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**SUPPORTING PATRIARCHY AND
CONSUMERISM THROUGH SEX RHETORIC:
POWER, FOUCAULT AND *SEX AND THE CITY***

BY

ALYSON CHACE ARNOLD

**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF**

MASTER'S OF ARTS

IN

COMMUNICATION STUDIES

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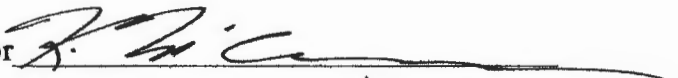
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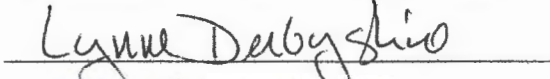
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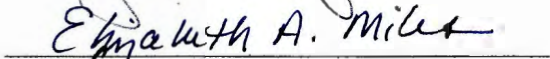
ALYSON C. ARNOLD

APPROVED:

Dissertation Committee:

Major Professor 







DEAN OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

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Abstract

As Americans seek identification through the media, Foucault's "bio-power" extends the power of patriarchy and consumerism through gender prescriptions. A study of modern sexuality discourses can show what those prescriptions are and how the current power-knowledge regimes are maintained by them. This paper focuses on the aspects of Foucault's theories on power that deal with gender and sexuality discourses, explicating the cable show *Sex and the City* to discuss its role in the perpetuation of the status quo of patriarchy and consumerism through gendered identities. The paper also identifies aspects of the show that reveal a progressive pattern of resistance against some patriarchal concepts.

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This thesis is dedicated to my daughter and my mother;
without both your special and unique places in my life I would not have
the motivation to constantly seek ways to better myself.

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Introduction

Statement of the Problem

According to the late historian and philosopher Michel Foucault (1926-1984), power relations exist throughout our society in a myriad of structures, associations and interactions, and are played out within these relations in ubiquitous and often indiscernible ways. For Foucault, these power relations are created and supported by the dominant discursive practices within particular periods of time. Because he believes that power and knowledge are co-creators, he regards discourse as the central activity by which the maintenance of power structures occurs. Foucault's extensive studies have given rise to a concept of power that he labeled "power-knowledge."

Basically, Foucault's assertion is that knowledge is directly linked to power:

that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations (Foucault, 1977, p. 27).

In *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (1978) Foucault discusses bio-power as a technique that modern power uses to maintain the status quo. Bio-power functions by attaching the findings of the "science of sexuality" to our bodies, normalizing and constraining behaviors, particularly through gender prescriptions. Foucault studied Western discourse on sexuality and how this discourse forces the perpetuation of norms, thus creating a situation in which men and women are constructed through gender and sex rules, constraining options to believe, live and

experience outside of these norms. For Foucault, the pathologizing of sexualities outside of traditional familial, adult heterosexual practices has created a society whereby citizens define themselves and others almost exclusively by their sexuality. Many search relentlessly for definitions of correct and incorrect behaviors, often looking to psychoanalysis, popular literature, and other forms of “authority” for answers and advice.

Sex and the City, a current popular cable television show, explores issues of American sexuality in the 20th century by depicting the lives of four single professional women living in New York City. The central character, Carrie Bradshaw, plays the role of “sexual anthropologist” (Star, 1998a)--she explores issues of sexuality in a weekly newspaper column. This Emmy Award winning show is watched every week by millions of people, mostly women, who are seeking greater representation in the media as well as answers to profound sexual questions. Carrie Bradshaw is viewed as both an “everyday woman” and an authority on sexuality; each episode follows her through her original “hypotheses,” “research” findings, and conclusions.

In this essay I will look to answer the following questions. According to Foucault, the function of bio-power is to maintain current power-knowledge regimes through dominant gender prescriptions in sexuality discourse. What are the current gender prescriptions of the dominant ideology and what regimes do they support? In what ways does the rhetoric of *Sex and the City* as sexuality discourse perpetuate or resist these regimes? Does the show represent traditional hierarchical relations between men and women, or does *Sex and the City* invite new roles by depicting a

wider variety of characterizations and situations? Are power relations between heterosexuals and homosexuals depicted in ways that perpetuate heterosexism? Why or why not? And lastly, what other power regimes are supported or resisted in the rhetoric of the show?

This thesis will contain four chapters. In chapter one I investigate the work of Michel Foucault on power relations and the discourse of sexuality, explicate gender prescriptions in communication research, and investigate literature that discusses issues of gender in the media. In chapter two I provide a description and episodic guide of the entire first season of *Sex and the City*. In chapter three I analyze the show using Foucault's theory on power, knowledge and sexuality, identifying current power-knowledge regimes and explicating the discursive practices that underscore the show's support or resistance of those regimes. Chapter Four is my conclusion.

Justification for and Significance of the Study

In contemporary American society individuals construct and define their identities through work and social relations in which gender plays a predominant role. Within this context the mass media are quite influential (Illouz, 1991; Selnow, 1990; Triage, 1999; Vavrus, 2000) and can also be understood as an institution that, with its far-reaching influence, helps to maintain current power structures by using rhetoric that maintains gender roles in part by depicting the concept of gender as a natural phenomenon (Brookey, 1996; Durham, 2001; Ellingson, 2000; LaFountain, 1989; Nakayama, 1994; Templin, 1999). A discourse analysis of popular television shows, films and literature aids communication scholars in analyzing how gender is

rhetorically enacted so as to appear a natural--rather than a socially constructed--phenomenon.

Issues of sexuality play a large role in how we view ourselves and others. As a text for critical study, *Sex and the City*, with its virtually singular purpose of defining sexuality in today's America, potentially influences millions of people in their quest for sexual identity. As stated in Sillars & Gronbeck (2001)

[L]ooking at portrayals of young singles in the city, as seen in *Friends*, *Caroline in the City*, or *Ally McBeal*, can reveal much about the self-images and goals of a significant number of young Americans. While you would not expect to meet many people exactly like the characters depicted on the programs, *the dialogues capture idealized fantasies and values that some people attempt to approximate in their own lives* [italics added] (p. 166).

Through an analysis of the rhetoric of sexuality, we are able to illustrate the ways in which Foucault's bio-power functions. In creating "critical distance" (Hayden, 2001) we are better able to recognize how the maintenance of gendered selves is conveyed through the media and how that may impact audience members' understanding of themselves. As Fung (1991a in Nakayama, 1994) states:

"(Re)creating ourselves in our own terms requires constant reevaluation of the master narratives that have bracketed our lives" (p. 162). Additionally

Because gender infuses the entire social order, it is difficult to notice, much less question, prevailing views of women and men. Becoming aware of how society creates and sustains gender enables social progress and personal change (Wood, 1996, p. 8).

Understanding the discursive construction of messages in shows like *Sex and the City* can also contribute to developing or furthering critical theories on power, knowledge, and sexuality.

Methodology

Michel Foucault has developed an array of theories on power in our society which is used as a lens in a variety of communications studies. This paper takes the part of his work that deals mainly with gender issues and how discourse, particularly through sexuality discourses in the media, perpetuates the status quo of patriarchy and consumerism through our gendered identities. I use the term patriarchy as it is commonly known to mean the dominance of men and masculine related qualities that infuse our society in social structures and scientific and historical studies. The results are societies that are developed around a hierarchy that value males over females and heterosexuals over homosexuals.

The Foucauldian concept of power is predominantly defined in terms of relations and activity. Foucault argues that, rather than power being a thing that can be owned, shared or acquired, power is an activity which is enabled and maintained during the interplay of multiple relations. Modern power is ubiquitous in all social, political and personal relationships. Through historical analysis, Foucault traces the origin of current power structures, which he asserts begins with the techniques developed and practiced sporadically in the late eighteenth century by doctors, wardens and schoolmasters in disciplinary institutions. These techniques were based on an architectural style called the panopticon (Fraser, 1989). As a result of this period, which Foucault refers to as "The Disciplinary Society" or the age of social

control (Foucault, 1973a, p. 57), these practices grew into what is today a formidable system of control carried out through multiple relations between people, institutions, and governments. In contrast to pre-modern power, such as in sovereignties or monarchies where control is exercised from a known entity and discipline is enacted from the top down, modern power has developed a grid of internal and external controls whereby subjects construct their identities in such a way as to perpetuate current power structures.

A stupid despot may constrain his slaves with iron chains; but a true politician binds them even more strongly by the chain of their own ideas; it is at the stable point of reason that he secures the end of the chain; this link is all the stronger in that we do not know of what it is made and we believe it to be our own work. (Servan in Foucault, 1977, p. 103).

Bio-power is the term Foucault uses to describe the way in which modern power maintains itself through the use of “political technologies of the body.” “Bio-power uses accounting, statistics, demographics, therapeutics and other methods to mold individuals into productive self-monitoring subjects who become their own objects of observation and control” (Illouz, 1991 p. 246).

According to Foucault, the development of psychiatry, psychology and the social sciences resulted in the collection and validation of population statistics which record and measure facets of human life such as population numbers, health, births and deaths. These statistics are used to construct so-called normal patterns of behavior in populations. This information is used directly on citizen subjects who, through the

disciplinary technology of modern power, have become docile bodies; bodies “that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved” (Rabinow, 1984, p. 17).

Subjects are invited to identify with this scientific data and divide aspects of their behaviors into normal or abnormal. Once subjects identify with normal or abnormal, good or bad, healthy or sick, etc. they can either be validated by the data and feel as if they are “respectable” citizens, identify with abnormal or unacceptable characteristics, or alter their behaviors and attitudes to fit in. Subjects internalize information about how they should think and act as well as choices for change based on discourse that is embedded within the scientific and educational systems working within a certain paradigm, which Foucault refers to as a power-knowledge regime in any given time. “The exercise of power over the population and the accumulation of knowledge about it are two sides of a single process: not power and knowledge, but power-knowledge” (Sheridan, 1981, p. 162).

When subjects identify themselves as objects of science, the perpetuation of existing power relations can occur. As an example, in a discussion of the media’s representation of infertility, Stone (1991) illustrates how infertile women often choose to behave dependently, allowing themselves to be controlled by others, generally male doctors, in order to claim their right of reproduction, thus perpetuating the power structures of patriarchy and modern science (p. 319).

Foucault asserts that constraining and controlling the construction of identities is a vital aspect of maintaining the status quo; subjects are not completely autonomous as they define themselves because power-knowledge infuses the process. Some believe we have innumerable choices and have an active, if not autonomous role, in

constructing who we decide to become. Others believe that in the pursuit of facts--in acquiring of knowledge of our sexuality, for example--we come closer to the truth of who we really are. Foucault believes that, although we are agents in the construction of ourselves as subjects, power-knowledge regimes limit our choices to those choices that perpetuate the status quo (Bevir, 1999). Even as we sometimes think we are resisting power structures or transforming society through radical acts, we are more often than not working within the power regime, strengthening the status quo by adhering to its discursive rules.

Foucault argues that power is both productive as well as oppressive, and the repressive hypothesis is a deception that helps to hide the productive side of power. The repressive hypothesis states that power only acts as an oppressive force as it limits the liberties of those upon which it acts. Therefore, liberation comes in the form of resisting oppression. For example, the ability to label and define oneself is believed to be vital for marginalized populations to resist oppression (Dow, 2001; Quinones-Rosada, 1998); the freedom to construct and describe ourselves is a liberating act. Also, since sexuality has been considered a taboo subject in recent Western history, it is believed that in talking about our sexuality, aligning ourselves with our desires and confessing our sexual natures, we can be liberated from oppressive powers while learning the true nature of ourselves (Foucault, 1978, p. 60).

The repressive hypotheses perpetuates the status quo because it distracts from the "polymorphous techniques of power" (Sheridan, 1981, p. 170), or the capacity of power to be performed through various channels. As power can also be productive, Foucault has identified discourse as the site in which power produces. As it supports

the proliferation of sexual discourses, power works through discourse when subjects engage in the construction of their identities as sexual, desiring beings. As stated in Sheridan (1981): "The relation of power to sex is not essentially repressive, that it is rather productive of an ever-proliferating discourse on sexuality" (pp. 165-166).

