-sexual", meaning she will try anything once.

Sex and the City series was divided up into six seasons altogether. The first season was twelve episodes (two discs of six), the second season was

eighteen episodes (three discs of six), and the third season was eighteen episodes (three discs of six). Then the fourth season was eighteen episodes (three discs of six), the fifth season was eight episodes (two discs of four), and the final season was twenty episodes. In total, there were 94 episodes of *Sex and the City*. *Sex and the City* series was end on February 22nd, 2004.

At the end of *Sex and the City*'s run in February 2004, there were indications of a movie being considered following the series. HBO announced that Michael Patrick King was working on a possible script for the movie which he would direct. Later that year, Kim Cattrall declined to work on the project citing reasons that the script and the start date were overly prolonged and she decided to take other offers at hand. As a result, the immediate follow-up idea for the movie were dropped. It was in the middle of 2007 that the plans for making the movie were announced again. This reportedly resulted after Cattrall's conditions being accepted along with a future HBO series.

The *Sex and the City* series gains many public responses since its first aired. Criticism has been expressed about the influence the show has on adolescents and how the images displayed on the show affect the way women and young girls view themselves (Baxter, 2009: 91–98). Another critics is *Sex and the City*, were specifically recognized for "glamorizing sex while hardly mentioning its downsides, such as pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases" by a 2008 study published in the American Journal of Paediatrics. The study found that females 12–17 who watched these, and similarly

"sexually charged" shows were about twice as likely to get pregnant as those who did not, and teenage male viewers were more likely to impregnate someone. The Daily Mail article noted that similar studies have also found an association between viewing sexual content and earlier sex and higher disease risk (<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/worldnews/Sexually-charged-shows-Sex-And-The-City-Friends-blame-rise-teenage-pregnancy.html>)

Joan Swirsky, a New York-based journalist and author, wrote in 2003: "Another example that feminism is dead is the popularity of *Sex and the City*, the HBO show that features 30- and 40-something woman sending out the unmistakable messages to females both younger and older that careers, money, looks and, ostensibly, intelligence are nothing compared to doing anything to get a man, including endlessly obsessing about the subject, engaging in loveless or even like-less sexual encounters." (Swirsky: July 24, 2003).

Although some reviewers said that the movie was contradictive and giving the negative effects for its viewer, it seems that it does not affect the market responses. *Sex and the City* Series had been aired in more than thirty countries in the world. The series was produced in the DVD edition. All six seasons of *Sex and the City* have been released commercially on DVD, with season six being split into two parts. They have been released officially on region 1 (Americas), region 2 (Europe & Middle East), region 3 (Korea) and region 4 (Oceania & South Pacific) formats. In addition to their region encoding, releases vary depending on the region in which they were released.

In addition to standard single season DVD box sets of the show, limited edition collectors' editions have also been released that include all six seasons in one complete set. Even these vary between region 1, 2 and 4. While Europe got a complete set that came with special 'shoebox' packaging, the USA and Canada version came packaged in a more traditional fold-out suede case and with an additional bonus DVD including many special features. Mexico's and Oceania's edition come packaged in a beauty case. Outside the US, *Sex and the City* boxed sets were released through Paramount Pictures. American and Canadian DVDs were released through the program's original broadcasters, HBO. In Australia, single editions have been released, where each disc is sold separately. In South Korea, a complete, six-season, special DVD shoebox sets were released. In Brazil, the first and fifth season were released on DVD Dual, but all other seasons were released the DVD box set, had its launch in the Brazilian market in 2006, and only with subtitles in Portuguese.

Sex and the City Series were also gained some industrial responses in the form of award. It won 7 of its 54 Emmy Award nominations, 8 of its 24 Golden Globe Award nominations, and 3 of its 11 Screen Actors Guild Award nominations. *Sex and the City* still airs in syndication worldwide and has been listed on Entertainment Weekly's end-of-the-decade "best of" list and as one of Time magazine's 100 Best TV Shows of All Time (<http://entertainment.time.com/2007/08/13/sex-and-the-city/x> and *the City: the Movie*).

Sex and the City Series are very interesting movie. There are several aspects that make these movie are very interesting. The first aspect is the title of the movie. "*Sex*" and "*the City*" combine the two fundamental aspects that give meaning to the characters. Sex is not simply an activity that takes place in an isolated room at a specific time. Sex, at least for the four women in the show, is the filter through which their entire lives emerge. The show relies on the words-play and double-meanings to express how interactions among characters always occur on the level of sexual connotation. The conversation in *Sex and the City Series* is the kind of girl talk, where men serve more as a commodity to trade in the economy of sex, than as a participating member of that exchange.

The second part of the title concerns "The City", which is a central element that characterizes the environment where this economy of sex can exist. Cities are distinguished by their modern appeal. They encompass a wide number and variety of people packed into a relatively small, dense space. In the city, people experience physical closeness and emotional distance. There people are closer to other people all around us, yet due to the nature of a busy metropolis, we are left feeling farther away than ever before which is precisely where this particular brand of sex comes into play. *Sex in the City: the Movie* and *Sex in the City 2* are about fighting the obscurity and namelessness in order to connect to the people surrounding us. It is about achieving intimacy with someone who is essentially a stranger, and dealing with the consequences of that risk. Locating the show in an urban

environment works to express the current problems that face us in today's world.