Additionally, when the repressive hypothesis is adhered to as the method of power, it is believed that power inhibits subjects from knowing their true natures. As sexual beings, we come to believe in the socially constructed concepts of gender--the prescriptions of masculine, feminine, heterosexual, and homosexual for example--as innate. As Reed (1997) states, "transgressions are based on a notion of power as repression. From these perspectives, masculine and feminine characteristics are presumed to exist in a precultural or latent form" (p. 31).

Power relations that exist in our society, such as those between men and women and heterosexuals and homosexuals are strengthened and perpetuated by gender constructions in sexuality discourses. Gender relations support a power regime in which the family structure plays an integral role. The family structure, according to Foucault, was raised in stature as capitalism moved to the West. Rules that were developed which created an imperative link between sexuality and reproduction of the species were not so much a way of controlling the working classes as a way of affirming the economically advantageous bourgeois (p. 123). By privileging the family structure and sexual rules of the bourgeois, bio-power as an instrument of capitalism took charge of people's very lives at the level of the body itself (Foucault, 1978, p. 143).

As *Sex and the City* explores issues of sexuality, it is a culturally pervasive form of sexual discourse for many Americans. Since its first season, *Sex and the City* has been nominated for numerous Emmy Awards and has won Emmy Awards in 2001, 2002, and 2003. Additional Awards include the American Women in Radio and Television Gracie Allen Award (2000, 2001, 2002, and 2003) and Golden Globe Award (2000, 2001, 2002, and 2003). A full list of awards is provided in Appendix H.

Informed by Foucault's theories on power, my analysis of *Sex and the City* explores how the show resists certain relations within patriarchy, such as traditional gender and family relations, while still supporting other relations vital to patriarchy, such as male dominance and homophobia. Consumer capitalism will also be shown as perpetuated by the rhetoric of the show. The text, then, consists of the entire first season of the show (1998, 12 episodes) against the backdrop of normalized gendered roles, family values, and capitalism.

Literature Review

Within the discourses of sexuality, gender prescriptions are dominated by dichotomous gender traits and roles. I use the term roles as defined by O'Sullivan et al. (in Sillars & Gronbeck, 2001) to mean "socially defined positions and patterns of behavior which are characterized by specific sets of rules, norms, and expectations which serve to orientate and regulate the interaction, conduct, and practices of individuals in social situations." What it means to be a man is defined by the socially constructed concept of masculinity; likewise what it means to be a woman is defined by the socially constructed concept of femininity. These gender rules inform individuals of what constitutes normal behaviors in a variety of relationships: familial

relationships, friendships between women, friendships between men, friendships between men and women, and intimate relationships. As there are only two genders defined, all sexual discourse falls into prescriptions of masculine or feminine.

Gender polarization operates in two related ways. First, it defines mutually exclusive scripts for being male and female. Second, it defines any person or behavior that deviates as problematic--as unnatural or immoral from a religious perspective or as biologically anomalous or psychologically pathological from a scientific perspective. "Taken together, the effect of these two processes is to construct and to naturalize gender-polarizing link between the sex of one's body and the character of one's psyche and one's sexuality" (Bem, 1993, p. 81).

The gender power relations that support the current power-knowledge regimes are the dichotomous hierarchical relationships between men and women and heterosexuals and homosexuals. Gender normalization between men and women is a particularly crucial ingredient in the structure of the family. The dominant discourse contends that the "traditional" family unit consists of a mother, father and children, with all members of the family playing out hierarchical and gendered roles that have strict guidelines (Lindsey, 1990).

Foucault argues that the family unit is more a product of economics than morality and the assumptions of its superiority as a social unit underscores the already privileged position of the upper middle class (Foucault, 1978). From a functionalist perspective, Lindsey (1990) points out how important the family system is, "allowing for orderly procreation, regulation of sexual behavior, socialization of the children,

economic cooperation, conferring status on its members, personality formation, protection and security, and the expression of affection” (p. 117).

The function of bio-power is to guarantee power structures through the privileging and normalizing of dichotomous gender traits. Through identification with gender, subjects construct themselves to maintain the desired level of normalcy or deviancy. As individuals “come to know themselves as desiring, sexual subjects” (LaFountain, 1989, p. 127) they construct themselves, guided by normalized masculine and feminine traits, to fit normal thought patterns and actions. Hayden (2001) who works from a feminist Foucauldian perspective, analyzes discourse found in two contemporary sex education texts and explores how attachments to the body and gendered norms are promoted pedagogically, arguing that “both programs naturalize gender assumptions and promote a ‘pro-life’ agenda” (p. 30).

Even within so-called deviant behavior, such as those outside the heterosexual categories, masculine and feminine types are normalized. And though the current power structure supports a white, heterosexual patriarchal society, Connell (1995) explains that “to the extent oppression appears in a role system, it appears as the constricting pressure placed by the role upon the self. This can happen in the male role as readily as in the female” (p. 25). Men and women, heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, and “other” gendered people are all constrained within the current system of stratified gender roles.

Masculine/Feminine

The stereotypical characteristics that define masculine and feminine are both opposing and complementary (Benwell, 2002; Bem, 1993; Connell, 1995; Wood,

1996). Women, as feminine, are said to be other-centered, sensitive, nurturing, cooperative, passive, dependent and sexually available; men as masculine are tough, insensitive, active, competitive, aggressive, independent and sexually bold. The role of woman is as a care-giver; she is expected to be other-centered, whether toward her husband, children, aging parents or all of the above. Only fulfilled when they are living for others, women are expected to be most concerned about creating successful relationships, getting married and having children (Lindsey, 1990; Litosseliti, 2002; Wood, 1996). Being feminine also means being equated with the body, being concerned with fashion and beauty (Crocco, 2001). Men, on the other hand, embrace action and adventure. Their realm extends outward into the world where their ability to compete and win translate into success and money (Bem, 1993; Connell, 1995). Being masculine means being equated with the mind and not interested in looks or fashion (Crocco, 2001; Hayden, 2001).

Lazar (2002) identifies the implications of a Singaporean national advertising campaign in the construction of heterosexual feminine identities. She identifies how heterosexual women are rhetorically constructed as other-centered in areas of relations with men (in courtship, marriage and motherhood) and with children and suggest how power relations are maintained through this construction. "The concentration of women's energies upon others in this way undoubtedly benefits the state, men and children, whilst at the same time curtailing the range of life choices and priorities of women themselves" (p. 125). At times, the media needs to address conflicts between reality and the myths perpetuated by the status quo. In Triage (1999) a study of mail-order magazines from 1900 to 1922 postulated an attempt to merge two contradictions

of the time: woman as domestic and working-class women. The contradiction was mitigated through the construction of a working woman that remained true to the culturally normative gender role.

Other ways media normalizes gender is through support of so-called gender appropriate behaviors. Bordo (1993) studies a number of television commercials implicating the media's use of food and appetite in gender construction. By depicting women as satiated by small and delicate tidbits of low calorie desserts and representing men as being able to gorge and satisfy their appetites whole heartedly, advertisements, among its other functions, "specifically (consciously or unconsciously) [serve] the cultural reproduction of gender difference and gender inequality" (p. 110).

The media also uses strategies that perpetuate the role of men as having positions of power and the need to maintain that power. In an analysis of men's lifestyle magazines, Benwell (2002) studies the discourse that "characterizes and defines" a particular masculine identity referred to as "new lad." He argues that using a discursive strategy of ambiguity, "manifestations of masculinity are intimately bound up with the survival and adaptability of male power" (p. 153), and that "masculinity is a social construct...actively constituted and reinforced through the consumption of men's magazines" (p. 154).

Maintaining women's roles as primarily responsible for the success of relationships can be explicated in an analysis of popular women's magazines by Illouz (1991). Illouz determines that although the media focuses a great deal on love and relationships—traditionally women's sphere—the emotional and romantic language

has changed to encourage women to be more “utilitarian” when choosing mates.

However, embedded within the more “masculine” ways of approaching relationships is the concept that a successful relationship remains the woman’s responsibility.

Attributes of each of the two sexes discussed are interchangeable: women can behave in masculine ways and men can behave in feminine ways. However, masculine traits are typically seen in our society as having more value, so that when a woman acts with masculine characteristics, she may be valued more--at least she is not devalued. However, when a man acts with feminine characteristics, he is harassed (Rosenblum & Travis, 2000, p. 27). Although research findings regarding differences between men and women show no measurable differences in intellect, temperament or other personal traits, differences in social, political and financial standings are stark. Although many believe that the biological differences between men and women result in the profound differences in their lives, this has not been validated by cross cultural and historical studies (Connell, 1995).

In addition to the lack of truly progressive gender roles, backlash can be identified in a number of venues when the maintenance of strict gender prescriptions is not followed. As an example, Templin (1999) studies a range of political cartoons about Hillary and Bill Clinton and shows an almost obsessive backlash against Hillary’s rejection of feminine cultural norms as wife, mother, and first lady.

Heterosexism

Within dichotomous roles and reciprocal functions of male and female, heterosexuality is imperative, creating the ground for what Bem (1993) calls “a special case of gender polarization” which is heterosexism. In this modern heterosexual

society, members of the gay community may be tolerated when they take on heterosexual appearances. In other words, assimilating into heterosexual lifestyles--such as living in committed relationships--or publicly exhibiting only heterosexual mannerisms and attitudes as defined by the dominant ideology, gay men, lesbians and bisexuals may be tolerated when they keep strict divisions between their personal and private lives (Slagle, 1995).

In "Ellen, television, and the politics of gay and lesbian visibility," Dow (2001) considers the coming-out of both the real and fictional Ellen Degeneres/Ellen Morgan. Her findings point to the power regime of heterosexuality and how the construction of the homosexual community is visible only as its antithesis. Dow also advances Foucault's argument against "confession as liberating," arguing that Ellen's confessions take place within the power relation of heterosexual/homosexual, identifying a heterosexual audience as the authority to which the confession was made. Reed's (1992) study of three films, *The Crying Game*, *Orlando*, and *M. Butterfly*, advances Foucault's argument that, while working within the current power-knowledge structure, it may be inaccurate to identify these films as resistance discourse. The rhetoric in the films perpetuates the current power regime by reinscribing the dichotomous constructions of masculinity and femininity on its characters.

Not only is the inclination to confess or to speak about one's sexuality not conducive to resisting power structures, neither is taking part in gender role reversals. Staying within "dichotomous constructions of sexual gender . . . [does] not represent a radical disruption of the status quo" (Reed, 1997 p. 30).

Rockler (2001) analyzed the film *Fried Green Tomatoes* and illustrates the media's resistance to overt portrayals of lesbian relationships by highlighting differences in the portrayals of the predominant relationship in the movie and in the original text, the novel by Fannie Flagg. By using what Rockler refers to as strategic ambiguity, the movie makes the relationship ambiguous to most viewers--only those who understand lesbian relationships more profoundly as identity rather than simply sexual behavior would notice a possible lesbian relationship.

Gender Ambiguity

Western thought has divided the human race into two distinct and opposing sexes: male and female. Physical sexual ambiguity falls into an even more threatening category than behavioral, to the point where extreme measures are taken to protect the distinction of the two sexes. Fausto-Sterling (2001) asserts that "biologically speaking, there are many gradations running from female to male." (p. 43). Ignoring obvious and enduring circumstances in which humans are born with and/or develop a combination of physical, emotional, and mental characteristics, Western culture considers those who do not fall neatly into male/female categories as aberrant. Many are medically altered as children and young adults. Those who are not must choose to live openly with hostility and humiliation or in secret. In her article, "The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female Are Not Enough," Fausto-Sterling offers an analysis of strict binary sexuality as a form of bio-power. She states: "The knowledge developed in biochemistry, embryology, endocrinology, psychology and surgery has enabled physicians to control the very sex of the human body" (p. 91). She believes that the

reason our society is so concerned about private matters of sexuality and the human body comes from a “cultural need to maintain clear distinctions between the sexes.”

Pagliassotti (1993), using Foucault’s method of genealogy, studied the discursive construction of sex and gender by investigating the development of “sexual deviancy” through the behavior and treatment of hermaphrodites and transvestites from early European Christian texts to the present day. He points to a dividing practice; in this case, the division of “male” and “female.” which produced normalizing effects that inevitably marginalized those who did not fit into either of these categories. Pagliassotti argues that sexual ambiguity always threatens the status quo, a system of power relations that has arisen around assumptions of two dichotomous distinct sexes (p. 477). In an analysis of the film *Showdown in Little Tokyo*, Nakayama (1994) invites us to “to move away from the trap of binary thinking by not allowing ‘race’ to be defined in black/white terms, gender in femininity/masculinity categories, sexuality as gay/heterosexual.”

Sexuality Discourse

As the repressive hypothesis aids in the proliferation of sexuality discourse, Foucault identifies discourse as the site where power takes on its productive character. Because many believe that sexuality is repressed, the idea that liberty comes from speaking of it enables the promulgation of discourse about it, particularly in a liberal, democratic society. “Sexuality discourse, [Foucault] claims, function[s] to support and extend the very power structures it was thought to challenge” (Hayden, 2001, p. 38). Of particular interest is the idea that that some resistant discourse may ironically be a vehicle in the perpetuation of a dominant hegemony. In her article, Hayden discusses

her previous assumption of the book "Our Bodies, Ourselves" as liberating because of its presentation of material on women's bodies. In this article, she claims that the same book actually extends bio-power for the same reason she previously considered it liberating. In her words:

Elsewhere I have argued that *Our Bodies, Ourselves* has a liberating function, moreover, I locate this liberating function, in part, in the presentation of information about woman's bodies (Hayden, 1997). Yet in the comprehensive sexuality education text discussed in this essay, I argue that it is specifically through the presentation of information about bodies that operations of bio-power are extended (p. 33).

It is important to study the norms of these socially constructed roles and the prevalent institutional predispositions to the perpetuation of these dichotomous roles in the media. Sillars and Gronbeck (2001) agree, "Television in particular has become a venue for the study of the politicalization of the social" (p. 171). The role of the media in the proliferation of sexuality discourse is remarkable. Rhetorical analyses of texts, such as television, films, popular magazines and educational texts, can inform communication scholars of how discourses can be found to be resistant, progressive, or perpetuating the status quo.

In television and films, assumptions of normal include men and women who follow distinct masculine and feminine roles while a certain amount of attention is paid to the homosexual community. In media, we find stereotypical definitions of masculine and feminine (Benwell, 2002; Lazar, 2002), that work strictly within

dichotomous gender roles, maintaining modern power structures (McLaughlin, 1991; Nakayama, 1994; Reed, 1997).

Scholars have identified how and where true resistant rhetoric can exist. Cooper's (2000) feminist reading of the movie *Thelma and Louise* defines the movie as resistant text because it uses a "female gaze" (p. 280) in conjunction with the typical "male gaze" of Hollywood by using techniques of mockery, male objectification, and the celebration of women friendships (p. 285). Demo (2000) analyzed the rhetoric of a group of feminist artists who call themselves the "Guerilla Girls." Studying one of their most famous and well-used mediums, the cartoon, she found them to be resistant by using mimicry, re-vision of history, strategic juxtaposition, and humor. Arguing that *How to Make an American Quilt* is "female identity therapy," Golumbisky (2001) discusses the film as "progressive" and "theoretically promising." According to Golumbisky, the film "rescues female-identification and the Mother-Daughter symbolic from patriarchal matrophobia" (p. 65).

Consumerism

As Americans seek identification through the media, bio-power--through the identification through gender--extends the power of consumerism as the media shapes identities through marketing strategies targeted along the lines of gender, sexuality, race and class (O'Dougherty, 2003, p. 70). According to O'Dougherty "shopping, consumer goods, and the wider realm of consumption present themselves throughout the US media as the promise of personal liberation and democracy" (p. 69). As Mascia-Lees and Sharpe (2000) argue, the survival of capitalism no longer depends on

productivity, but the creation of new needs and desires (p. 134). These needs and desires grow with the identification of subjects with the hierarchical placing of gender, race and class within predominant media images. The authors assess the marketing of the female body through a couple of new stores found in malls across America. The dual power structures of patriarchy and consumerism are hard at work, encouraging women to find their identities through the activities of trying on and purchasing clothing.

Brookey (1996) illustrates how deviancy in sexuality, specifically homosexuality, can be tolerated by a dominant heterosexual audience when portrayed in a way that diminishes their sexual activities, emphasizes common life-styles with heterosexuals, and most importantly, brings to light their high purchasing power. In a study of the genre of the "single woman novel," Philips (2000) discusses the characteristics of the heroines: "They take their work and independence for granted, but leave traditional gender relations and patriarchal structures profoundly unchallenged." Having it both ways, the heroines of these novels may break some of the traditional roles women have but undoubtedly help perpetuate patriarchy and mass consumerism. For example, they have decent jobs and good pay, spend a great deal of money on beauty and fashion, usually seek relationships with future "providers," and desire traditional weddings.

Ellingson (2000) discusses issues of classism in her analysis of Bernie Seigel's self-help rhetoric that is geared toward women. She illustrates how a great deal of Seigel's advice ignores issues of financial constraints that many women have when seeking, for instance, second medical opinions or alternative medicine. While

frustrating members of his audience, I submit that in the process of recommending costly medical alternatives to those who can afford it, Seigel is also supporting the power regime of capitalism.

In a Foucauldian reading of a variety of popular texts about infertility, Stone (1991) identifies how bio-power works in infertile women to produce attitudes of entitlement to bear children. With this sense of entitlement women are engaging in “fertility management” that includes “home use of basal thermometers, ovulation charts, programmed sex schedules, and over-the-counter urine tests for ovulation” (pg. 319). In addition to spending a great deal of money on these products, couples are spending billions of dollars to “combat fertility” and for its diagnosis and treatment (p. 321).

As I enter into my analysis of *Sex and the City* I draw important conclusions from the review of literature. I have identified how gender prescriptions are based on distinct dichotomous and hierarchical concepts of masculine and feminine, and that these concepts support the patriarchal institution of family. By illustrating that bio-power works through the identification of this binary thinking, I show how power produces “normal” subjects when fulfilling these prescriptions and “abnormal” or pathological subjects when they do not. I have identified feminine traits and masculine traits that are deemed normal and supportive of the family structure and how sexual ambiguity is seen as a threat or an erosion of that structure. As sexuality discourse, the media, including television, films, popular magazines, and in some cases, educational texts generally support the dominant ideological concepts of masculine, feminine and importance of family, although some resistance can be identified. Additionally, I have

identified the intersection of gender prescriptions and consumerism in the media and how this form of bio-power supports the power-knowledge regime of capitalism.

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Description of the Show*

Sex and the City is a weekly HBO cable show which is based on a collection of actual columns entitled “*Sex and the City*” from a New York paper that were written by Candace Bushnell. The show’s episodes center on weekly articles that the main character, Carrie Bradshaw (Sarah Jessica Parker) writes exploring issues of being single in Manhattan. Throughout the show Carrie uses her personal experiences, her friend’s experiences, and occasional person-on-the-street interviews as her basis of research for the articles. Carrie narrates the entire show, and opens each episode in one of three ways: by telling a story in fairy tale fashion, beginning with phrases such as “once upon a time;” by introducing a situation; or by stating a New York statistic, and how it affects or describes the singles scene in the city.

Taking place in the upper echelons of the economic bracket, *Sex and the City* focuses on four single, successful women and their exploits and blunders in search for true love, or sometimes just a decent one night stand. The show gives a lighthearted view of current sexual issues of single people, particularly women, living in New York and discusses such themes as toxic bachelors, settling for what you can get, not getting enough sex, marriage and motherhood, the power of female sex, and monogamy. The topics considered may be for the fainthearted but the language is not. There are often times blunt descriptive language that would make even Dr. Ruth blush. More often

*For my research, I am taking a snap shot of the show in its first season. The Episode topics, character development and reviews all are from 1998-1999.

than not, the show's main characters lament about the shortage of decent men, but what actually occurs is a regular cast of single, successful heterosexual men parading across the small screen, available for dating and possible intimate relationships. Aside from one episode in twelve of the entire first season (titled "The Drought") the women have no problem finding dates or sexual partners.

Toward the beginning of each episode, a situation happens that causes Carrie to pose a particular question for her weekly column. She then begins her process of research, in which she discusses the current issue with her friends, explores it in her own activities, and sometimes conducts person-on-the-street interviews. In the end, Carrie provides some sort of answer or closure on the topic. In each episode, there is one scene where all four main characters are in a discussion, which I will refer to as "Girl Talk." These scenes may either set up the topics that Carrie chooses for her articles or are the site of Carrie's research for the particular issue already in question. During Girl Talk the personalities of the women are illustrated through their dialogue as their opinions and experiences oppose, clash and harmonize with each other's. Although throughout the show the characters are further developed, it is during Girl Talk that their individual traits are most intensely developed because of the contrast between their particular attitudes and beliefs.

Main Characters

Carrie is the star of the show, and the most ambiguous with respect to her specific viewpoints and opinions. As author of the articles she researches, she plays the part of an "objective" writer, and gleans much of her data from discussions with her friends and person-on-the-street interviews. We learn most about Carrie's attitudes

and beliefs through her actions and how she leads discussions rather than through the dialogues during Girl Talk as with the other main characters. Carrie is a very small woman who wears stylish, revealing clothes and has an addiction to expensive shoes. She is insecure, witty, independent and intelligent and believes in romantic notions such as love at first sight and finding a man who is “the one.” She is quite ambiguous about her role in life and what she wants with regard to marriage and family. Her key relationship throughout the season is with a man known as Mr. Big. This relationship is vitally important to her, and she tends toward being whiney, clingy and child-like in it.

Samantha Jones (Kim Cattrall) is a towering, sensual woman who owns a public relations firm and is known for “regularly sleeping with sexy men in their twenties” (Star, 1998a). She is in her early forties, wears seductive clothing and is usually in control of her relationships, which are most often short term. She is confident, sexually aggressive and adventurous. Samantha is often seen approaching any man that suits her fancy, though occasionally she loses that confidence when rejected. Nevertheless, she pulls herself back up and trots off to find another conquest.

Miranda Hobbes (Cynthia Nixon) is a spunky corporate attorney and the only one of the four who has short hair and wears suits and baggy clothing. She is somewhat cynical about relationships and throughout the season dates Skipper, the only man who isn't sophisticated and wealthy. Skipper is a web designer, a romantic and totally in love with Miranda. She pushes him away but he always comes back, and in her weak moments, she takes him. She is ambitious, intelligent, and pragmatic.

Charlotte York (Kristin Davis) is a bright and successful art dealer and a bit more conservative in manner and dress than the other women. Charlotte has a very traditional attitude toward relationships and roles, and when she is first introduced in Episode One (Star, 1998a), she states that “Men are threatened by successful women. If you want to get these guys, you have to keep your mouth shut and play by the rules.” Charlotte wants to get married, is a true romantic looking for “Mr. Right” and doesn’t engage in adventurous sex. In her relationships she always lets the man make the first move, and though many of them turn out to have some inherently impossible flaw, she keeps her optimistic and idealistic attitude toward finding a fulfilling, traditional relationship.