The second aspect that makes *Sex and the City* interesting is the character and characterization. The four women themselves are categorized by the material and physical elements of their character. They are defined as much by the role they play within the group as they are by how they differ. Their hair color alone is indicative of four distinct personality types. Miranda has short red hair, and embodies the temperamental nature typically ascribed to redheads. In the U.S., only about 2% of the population has red hair. But Miranda is the minority in more than just her hair. She is the only member of the group to be portrayed in a masculine way. She wears business suits and high-buttoned collars. Compared to her gushing, sensitive friends, she appears unemotional and sometimes cold-traits often attributed to the male gender. In her relationships with men, she is usually the one enacting control and making major decisions.

As a stark contrast to Miranda, there is Samantha, an oversexed platinum blond whose notoriously low necklines were part of the reason the TV show was resigned to late night cable. Samantha is also a powerful figure, but her blond hair indicates a power that derives from her sexual appeal, and not Miranda's tempered restraint. Blonde hair is usually associated with a fun-loving ambitiousness. She is the older, wiser seductress of the group, whose age and experience only seems to add to the cool cynicism that accompanies her sexual escapades.

Charlotte serves as the opposition to Samantha's cynical takes on life. By casting Charlotte as a brunette, the show's creator wants to build the connection between brown hair and down-home decency. Brunettes are considered the standard in western culture, and Charlotte personifies the acceptable, natural version of femininity. She is sweet, good natured, and the perpetual romantic, even in spite of her repeated failed relationships. Her femininity is reinforced by her emotional temperament, as she is the "crier" of the group, regardless of whether she is overly happy or overly sad.

As the narrator, Carrie is the anchor of the show, and she is less of an archetype than her fellow friends. For instance, Carrie's hair is constantly changing in color and style. She represents the full spectrum of choices available to the stylish, modern woman, especially when it comes to physical appearance. Carrie's grappling with the diverse representations exhibited by her friends becomes the central storyline throughout the series. She fluctuates between Charlotte's innocence, Samantha's gumption, and Miranda's sensibility, all the while searching for a compromise that will finally bring her some sort of acceptance and fulfillment.

Another aspect that helps distinguish the four characters is the tone of their voice. Miranda has a flat voice that comes off completely asexual, Charlotte speaks with the perky high-pitched voice from her former cheerleading days, and Samantha purrs her lines with a sultry, lower intonation. Carrie, once again, occupies that middle ground where her voice

can take on the attributes of her particular persona in each scene. As the voice-over narrator, her voice is a projection of "every woman".

Sex and the City is set in the metropolis city, New York. The city has association with excess and abundance. Choices are limitless in the city, from the selection of footwear, to the array of ethnic restaurants. Potential sexual partners are limitless too. The excessive nature of the city allows for more freedom of choice and a greater margin for error. It also leads to a greater focus on material possessions. Part of the appeal of *Sex in the City* is the fashionable, trendy clothes the characters sport each week, especially Sarah Jessica Parker's character, who models top designers lines that are often absurdly inconsistent with the average person's wardrobe. Style, therefore, becomes a priority in the context of the show. It takes precedent over all matters of comfort, cost, or feasibility. The show feeds off the materialism inherent in consumer culture, and uses properties such as haute couture and designer footwear to capture our aspirations for fiscal and social distinction at any cost.

Last but not least, the interesting aspect is *Sex in the City* as one of the first shows to portray women in ways typically associated with men, especially in terms of their unabashed attitude towards sex, attempts to challenge our assumptions by transforming sex from a feminized act of modest submission to a masculinized act of power and control. The women in this show approach it from an unapologetic viewpoint, where they embraced the crass remarks and dismissive jokes usually uttered by men at

the expense of women, objectifying the male gender in the same way that the female gender has claimed to be victimized in the past. Signs of this change are evident in the language rules during scenes where the women gather around the brunch table to chat. The women drink their staple cosmopolitans, and they speak liberally about their sexual exploits, feeding off the estrogen-charged environment.

Although they are endowed with a certain power by assuming masculine qualities, the show makes it clear that the modern woman must also preserve her feminine allure. Carrie can wear a men suit, but she is still wearing an haute couture hat. Miranda can punch a man in the nose, but only as a creative come-on. Charlotte can stand by her "no sex on the first date" rule, but that doesn't mean she shouldn't let him think he has a chance. These double standards can be found throughout the movies, and they complicate the expectations of how a woman should behave according to our collective system of signs. The movies represent women in urban city nowadays. Based on that reasons, the writer will observe how urban women are represented in *Sex and the City Series* by using a postfeminism approach. So the writer constructs the title **“Representation of Urban American Women in *Sex and the City Series*: a Postfeminism Study”**

B. Problem Statement

According to the background of this study, the writer formulates the problem statement into:

1. How urban American women are represented in *Sex and the City Series*?
2. What is the dominant ideology being prescribed in *Sex ans the City Series*?
3. How is the construction of womanhood in postfeminism?

C. Limitation of the Study

In this study, the writer focuses on representation of the Urban American women in *Sex and the City Series*, the dominant ideology which appears in tje series, and the construction of womanhood in postfeminism based on *Sex and the City Series*.

D. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study mentioned as follows:

1. To identify the Stuart Hall's representation of Urban American women in *Sex and the City Series*.
2. To reveal the dominant ideology being prescribed in *Sex ans the City Series*.
3. To build the construction of womanhood in postfeminism based on *Sex and the City Series*.

E. Benefits of the Study

The benefits of the study are:

1. Theoretical benefit

To give contribution to the feminist literary research, especially the study which is dealing with womenhood, film, literature, cultural studies and postfeminism.

2. Practical benefit

The study is hoped to give more knowledge for the reseraacher and the reader about identity and the gender construction in society, family, politics, and education.