There are three men in *Sex and the City* who show up regularly: Mr. Big, Skipper, and Stanford Blatch. Mr. Big is the main focus of Carrie’s infatuation. He is a tall, confident, and an extremely financially successful man who seems to have a difficult time engaging in a committed relationship with Carrie. Always in a rush, he meets up with Carrie in between meetings and other dates. Skipper is the romantic younger man who is obsessed with Miranda. He is insecure and described as “a romantic.” Stanford Blatch is Carrie’s homosexual friend, and the spokesperson for the gay community for Carrie’s research. Stanford is a mildly successful owner of a talent agency, effeminate in manner, and a romantic.

Episodes

Episode One, “*Sex and the City*” (Star, 1998a) opens the season with a fairy tale which is meant to describe a very typical encounter for a single New York woman. After newly arriving to the city from London, Elizabeth, a very successful

woman, is seduced by a wealthy bachelor, Tim. They spend a romantic couple of weeks together, and just after Tim invites Elizabeth to meet his parents, he cancels the date and never calls her again. At this point, Carrie is introduced as an expert and writer of a column called "*Sex and the City*." Alluding to the story of Elizabeth and Ted, Carrie asks, "Why are there so many great unmarried women, and no great unmarried men?" This question is then answered by a number of men and women in typical person-on-the-street interviews, which then leads to the main question and topic of this episode, "Can women have sex like men?" During this episode we meet the other main characters, Samantha, Miranda, Charlotte, Skipper Johnston, Stanford Blatch, and Mr. Big. Carrie attempts to have sex like a man, then later meets Mr. Big; Miranda meets and begins to date Skipper, a much younger and more romantic person than she; Charlotte has a fascinating date with Capote Duncan, "one of the city's most un-gettable bachelors," and then is disappointed; and Samantha is rejected by Mr. Big and goes home with Capote Duncan. Girl Talk focuses on what it means to have sex like a man.

Episode Two, "Models and Mortals" (Star, 1998b) opens with a situation in which Miranda is on a date with a "modelizer," someone who is obsessed with models. That leads Carrie to explore the question "If models could cause otherwise rational individuals to crumble in their presence, exactly how powerful was beauty?" During this episode Carrie bumps into Mr. Big who is with a model; later she goes home with a top underwear model but doesn't have sex with him; Miranda gives Skipper another chance after trying to dump him; and Samantha sleeps with a "modelizer" and allows him to videotape their encounter. Models are interviewed to

find out how powerful beauty is, and *Girl Talk* is about unfair beauty standards for women.

Episode Three, "Bay of Married Pigs" (King, 1998a) begins with an encounter that Carrie has while visiting some married friends in the Hamptons. While the wife is out, the husband exposes himself to Carrie. When Carrie mentions it to the wife, the wife gets angry and sends Carrie home. Carrie's research then asks the question: "Is there a secret cold war between marrieds and singles?" The person-on-the-street interviews seems to substantiate this observation as we hear married and single people discussing their frustrations with each other. During this episode Carrie is set up with a "marrying" type and breaks it off; Samantha gets drunk at a party where there are all married people; and Miranda is mistaken for a lesbian, fixed up with a woman and, with the other woman, is invited to her bosses' home for dinner. *Girl Talk* focuses on Carrie's encounter and a discussion about being married and single.

In Episode Four, "Valley of the Twenty-Something Guys" (King, 1998b) Carrie poses the question, "Are men in their twenties the new designer drug?" During this episode Carrie's attempted meetings with Mr. Big are sabotaged and she ends up trying out a relationship with a younger man; Samantha is dating a younger man and is having great sex; Charlotte meets a great guy but is confused when he wants to have anal sex with her; and Miranda continues to date Skipper. Person-on-the-street interviews ask younger men "What do younger men see in older women?" and *Girl Talk* is a discussion of Charlotte's issue with having anal sex.

In Episode Five, "Power of Female Sex" (Star & Kohan, 1998) we meet an acquaintance of Carrie's, Amalita Amalfi, "who doesn't work, but possesses a

dazzling sexual power that she exploits to her advantage.” This introduces the question and topic for this episode which is “Where’s the line between professional girlfriend and just plain professional?” During this episode Carrie is seduced by a handsome French man whom Amalita has introduced to her, and who leaves \$1,000 cash after a night of sex; Skipper is becoming obsessed with Miranda’s sexual energy; Samantha isn’t able to convince the hostess at Balzac (“the most powerful woman in NY”) to give them a table; and Charlotte poses for a famous artist whose current works are large paintings of the “cunts of women who have deeply affected his life.” Girl Talk is about using sex as an exchange of power between men and women.

In episode Six, “Secret Sex” (Star, 1998c) Carrie runs into an old friend, Mike, who is dating someone he’s ashamed to introduce to his friends, and she wonders if “secret sex is the ultimate form of intimacy, or another way we compartmentalize our lives?” After Carrie sleeps with Mr. Big on their first official date, she wonders if he is keeping her a secret. This episode focuses on the relationship between Carrie and Mr. Big and Mike and his girlfriend. Miranda meets a great guy and finds out he has a secret passion for spanking, and Girl Talk is about the appropriate number of dates needed to first sleep with a man.

Episode Seven, “The Monogamists” (Star, 1998d) opens with Carrie discussing New York as a place where “everyone is trying to get laid” and segues into her and Mr. Big and their developing intimate relationship. Carrie’s been neglecting her friends for Mr. Big and they finally arrange a dinner with all four of them. While they’re out they see Mr. Big on a date with another woman. Carrie poses the question “In a city like New York, with all its options, has monogamy become too much to

expect?" During this episode, Charlotte meets a perfect guy who is pressuring her to give him a blow job; Miranda, after having ended her relationship with Skipper, gets jealous when she sees him on a date with another woman; and Samantha is unfaithful to her real estate agent. Person-on-the-street interviews discuss monogamy and Girl Talk focuses on oral sex.

Episode Eight "Three's a Crowd" (Bicks, 1998) opens with a fairy tale introduction to the relationship of Charlotte and her new boyfriend: "Once upon a time, in a magical land called Manhattan, a young woman fell in love." Another so-called perfect man, this boyfriend is pushing Charlotte to do a threesome with him and another woman (no one specific). Carrie looks around her and sees that threesomes seem to be all around, and asks the question "Were threesomes the new sexual frontier?" In this episode Miranda is insecure because no one wants a threesome with her; Samantha is having an affair with a married man; and Carrie seeks out Mr. Big's ex-wife. The interviews take on a different style as they are individuals who are narrating their personal ads for threesomes, and Girl Talk is about threesomes.

Episode Nine, "The Turtle and the Hare" (Avril & Kolinsky, 1998) opens with the story of a friend who she describes in this way: "in a city of perfect people, no one was more perfect than Brooke." When Brooke gets married to a man whom she has settled for, Carrie wonders "In a city of great expectations, is it time to settle for what you can get?" Mr. Big tells Carrie that he'll never get married again and she doesn't know if she can date a man who will never marry. Also in this episode Charlotte gets addicted to a vibrator and Samantha dates a man she's trying to change into someone

she can fall in love with. Girl Talk is about men who don't want to marry and vibrators.

In Episode Ten, "The Baby Shower" (Minsky, 1998) the women are invited to the baby shower of a friend who's life has drastically changed. This episode explores the issue of motherhood and how it changes the lives of women. Interviews are of the mothers at the baby shower as Carrie ponders "What is buried deep inside the Mommies downstairs?" Carrie is very late for her period and wonders if she is ready for motherhood while Charlotte has a personal crisis. Laney, the pregnant friend, tries to get back her crazy ways and becomes upset when she realizes how much she's changed. Girl Talk is at the beginning of the episode and it is a discussion of Laney and the big change in her life as a wife and mother-to-be.

Episode Eleven, "The Drought" (Green & King, 1998) opens with Carrie and Mr. Big in bed, and the embarrassment Carrie feels when she farts in front of him. This turns into a situation for her because after that, he doesn't want to have sex the next few times they are in bed together. No one is having sex in this episode except for a couple that lives across from Carrie and is easily seen through her window. Miranda hasn't had sex for three months; Charlotte meets a guy who's on Prozac and doesn't care about sex; and Samantha has met a celibate yoga teacher who has introduced her to the sensual aspect of celibacy. Person-on-the-street interviews ask "How often is often enough?" and Girl Talk is about not having enough sex, and takes place while the women are watching Carrie's neighbors.

Episode Twelve, "Oh come, all ye faithful" (King, 1998c) is the final episode of the season. It opens with a discussion of Miranda's new relationship with a guy

who is catholic and insists on taking a shower after sex each time because, as a child, the nuns told him sex was a sin. Carrie poses the question "Are relationships the religion of the 90's?" and while doing research finds Mr. Big at church with his mother. This leads her to want to personally meet Mr. Big's mother, but he is not ready. Samantha falls in love with a man with whom she's uncharacteristically waiting to have sex with and Charlotte is concerned about her marital situation and seeks the guidance of a number of psychics. At the end of the episode and season, Carrie breaks off her relationship with Mr. Big. Girl Talk focuses on Samantha's problem of being in love with a man who has a very small penis.

Analysis

The following analysis discusses the implications of gender roles and family values, from a Foucauldian perspective, portrayed in *Sex and the City* and what those portrayals mean in terms of the current power structures of patriarchy and consumerism.

Gender Roles

Although many of the prescriptions for being feminine remain, women today enjoy a wide range of choices when constructing their identities as women and as feminine. As Wood (1997) states:

Society no longer has a consensual view of who women are or what they are supposed to do, think, and be. A woman who is assertive and ambitious in a career is likely to meet with approval, disapproval, and curiosity from others.

A woman who chooses to stay at home while her children are young will be criticized by many women and men, envied by others, and respected by some, and disregarded by still others. Currently, multiple views of femininity are vying for legitimacy (p. 143).

Although Wood's example is simplistic she does acknowledge that today there exists multiple definitions of femininity. As she states, this can be confusing, but it also allows for a variety of choices that women have while still considered normal in our society. In *Sex and the City* we find the representation of some of those choices in the four main characters, albeit with limitations with regard to race, class and sexual orientation. In other words, even though all the main characters are middle class,

white, and heterosexual they do exhibit a new and increasing range of feminine characteristics relative to what has typically been portrayed in the media.

Embodied in the four main characters, Carrie, Samantha, Miranda, and Charlotte, are a range of physical traits, personalities and mind-sets regarding independence and dependence; sexual prowess and naïveté; cynicism and romanticism; coyness and assertiveness; confidence and insecurity. In addition to characteristics and personalities female viewers are invited to identify with the variety of dating circumstances depicted on the show, and by keeping the situations frivolous--staying away from issues dealing with violence, for example--audience members are able to keep their identifications in a positive light.

Although there is a range of feminine characteristics depicted extensively on the show, I propose that Carrie Bradshaw is set up as the standard for what is considered a normal woman. Foucault asserts that one way power works through discourse is that it is limited to those who have the authority to speak. In the same light that LaFountain (1989) describes Dr. Ruth's appeal as authority, I extend to Carrie Bradshaw: "the combination of her voice as woman, her animated presence, and the 'rituals' of her expertise . . . in Foucault's terms, 'rarefy' her as a 'speaking subject'" (p. 134). In *Sex and the City* Carrie Bradshaw represents the voice of authority. As the authority she illustrates through her words and actions what defines normalcy for women. The other characters of the show, particularly Samantha, Charlotte, and Miranda represent some form of deviant femininity, although readily accepted in our society. Rather than forcing one definition of femininity, the show

constructs one definition of “normal” femininity as represented by Carrie while also defining alternate forms of womanhood.

There are a number of ways in which Carrie is created as an authority on sex. The most obvious way her authority is enacted is the use of scientific jargon. She calls herself a “sex anthropologist” (Star, 1998a) and constantly reiterates the scientific theme by doing things in the name of research. For example, in Episode One (Star, 1998a) she is exploring the idea of “women having sex like men” for her weekly column. When she runs into an old boyfriend, she seduces him for “research” and engages in uncommitted, selfish sex--her opinion of having sex “like a man.” In Episode Two (Star, 1998b) Carrie meets and takes home a young model. As she is getting in the taxi with him, she looks at the camera, shrugs, and says, “The things you gotta do in the name of research.” She refers to her friends as “subjects” and engages in pseudo-scientific evidence gathering by interviewing them as well as conducting “person on the street” interviews.

Carrie is also shown as authority through her career as a professional writer hired specifically to inform the public about issues of sex. Carrie is no “fly-by-night” operator. The show depicts this during Episode Two (Star, 1998b) when Carrie is having a discussion with a young male model. When he asks her what she wants to be when she grows up, she replies condescendingly, “Oh, I think this is it.” In addition to her occupation as a writer the fact that she is a woman emphasizes her authority on sex and relationships. One of the stereotypical attitudes toward women is that they are the experts in relationship issues.

As an authority on sex, Carrie is able to hear people's confessions and therefore normalize issues of sexuality. Although not a psychotherapist per se, Carrie's interviews, along with her position of authority, can be seen as opportunities for others to "confess." During *Girl Talk*, for instance, Carrie offers little of her own assertions and details while enabling her friends to go into minute details of their issues and experiences. She simply offers suggestions and leading questions to further the conversations.

By establishing Carrie as having a hierarchical, or authoritative, gaze through these rhetorical acts, we witness what are considered sexual norms through her opinions, comments and specific actions. She speaks with authority, she uses statistics and descriptions in her voiceovers to the audience, she gives observations which she records in her weekly column, and we watch her work through her own personal sexual situations. The audience is invited to learn through these rhetorical acts what it means to be a "normal woman."

Carrie Bradshaw is a petite woman who wears tight fitting clothes and has an addiction to expensive shoes. In each episode it is obvious that she is focused on fashion and beauty. She is on the quest for a relationship and believes in the romantic side of life. For example, in Episode One (Star, 1998a) the women are talking about "women having sex like men." Samantha and Miranda are taking a position that it's better if women were to leave out their emotions and desires for a committed relationship and simply use men sexually. When Samantha and Miranda have discussed their perspectives, Carrie says "Oh c'mon ladies, are we that cynical? What about romance?" After comments that romance is passé, Carrie says "Oh no, no no.

Believe me, the right guy comes along, and you two here--the whole thing, right out the window." So although in dialogue Carrie says very little, her position as a romantic is obvious. Her actions also disclose her romantic quality. Throughout this episode Carrie is researching the idea that women can have sex like men--"without feelings." She engages in uncommitted, casual and selfish sex with an old boyfriend and initially gets a high that is likened to a power surge. When she runs into him later in the episode, he explains to her that, after initially being frustrated and angry, he was turned on by the encounter because she "finally understood what kind of relationship [he wanted] . . . Sex anytime with no emotion." This comment immediately troubles her and ends the power trip she is on. Later, as Carrie meets Mr. Big she tells him about her research into how men have sex. He denies he is like that himself, and proposes that Carrie doesn't really understand things because "she has never been in love before." She has a very strong emotional reaction to his comment and as a result, confirms that it is possible to find "true love."

Nine / Carrie also plays a traditional female role in her relationship with Mr. Big. She takes full responsibility for the relationship throughout the season in a variety of ways. The relationship between Carrie and Mr. Big is riddled with gender norms. She is desperate to make this relationship work, while he is aloof, non-committed and, at times, condescending. Their non-verbal communication also follows typical gender norms as he is larger in stature than her, makes more money than she does ("major tycoon, major out of my league"), and is much more confident and older than she is. In their encounters, he tends to tower over her, keeping his eyes pinned to her, while she

moves around a bit, looking this way and that, avoiding direct eye contact with him. She also ends up being very clumsy in his presence.

Carrie is really the only reason this relationship exists; without her it seems he would just let it slide. Mostly, she makes time for him while he breezes in and out of her life, refusing or canceling dates, or in a rush between meetings. Also, she is the only one that brings up issues in the relationship; he is usually oblivious to any problems and when asked to discuss them, appears annoyed. In each of the incidents, Mr. Big is able to put her at ease with some vague notion of commitment, to which she latches on. For example, with regard to his seeing other women (Star, 1998d), Carrie tells him that she's been around enough and says, "I feel like I've met somebody I can stand still with for a moment, and . . . don't you want to stand still with me?" He replies, "You dragged me out to a park at 3 o'clock in the morning to ask if I want to stand still with you?" She says "yes;" he doesn't answer, but smiles, puts his arm around her and stands still. She takes this as a yes. Also as an example, in Episode Nine (Avril & Kolinsky, 1998) Carrie realizes she doesn't want to date a man who won't consider marriage. She tells him, "I do want to get married sometime. Maybe ~~not now~~, but someday." He replies, "I thought we were having fun. It's all in the timing." She acquiesces. However, in the final episode (King, 1998c), when Mr. Big refuses to introduce her to his mother, she insists that he admit she (Carrie) is "the one": "you don't have to tell your mother or the whole world, just tell me." When he refuses, she breaks up with him.

Carrie's feelings of responsibility for the relationship are further addressed in a somewhat amusing episode (Green & King, 1998) in which she farts while she and

Mr. Big are in bed cuddling. She was “mortified” and ran out of his apartment as fast as she could. The next three times they spent the night together Mr. Big doesn’t want to have sex; which is also the first time that happens in their relationship. Carrie attributes his lack of interest to her farting.

Carrie also appears to be family oriented. Episode Three (King, 1998) discusses a “cold war” between marrieds and singles and paints a particularly negative view about married life. At the end Carrie rejects the advances of a “marrying guy.” Her feelings about marriage are ambiguous here, but later in the season she takes part in her own soul searching when Mr. Big mentions that he never will get married again. During a visit to Stanford’s Grandmother’s house, Carrie pours over family photos of weddings, children, etc. and realizes she does want to get married and have a family someday (Avril & Kolinsky, 1998).

The other main characters depart somewhat from, while still maintaining, many traditionally feminine traits. The traditional notion that women are identified by their bodies exists in Samantha’s character. However, she is not romantic, other-centered, or interested in having a family. Samantha is an independent, successful public relations entrepreneur who is sexually aggressive and adventurous. Her main pursuit is the sexual conquest of *all* the men whom she finds appealing, and she is often successful, using her body by using extremely seductive mannerisms and dress. Her sexual attitude is one not based on romance, but on expediency, as is evident in her dialogues during girl talk in the following episodes (for complete discussions see Appendices A, B, C, D & E respectively).

Topic—Having Sex Like a Man: If you're a successful saleswoman in this city, you have two choices; you can bang your head against the wall and try and find a relationship or say screw it and just go out and have sex . . . like a man. . . I mean without feelings. . . . Sweetheart, this is the first time in the history of Manhattan that women have had as much money and power as men, plus the equal luxury of treating men like sex objects. . . . The right guy is an illusion, don't you understand that? You've got to start living your life! (Star, 1998a)

Topic—Anal Sex: Front, back, who cares? A hole is a hole. . . . This is a physical expression that the body was designed to experience, and P.S., it's fabulous. (King, 1998b)

Topic—Sex on a First Date: If it happens, it happens. . . The women who wrote that book, they wrote it because they couldn't get laid. So they constructed this whole bullshit theory so that women who can get laid feel bad . . . Isn't it best to find out if sex is good, right off the bat, before anyone's feelings get hurt? . . . Yet you can have good sex with someone you don't like or respect, or even remember. (Star, 1998c)

Topic—Oral Sex: Plus the sense of power is such a turn on. Maybe you're on your knees, but you got him by the balls. (Star, 1998d)

Topic—Threesomes: Don't knock it 'til you've tried it. The only way to be in a three-some is to be a guest star. The girl the couple gets to come in, screw, and leave. It's perfect: all the great sex without wondering what it'll do to your relationship. (Bicks, 1998)

Samantha finds herself in a bit of a dilemma by the end of the season. She meets a man one evening and behaves sweet and demure with him the first night and uncharacteristically holds back having sexual relations with him. Soon, she winds up falling in love with him, even to the point of considering marriage. When they finally consummate the relationship, Samantha finds out that his penis is quite small. She is in a great deal of agony and confusion over this situation as the season ends.

Samantha brings into her particular style of womanhood aspects that are not historically feminine, yet doesn't tread too far out of the confines of what it means to be feminine today. When approaching a man in her extremely titillating fashion she tends to soften her tone and walk in a seductively feminine way. Also, for a woman who is sexually adventurous, she still manages to stay within the confines of normal heterosexual behavior.

Miranda is a successful corporate attorney who is ambiguous about romantic relationships. Although at times she seems to want one, she doesn't date as often as the others and often winds up using Skipper for sex. She seems the least traditional of the women, having a position in a male dominated industry as a corporate attorney. Her clothes also reflect her lack of identity in her body; she wears suits for work and at other times wears much less revealing clothing than the others. The relationship that she has with Skipper can be considered a role-reversal. She is the older, more confident partner who is emotionally unavailable while Skipper is very infatuated with Miranda and obsesses about their relationship. Although Miranda is cynical, she does show interest in having a normal, romantic relationship, although she has a

particularly pragmatic view when it comes to sex. In her dialogues (for complete discussions see Appendices A, B, C, D & E respectively) she comments:

Topic—Having Sex Like a Man: Yeah, but the men in this city fail on both counts. They don't want to be in a relationship with you, but as soon as you just want them for sex, they don't like it. All of a sudden they can't perform the way they're supposed to. . . . It's like that guy, Jeremiah, the poet? I mean, the sex was incredible! But then he wanted to read me his poetry, and go out to dinner, and the whole chat bit . . . and I'm like, let's not even go there! (Star, 1998a)

Topic—Anal Sex: It's all about control, if he goes up there, there's gonna be a shift in power. Either he'll have the upper hand or you will. Now, there's a certain camp that believes that whoever holds the dick holds the power. . . . The question is, if he goes up your butt will he respect you more or respect you less? That's the issue. (King, 1998b)

Topic—Sex on a First Date: Just don't fuck on a first date, you're fine. . . . True romance can't exist without good sex. (Star, 1998c)

Topic—Oral Sex: Personally, I'm loving it, up to the point where the guy wants me to swallow. . . . Oral sex, it's like God's gift to women. You can get off without the fear of getting pregnant. . . . But if you don't go down on him how can you expect him to go down on you? . . . I only give head to get head. (Star, 1998d),

Topic—Threesomes: Its' just a guys cheap ploy to let him get to watch y'ou be a lesbian for the night. (Bicks, 1998)

Miranda is a practical headstrong woman and is the only woman who has a difficult time finding men to date, Skipper aside. In her behavior toward men she is the least flirtatious and dependent. (Although Samantha may appear quite independent, her character is depicted as particularly needy for sexual attention). Miranda is the only character who experiences a near lesbian experience, although true to heterosexism she fails to pursue or even identify with that option.

Charlotte is a truly traditional, romantic woman who is looking for a husband and family. Although she is a successful art dealer, she hides her success and ambition from men in order to play the traditional role of dependent female. Charlotte is looking for “Mr. Right” and she manages to remain a “good girl” in spite of the large number of sexual encounters she engages in while looking for him. Charlotte is naive and not particularly adventurous sexually. Charlotte’s dialogues illustrate her traditional views (for complete discussions see Appendices A, B, C, D & E respectively).

Topic—Having Sex Like a Man: What are you saying? Are you saying you’re just going to give up on love? That’s sick! (King, 1998a)

Topic—Anal Sex: I’m not a hole! . . . What are you talking about? I went to Smith! (King, 1998b)

Topic—Sex on a First Date: I thought you were serious about this guy. You can’t sleep with him on the first date. . . . But if you’re serious about a guy, you have to keep in a holding pattern for at least 5 dates. . . .By the tenth date, at least you’re emotionally involved. . . . The Victorians were on to something, they valued romance. (Star, 1998c)

Topic—Oral Sex: Truth is, I hate doing it. I don't like putting it in my mouth. I have a sensitive gag reflex, it makes me want to puke. . . . I tried it . . . I just don't like it! (Star, 1998d)

Topic—Threesomes: Well I've never done a three-some. . . . Jack thinks I'm sexy. . . . I think I'd feel safer with a friend, with someone I can trust. (Bicks, 1998)

At the end of the season, Charlotte is totally frustrated and fears that Samantha might end up getting married before she does, so she takes to the streets to consult a number of psychics. Although she is told that she will be successful and independent, she is also told that she will never marry. By the end of the episode, however, she's decided that she will remain optimistic about attaining her true goal in life.

Women who are more traditional can identify with Charlotte as she portrays feminine characteristics of nurturing, dependency and strong emotions. Her goal in life is to marry and have a family. She is innocent and easily offended, especially when confronted with the idea of having adventurous sex, except when her boyfriend is able to persuade her--not through pressure or begging, but through excessive compliments and assurances of her sexuality. Charlotte is also the more dependent and emotionally needy of the four women, and the other friends often come to her rescue or avoid telling her things if they think she will get upset.

As female viewers watch *Sex and the City* they are invited to identify with one of the four women, their particular personalities and situations. Carrie is most "normal" as she portrays most of the characteristics traditionally considered feminine: relationship centered, dependent, and focused on beauty and fashion. The other

characters deviate somewhat from the norm: Samantha is not romantically inclined and is sexually aggressive; Miranda is the stronger partner in her predominate relationship, is a corporate attorney, and dresses in less revealing clothes; and Charlotte is old-fashioned, very emotional, and easily offended. As Foucault might suggest here, rather than the representations of additional forms of femininity working toward liberating women with more choices, it may be that it is simply another way of inciting sexuality discourse. As Sheridan (1981) comments with regard to so-called scandalous literature that Foucault researched:

He may seem to us to be . . . a rebel against the Puritanism of his time and a precursor of a later, more enlightened age; he may equally well be seen as a representative figure in a long, uninterrupted tradition of talking about sex (p. 171).

Resistance Rhetoric

As discussed earlier in this essay, Foucault argues that resistant rhetoric is often ineffective because it works within the discursive rules of the current power regimes which it attempts to subvert. However, we have found that in media there have been instances of truly resistant rhetoric as this rhetoric uses techniques that work outside the normal structures of dominant discourse.

One way that *Sex and the City* offers resistance to current patriarchal power structures that are otherwise typical in television and movies is by using rhetoric that neutralizes the male gaze. The “male gaze” is a term used to define the male dominated, voyeuristic gaze “in mainstream Hollywood [that] reflect and satisfy the male unconscious” (Cooper, 2000, p. 280). The male gaze is believed to be the

dominant viewpoint of Hollywood in that it reflects and satisfies the heterosexual male perspective while marginalizing women. In "'Chick Flick' as Feminist Texts: The Appropriation of the Male Gaze in *Thelma and Louise*", Cooper (2000) identifies three ways in which that film resists the male gaze typical in Hollywood films. Although the male gaze is dominant and may not be eliminated altogether, the addition of a female gaze has the opportunity to appeal to women as viewers by offering resistance to normally offensive situations. In her reading of *Thelma and Louise* Cooper identifies three ways in which the movie exhibits a female gaze. First, the protagonists use mockery in order to resist the objectification by men; secondly, they "return the look" (p. 285) and objectify men; and lastly, they celebrate women's friendships. *Sex and the City* can also be seen to exhibit these aspects.

The show makes a mockery of heterosexual men in a number of ways. When opening the season, Carrie, in Episode One (Star, 1998a) conducts interviews in which the men who are interviewed are labeled as toxic bachelors. They are macho, whiney men who readily objectify women but who are also upset by being rejected by them. For example:

Toxic Bachelor I: When you're a young guy in your 20s, women are controlling the relationships. By the time you're an eligible man in your 30s, you feel like you're being devoured by women. Suddenly, the guys are holding all the chips. I call it the mid-30s power flip. . . . The problem is expectations. Older women don't want to settle for what's available. . . . There isn't one woman in NY who hasn't turned down 10 wonderful guys because they were

too short or too fat or too poor. . . . Why don't these women just marry a fat guy. Why don't they just marry a big, fat tub of lard!

Toxic Bachelor II: Its all about age and biology. I mean if you want to get married, its to have kids, right? And you don't want to do it with someone older than 35 'cause then you have to have kids right away, and that's about it. I think these women should just forget about marriage and have a good time. . . . What women really want is Alec Baldwin.

The show also depicts men as always having inherent flaws as lovers and partners. Charlotte's boyfriends demand blow jobs (King, 1998b) and anal sex (Star, 1998d) while one of them keeps constant pressure on her to engage in a three-some with him (Bicks, 1998). Throughout the season Miranda dates Skipper, who is a younger man infatuated with her. She also dates a man who appears to be into spanking, but when she confronts him playfully about it, he runs off with his tail between his legs (Star, 1998c). Miranda dates another man who is a Catholic and insists on showering every time after sex because the nuns told him sex was a sin (King, 1998c). Throughout the season Carrie dates Mr. Big, a supposed catch because he is "the next Donald Trump, only younger and much cuter" (Star, 1998a) but turns out to be a cheater, a liar and unable to commit. When Carrie rejects a "marrying guy" he becomes whiney and has a temper tantrum (1998a). Barkely is a modelizer who secretly tapes his conquests (Star, 1998b), Sam is a twenty-something good kisser with no bedside manners (Star, 1998b), Derrick is a simple minded model (Star, 1998b), and Jon and Jared are very arrogant young men (King, 1998b). There's more. In every

episode men are depicted as inherently flawed and characterized by typical machismo and ego-filled images. The reviews also acknowledge this mockery:

The only male in New York who almost gets through their armor is Mr. Big, a smug, smarmy oaf to whom Ms. Parker's character is unaccountably attracted.

The rest of the city's men don't even rise to his low level. Some are faithless cads. Some are not rich enough or interesting enough. The rest are hopeless in bed (Tierney, 1999, p. B1).

Oh Lord, these men!--display an assortment of sexual shortcomings so pitiable and obscene they cannot be detailed in a family magazine (Chang & Chambers, 1999, p. 60).

[A]s the four attractive, successful women maneuver the thickets of "toxic bachelors," "modelizers" and other dubious specimens of the male gender" (Rudolph, 1998, p. 12).

[T]he men who aren't gay will only date models, and those who are old enough to clean their apartments are desperate to fill them with children, immediately (Katz, 1998, p. 36).

In addition to making a mockery of the men *Sex and the City* objectifies men. We never know the real name of Mr. Big who is an ongoing and important character throughout the season. Charlotte's always looking for the perfect man who needs to have good looks, taste and money. When described, men are discussed only in terms of their financial prowess. Carrie "tries out" a younger man and labeling twenty-something men as either the "groovy guy, the jock guy, the corporate guy, the under aged guy" or the "good kisser-guy" (King, 1998b). The men parading through the

show are objectified and used by Samantha in particular, but all of the women for purposes of fulfilling sexual needs or as possible mates. We never really get to know the male characters except possibly Skipper—but only in relation to Miranda—and Stanford, the homosexual. As one reviewer puts it: “The weird guys on “*Sex and the City*” are such bit players they don’t even get real names” (Chang & Chambers, 1999, p. 61).

Aside from the eternal search for a mate, foremost in the show are the friendships between the women. As Parker, the actress who plays Carrie, states: “The way we women look now look at our lives, we’re the main characters. . . Men come and go, but you always have your girlfriends” (Rudolph, 1998, p. 12). Most of the scenes in the show, sex scenes excluded, take place as the women spend time together, either all at the same time or two or three together. They dine together, exercise together and tell each other everything. They tell each other everything that is going on in their lives and support each other in all their escapades. At one point, when Carrie had been involved and consumed with Mr. Big, Miranda gave her a call admonishing her for ignoring her friends (Star, 1998d). Carrie says in a voice over: “I just committed the cardinal sin. I’d forsaken my girlfriends for my new boyfriend.” Samantha, Carrie and Miranda are also very protective of Charlotte. During the baby shower (Minsky, 1998) when Charlotte finds out that Laney has stolen her baby name, Samantha calls Laney a bitch, throws her arm around Charlotte and leads her to the door. Whenever Charlotte finds herself in desperate need of advice the friends drop what they’re doing to help. They also often keep certain information from her so

that she doesn't get upset, like when Carrie thought she was pregnant (Minsky, 1998) and when Carrie had experienced "sex like a man" (Star, 1998a).

Even while the focus is on men, *Sex and the City* can clearly be seen as containing a strong amount of the female gaze, allowing women to identify with the characters, enjoying the perspective of watching women in action.

Another way in which *Sex and the City* resists the current power structure is by negatively portraying the institutions of marriage and motherhood. As stated earlier, the current power regime of patriarchy uses the family structure to strengthen and maintain the status quo.

Sex and the City as sexuality discourse departs from the usual representation of upholding family values. In contrast to an article in *USA Weekend* stating that "women are approaching the next century being 'focused more on their families and homes, and less on meeting career goals or society's expectations . . .'" (Vavrus, 2000, p. 414) the distinct perspective of the show focuses not only on a lifestyle without traditional family structures but often draws negative pictures of those structures. The main characters' actions may typically center on finding a mate, albeit unsuccessfully, but the importance or compulsion of marriage and child-rearing come into question. During the episodes about the subjects of marriage and motherhood there exist particularly negative illustrations.

Episode Three (King, 1998a) asks the question "Is there a secret cold war between marrieds and singles?" Well illustrated is the concept that once people marry they belong to a different, more mundane world. The episode opens as Carrie is visiting a couple who she calls the perfect married couple: "They're fun, smart. And

they look like they just fell out of a J. Crew catalog.” In relation to the crowded life of New York City, with a house on the beach in the Hamptons, they are pictured as somewhat isolated, with the only diversions to their otherwise empty lives being drawn from their house guests. Carrie narrates: “Hampton house guests are always required to sing for their supper. Brokers give investment advice, architects design advice. Single people give married friends tidbits from their sexual escapades.” While Carrie describes a tidbit from one of her own sexual escapades, the “perfect” couple looks drawn in and titillated, as if this is the most sexual excitement they’ve had since marriage.

Married people are further isolated because they have a tendency to lose contact with their single friends (see Appendix F for person-on-the-street interviews). They also give up their individual identities. Always seen in pairs, married people on *Sex and the City* are rarely seen out having fun, they’re usually tucked away in their houses in the Hamptons or found at private parties where there are only other married couples. Married people are also painted as being fearful of single people. Married women are afraid that single women will sleep with their husbands, and married couples have a fear of the unknown and work diligently to “figure out” singles.

Even the reviews offer a conflicting perspective on what the show is saying about marriage. Some definitively state that the women are looking for marriage:

It all comes down to that one thing—we’re single—and there’s this little person inside of you saying no matter how successful you are or how great your wardrobe is, you don’t have a date. Maybe, just maybe, you’re a big loser

(Chang & Chambers, 1999, p. 61).

It's [the book] about one thing and one thing only: the horror of being a single woman in her late thirties in New York and trying to land a suitable-- that is, rich, powerful, and important--husband. And that pursuit is basically what the HBO series is about (Franklin, 1998, p. 75).

Carrie Bradshaw . . . who chronicles their disastrous attempts to transform themselves from single professional women into married professional women (Katz, 1998, p. 36).

However, another reviewer sees the show as portraying single life as exciting while married life is not worth pursuing:

The women of "*Sex and the City*" sleep with whomever they want, max out their credit cards and never have to worry about playdates or carpools. And they know their married friends aren't having any fun at all. . . . The show is really breaking through the notion that marriage is the end-all and be-all . . . there's just a way in which you can fall in love with your single life. You're in charge" (Chang & Chambers, p. 61)

The "mother mandate" or "[t]he belief that a woman's greatest fulfillment and ultimate achievement will be in her role as a mother" (Lindsey, 1990, p. 136) is not supported in *Sex and the City*. Episode Ten (Minsky, 1998) opens with the four women receiving invitations to a baby shower for an old friend, Laney, who previously had been a wild and promiscuous woman. While attending the baby shower it becomes clear that once a woman becomes a mother, she loses her identity and her main focus becomes that of her children. Foreshadowing this idea is a scene in which Carrie, Miranda, Samantha, and Charlotte are approaching the house where the baby

shower is being held. A friendly dog runs up to meet them, but is held back by an invisible fence. Miranda notes that her sister, who was mentioned earlier as belonging to “the mommy cult,” also has an invisible fence.

When introduced to the women at the baby shower we find them completely absorbed in their children and motherhood. Laney introduces or describes each woman with respect to her role as mother or mother-to-be. For instance, as she introduces one woman and her son, Betsy and Harold, she comments: “They’re inseparable. We call them our old married couple.” Just after, another mother approaches Miranda and Carrie and exclaims, “I love my son. Andy’s eleven months old. He’s a god and I tell him so every single day.”

During this episode, Carrie is particularly absorbed in the issues of motherhood as she is nervous because her period is late. She contemplates motherhood and the apparent change of personality and lifestyle it brings to a woman, and asks “What was still buried deep inside the mummies downstairs?” This is her interview question to the women at the shower, and the answers strongly normalize motherhood as resulting in the silencing of women’s individual voices as well as women’s own frustrations of missing their previous lives and/or identities. Their true selves have become closeted (for detailed interview see Appendix G).

After the baby shower, the four women sit in a bar and discuss their reactions to the day. Samantha is resisting the societal conditioning that she should consider being a mother while Miranda bemoans the loss of intellectual stimulation resulting from having babies. Carrie is trying to bring a modern perspective of “women having it all” into the concept of motherhood, but fails.

Miranda: I spoke to a woman with a Master's in finance. All she wanted to talk about was her diaper genie.

Samantha: Well, I for one love my life, and I will not be made to feel inadequate by all this baby talk.

Carrie: Oh c'mon guys, it doesn't have to be like that. You don't have to lose yourself to have a kid. I know plenty of cool, hip mothers who live in the city and still have careers and stuff. (When asked to name them, she couldn't.)

It is worth noting that Charlotte, who is the only positive voice regarding motherhood, is absent from the conversation.

Later in the episode, in an attempt to reclaim her old self, Laney shows up at Samantha's "I'm not having a baby" party. When Charlotte reproaches her for ruining her dream (illustrated through an earlier encounter at the shower), Laney replies "At least you know what happened to your dream. I have no idea what happened to mine." Laney even goes so far as to begin a strip act like the ones she used to do when she was single. No one is particularly interested in seeing a pregnant woman strip and Laney experiences a personal crisis.

When Carrie walks Laney to a cab to send her home, Carrie says in a voice over: "Despite her efforts to run free, it appears as if Laney's invisible fence stretched all the way to Manhattan." As Laney gets into the cab, after making one last attempt to go back to the party, she complains to Carrie "Somebody should warn you. One day you're gonna wake up, and you're not going to recognize yourself."

In addition to the negative portrayals of marriage and motherhood, the characters of the *Sex and the City* resist the traditional family structure by ignoring its significance in their own lives. The women never mention their own childhoods or families, and current relationships with their own parents and siblings simply do not exist. Only in one case is a family member mentioned: in Episode Ten (Minsky, 1998) while discussing babies, Miranda mentions that she has two sisters who are part of the “mommy cult.”

Patriarchy

It is obvious that women today have many more choices than in recent history. Women can choose paths that lie along continuums of financial independence, sexual interest, and family status. It appears as if women have gained freedom from the gender descriptions which have constrained them in roles of care-giver, nurturer, and dependent. However, just as Philips’ (2000) heroines in the genre of single women novels, the single women of *Sex and the City* have the benefits and choices gained from the women’s movement while “leaving traditional gender relations and patriarchal structures profoundly unchallenged” (p. 250). This is illustrated in a number of ways in *Sex and the City* through descriptions of life-styles and relationships, and strikes remarkable similarities to the heroines discussed by Philips. Carrie, Samantha, Miranda, and Charlotte are all “independent, privileged young women . . . with jobs in the glamorous end of the middle-class professions . . . [who] rarely demonstrate any career ambition . . . [whose] jobs are important to them, if largely because they supply the means for an urban lifestyle that is dedicated to consumption (p. 239). In the entire season, with two exceptions, the women of *Sex and*

the City don't appear interested in ambitious goals or growth in their careers. The exceptions occur when Miranda (King, 1998a) pretends to be a lesbian to get invited to her boss's house for dinner, and when Charlotte (Star & Kohan, 1998) poses for a famous artist in order to get him to show at her gallery. In essence, the purpose of the women's jobs is to support a lifestyle in which they make numerous purchases in order to market themselves to men.

In addition to the lack of focus on their careers, the pursuit of happiness lies in the acquisition of a man; whether for purposes of marriage, as with Charlotte's and Carrie's romanticism, or with no such end in mind, such as with Samantha's and Miranda's utilitarianism. It is also important that the right man is in a higher income bracket and therefore, continues the traditional relationship trait of male as provider.

The characters in *Sex and the City* shy away from using political terms such as "feminist" or "feminism" or "women's movement," even during discussions of sex and power. Samantha believes that "women now have as much power and money as men" (King, 1998a) and are "equal opportunity exploiters" (Star & Kohan, 1998). Though the specific movements or struggles are not mentioned, the assumption of women being on equal footing with men prevails. Philips (2000) finds that in single women novels "The narrator of these fictions will often deliberately distance the heroine from any suggestion of feminism" (p. 247). In some cases the media goes so far as to problematize feminism, as Vavrus (2000) illustrates by discussing how in *Ally McBeal*, for instance, a typical description of feminism and feminists is "a dying social movement . . . [and] grave, ball-busting women" (pp. 421-422). Although there are no direct attacks on feminists and feminism in *Sex and the City* there is a stark absence of

these political terms. According to Foucault, one tool that discourse uses in maintaining power structures is exclusion. A dominant definition of women's lives, as described in the show, suggests not only a tiny fragment of the entire population of single women living in the city, but also the complete lack of acknowledgment of one of the most important movements in women's recent history. Such an important erasure certainly has its affect in producing an illustration of women whose lives are still focused on fashion, beauty and men while ignoring more vital, public issues--as well as silencing the voices of many women. In essence, according to much of mainstream media, women's lives are still occupied with the function of focusing on their looks, creating and maintaining relationships, and finding a man with more economic power even while they pursue high-level careers and spend their own money on personal pleasures.

Homosexuality

The media can be particularly silent when dealing with issues of lesbianism, and *Sex and the City* is no different. Using Adrienne Rich's "lesbian continuum" (Rich, 1983) however, we can identify more profound relationships between the women of the show that extend beyond simple friendships and how ignoring the strength of those relationships aids in the perpetuation of male dominance.

Female ways of communicating and experiencing relationships are quite different from male ways and as a result public knowledge and portrayals of female relationships have been conducted through the lens of male viewers, particularly in the media. However, Rich also argues that even in feminist writings the experiences of lesbians are often ignored or downplayed. She believes this is a result of the concept

of compulsory heterosexuality, which explains heterosexuality as a political institution. Rich (1983) asserts that “the institution of heterosexuality itself [is] a beachhead of male dominance” (p. 178) and women-centered relationships threaten that dominance. The dominant ideology recognizes lesbianism as only a function of genital relations between women and denies the deeper context within which women relate. As Rich (1983) explains:

Lesbian existence [italics added] suggests both the fact of the historical presence of lesbians and our continuing creation of the meaning of that existence. I mean the term *lesbian continuum* [italics added] to include a range--through each woman's life and history--of woman identified experience; not simply the fact that a woman has had or consciously desired genital sexual experience with another woman (p. 192).

In our culture lesbianism is denied an existence in a number of ways. First, lesbianism is nearly completely ignored in the media unless portrayed as exotic or perverse behavior, or as the practice of a marginalized population, while heterosexual romance is normalized. Second, when represented in the media, lesbianism is often identified as the same in essence as male homosexuality. This creates weighty misrepresentations of the lesbian community because stark differences exist between lesbian and gay communities, particularly due to the differences between the lifestyles and relationship practices of women and men. Rich (1983) points out those differences:

[W]omen's lack of economic and cultural privilege relative to men; qualitative differences in female and male relationships, for example, the prevalence of

anonymous sex and the justification of pederasty among male homosexuals, the pronounced ageism in male homosexual standards of sexual attractiveness, and so forth. I perceive the lesbian experience as being . . . a profoundly *female* experience (p. 193).

As Rich explains, women's experience of eroticism is not contained in body parts or the body itself, and sex and sexuality need not be linked only to a function of procreation as has been maintained by the dominant ideology. She explains that women who find deep, more profound—and perhaps primary--relationships with other woman rather than men can be considered quite natural and a “source of energy, a potential springhead of female power, violently curtailed and wasted under the institution of heterosexuality” (p. 199).

The importance of Rich's discussion about lesbianism for this essay is that she points to the concept of women's relationships as a source of distinctly female power, and that that power can upset the current hierarchical male/female power structure. She states that “enforcement of heterosexuality for women [is] a means of assuring male right of physical, economical and emotional access” (p. 191).

Sex and the City as a show about women and sexuality ignores the implications of lesbianism except in its most vernacular sense; but it does illustrate the unique bonds woman can have while still supporting heterosexuality.

During Episode Three (King, 1998a) Miranda is fixed up with another woman, a lesbian woman named Syd, during a game with her company's softball team. Miranda is assumed to be a lesbian because her co-workers have never seen her with a man. Interestingly, Syd and Miranda end up making the winning play in the softball

game, depicting the “masculine” aspect of lesbian women: competitive and physically adept. After they win the game, a senior partner in the law firm warms up to Miranda by inviting the two women to his house for dinner and by asking Miranda to call him by his nickname, Chip. Miranda immediately accepts the dinner invitation for the both of them. However, after the dinner she can’t continue with the charade. She explains to her boss that she had just pretended to be gay in order to accept the invitation and talk to him about her work at the firm. He is disappointed, because “his wife had wanted to include a lesbian couple in their circle.” This is a good illustration of how those in marginalized populations can be objectified, wanted and accepted because of their deviancy rather than as individuals. Dow (2001) explains: “Homosexual characters are rarely shown in their own communities, homes, or same-sex romantic relationships but are depicted in terms of their place in the lives of heterosexuals” (p. 129).

During Episode Eight (Bicks, 1998) lesbianism is further normalized as genital sex between women. Charlotte discusses the pressure she is getting from her boyfriend to participate in a threesome with her--a threesome that is normalized as a sexual encounter between two women and one man. Miranda tells Charlotte that threesomes are “just a guy’s cheap ploy to let him get to watch you be a lesbian for the night.”

Samantha, Carrie, Miranda, and Charlotte are close; they share a great deal of time and energy with each other, keeping each other in touch with all the important details of their lives. If there comes a time when one is out of touch with the others, they fight their way back into each others’ lives, as when Carrie’s relationship with Mr. Big becomes more intense. They support each other in time of need. In Episode

Four (King, 1998b) when Carrie is rushing around because she's late for a date with Mr. Big, Charlotte calls with a serious problem. Immediately Carrie rushes to her aid. She takes a cab to pick up Charlotte and then instructs the cab to pick up their other two friends so they could all work together to help Charlotte deal with her problem of having a "perfect" boyfriend who was expecting anal sex that night. In Episode Five (Star & Kohan, 1998) Carrie has a dilemma in which Miranda and Samantha came to her aid. After spending a night with someone in a hotel, Carrie wakes up to find he has left her \$1,000 in cash. She feels like a whore and doesn't know whether or not she should keep the money. Another example of the closeness of their friendships is in Episode Three (King, 1998a) as they explore issues of marriage. When, in the end, none of the women are in a relationship, Carrie ponders the marriage issue and finishes by saying, "Sure it'd be great to have that one special person to walk home with, but sometimes, there's nothing better than meeting your single girlfriends for a night at the movies." The show ends with the four of them meeting at a movie theater, Samantha with her arm around Carrie, Charlotte with her arm around Miranda, walking into the theater like two couples.

In essence, the four women are very protective and supportive of each other and are an integral part in each others' lives; however, most of the time their conversations and support focus on their sexual relationships and the men with whom they have them. They encourage each other to pursue romantic relationships to the fullest and their conversations don't go beyond advice and opinions which predominately center around heterosexual relationships and sex. In an interview with Sarah Jessica Parker (Rudolph, 1998), the actress who plays Carrie makes a comment

illustrating the lack of real depth and concern the characters seem to have for each other. Discussing Samantha's character, Parker states that "If I had a friend who was promiscuous, we'd have a conversation about how she lives her life" (p. 13).

B The gay community is mainly represented by Carrie's friend, Stanford, who is the show's spokesperson for, and whose comments represent and totalize, gay men. Stanford typifies an effeminate single gay man with whom the heterosexual community is already familiar with in television. He plays a feminine role: he is other centered; passionate; concerned about his appearance; and searching for a relationship. His femininity is rhetorically created through the following discursive practices.

the He is looking for love and romance: In Episode One (Star, 1998a), just after Carrie introduces him to the audience, he states, "I'm beginning to think that the only place one can find love and romance in New York is the gay community." In Episode Two (Star, 1998b), as he is talking about his client with whom he infatuated, he tells Carrie, "I keep dreaming that one day he's going to turn around and say, 'Stanford, I love you.'"

rw He's other-centered: In Episode One (Star, 1998a) he explains to Carrie that he has no time for romance. "How could I possibly sustain a relationship, you know that Derrick takes up, like, a thousand percent of my time . . . Carrie, I'm a passionate person, his career is all I care about. When that's under control, then I can concentrate on my personal life."

for He's into fashion: In Episode Twelve (King, 1998c) Stanford has finally found a steady boyfriend. Carrie comments: "They worship the same god, style."

As another important aspect of illustrating gays “safely” on television, *Sex and the City* never shows Stanford engaging in sex or behaving affectionately with another man, except for a quick peck on the cheek with a new boyfriend in one episode. As Brookey (1996) states: “In order to avoid . . . alienating aspects of deviant sexuality, the sexual nature of these relationships is diminished, or ignored all together.” Aside from Stanford, the perpetually single, effeminate gay man, and his occasional lovers, only one gay couple appears in the show during the entire first season. In Episode Three (King, 1998a) Carrie and Stanford bump into an old friend of Carrie’s who is with another man; they are obviously a couple. During their meeting the men show their commitment to each other by flashing their wedding bands stating they have become life partners, and by asking Carrie if she would be interested in donating an egg so that they could have a child. They assure her that they have the money to pay for it. This couple follows the guidelines that Brookey (1996) highlights as the type of gay couple that is acceptable to heterosexuals: white, financially stable, and family oriented. In addition to following the prescriptions for an acceptable gay couple, the two men have very masculine physiques and, aside from one draping his arm over the other, they behave with very masculine mannerisms.

In an alternate reading of the show, the four main characters may be seen as depicting four gay men as gay male viewers might also identify with their habits and lifestyles. As Huston & Schwartz (1996) discuss, most gay men report the desire for long term relationships, but “while the gay bar subculture has made finding a casual sexual partner relatively uncomplicated, it has also made finding a long-term companion rather difficult” (p. 167). *Sex and the City* depicts this phenomenon quite

well in that our main characters find plenty of dates and sexual encounters but are usually unable to extend those relationships beyond a couple of weeks.

Capitalism

It serves capitalism well, of course, to address the consumer in multiple ways.

For each of our roles, whether mother, worker, or wife, and be made to seem to depend on a different set of consumer items. Multiple interpellations construct multiple needs and desires which are satisfied through an ever-increasing proliferation of commodities (Mascia-Lees & Sharpe, 2000, p. 132).

Late capitalism has but one requirement: consumption. No longer an issue of productivity, capitalism depends on the “manufacturing of new needs and desire in ourselves. (Mellencamp in Mascia-Lees & Sharpe, 2000, p. 134).

Media is a site in which traditional gender constraints appear as a natural phenomenon. Women are more often seen in traditional feminine roles of care-giver, nurturer while intuitive and relationship-centered and men are portrayed as active, rational, and independent. The women of *Sex and the City* are “deviant” as single women, and, like the homosexuals in Brookey’s (1996) analysis in the media, they need to be portrayed in a way that enables the audience to accept their deviancy.

Unlike Brookey’s community of homosexuals, though, our heroines are not portrayed positively by aligning them with family morality; on the contrary family values don’t seem to be represented positively at all. What the show does is provide a diverse representation of privileged single women while at the same time keeping the women in incessant modes of consumerism. The show’s characters’ ability, both in time and in money, to consume at whim is remarkable.

Throughout the episodes, behind each situation and each relationship there is a backdrop of endless consumption. To underscore their purchasing power, the characters are unceasingly involved in eating, drinking, shopping and taking advantage of services such as yoga classes and manicures. Sean Nixon (1992, in Philips, 2000) describes the connection between women and consumption in her discussion of malls:

The very spectacle of consumption—the windows filled with goods, the lighting, the displays, the other shoppers, the places to meet—has . . . historically been signaled as a feminine domain, and associated with femininity. From the department stores at the turn of the century with their clientele of middle-class ladies, to the ‘consuming housewife’ of the 1950s advertising, the dominant imagined addressee of the languages of consumerism has been unmistakably feminine. Consumption, associated with the body, beautification and adornment in particular, has historically spoken to a feminine consumer, producing her as an ‘active’ consumer but also as a ‘spectacle’ herself—to be looked at, subject to a predominantly masculine gaze” (p. 240).

Brookey (1996) demonstrates in his analysis of the film *Philadelphia* and other media sources that a positive portrayal of homosexuals is necessary for acceptance by the dominant heterosexual audience. This is done in two ways. Homosexuals represented must be shown as having relationships typical to dominant heterosexual relationships, with characteristics such as engaging in committed relationships, creating a home, and having a family. Also, positive identification will come when

homosexuals represented have high purchasing power, which is vital for a capitalist power regime. The homosexual couples portrayed in *Philadelphia*, a television commercial, and a magazine article are accepted in our heterosexist society because they meet these criteria. This power regime, in Brookey's words, "support the assimilationist version of homosexuality" (p. 43).

Although the main characters in *Sex and the City* may sometimes deviate from the dominant sexual norms, they are still acceptable because of their high level of purchasing power. They are financially independent but don't seem to be bogged down with long hours at the office. There appears to be plenty of time and money to participate in the New York singles scene which includes an incredible amount of shopping, dating, bar hopping, attending cocktail parties, plays and gallery openings and eating at fine restaurants.

Obviously the dating scene includes drinking and dining out, but in *Sex and the City* shopping is also a very common activity of newly involved couples. In Episode Three (King, 1998a) Carrie helps her new boyfriend pick out a "top of the line cheese grater at William Sonoma." Later Charlotte is fixed up with the same man and they wind up shopping for china. Consumption is played out constantly throughout each episode as Carrie succumbs to her addiction for expensive shoes; conversations between Carrie and Samantha and Carrie and Charlotte take place during yoga classes; a conversation between Miranda and Carrie take place while they are getting manicures; and when Stanford is excited about a new boyfriend, he tells Carrie that they spent the day looking for art deco handles for cabinets.

Carrie's descriptions and how she relates experiences also fall into a mode of consumerism. For example in Episode One (Star, 1998a) Carrie is opening the first show of the season with her initial inquest: "Why are there so many great unmarried women in Manhattan and no great unmarried men?" Her description of these women is as follows: "They travel, they pay taxes. They'll spend \$400 on a pair of Manola Blahnick strappy sandals." In Episode Five, "The Power of Female Sex" (Star & Kohan, 1998) Carrie goes shopping to "unleash the creative mind" while in the same episode a strong argument is made that beauty equals power and power equals consumption. Female sexuality is turned into the power of beautiful people, which translates into the power to acquire things. To answer her question: "Exactly how powerful was beauty?" Carrie conducts interviews with male and female models. The overwhelming attitude is that, when you are beautiful, you can get anything you want.

Cassie Fields, Runway Model: Being beautiful is such a power. You can get whatever you want.

Xandrella, Super Model: You can get anything. I've been offered trips to Aspen, weekends in Paris, Christmas in St. Barts . . . a Bulgari necklace, a breast job.

Brad Fox, Catalogue Model: A motorcycle, juicer . . . some scuba gear, a Herb Ritt's photo.

Carrie also relates experiences in terms of purchases. For example, in Episode Seven (Star, 1998d) when she finds out Mr. Big is dating other women, she laments: "For me seeing another man would feel like trying to fit another outfit into an already over-stuffed suitcase." In episode Three (King, 1998a) she meets a "marrying guy"

who she isn't very attractive to, but decides to pursue the relationship anyway. She explains her reason this way: "He was like the flesh and blood equivalent of a DKNY dress. You know it's not your style, but its right there, so you try it on anyway."

As Brookey (1996) submits in his findings that adherence to family values by the homosexual community in media is just a "rhetorical cover for the real point of validation: an ability to achieve a high level of purchasing power" (p. 52) I submit that in the same light, the departure from traditional values, the sexual promiscuity of the characters, and the abundant scenes of sexual encounters is, as well, a rhetorical cover for the validation of the characters as high-level consumers. All are financially successful and white and therefore represent a group of people who, in addition to having discretionary funds also have the leisure time to spend them.

Conclusion

In communication literature, the media, through the strength of identification of audience with characterizations, has been shown as a popular form of discourse that influences many individuals as they come to understand and/or develop themselves. Because gender is a construct with which people principally identify, studying gender norms helps us to recognize how current power structures work within those norms. With an academic study of television, film, and popular magazines we can develop a theoretical perspective on how gender strengthens and perpetuates the power structures of the dominant ideology.

Michel Foucault has done an enormous amount of work in the historical progression of power in Western society, and his final works--unfinished--rest on issues of gender. He developed a theory of power and knowledge that states they are co-creators--power creates and is created by knowledge and vice versa. He further theorizes that power is about relationships and that relationships are governed by our attachment to our gender identities. Bio-power is a concept that Foucault coined to define the ways in which people become attached to their identities, and that through identification with gender the dominant ideology maintains its power. Discourse, he states, is the way in which dominant concepts of gender are identified and perpetuated. Because of his theories on modern power, gender, and bio-power Foucault can make a significant contribution to the reading of popular texts for the purpose of identifying what modern society deems as normal and how that gives rise to the creation and maintenance of power structures.

Reading modern texts through Foucault's theories can enable scholars to identify concepts such as gender and sexuality, how norms are defined, and how relationships based on gender and sexuality perpetuate status quo. *Sex and the City* is one such text.

According to today's gender norms explicated from my Literature Review, the heroines of *Sex and the City* offer a wide variety of feminine characterizations that can give the show a resistant, or at least progressive, appearance. Possibly liberating for women who don't fit into heretofore media definitions of women who are mothers, wives and caregivers, *Sex and the City* offers representations of single women who are not imbued with traditional feminine traits. The four main characters are selfish, financially independent, sexually adventurous, and enjoying the single life. The show depicts marriage and motherhood as somewhat harmful to women's independent natures while normalizing single life as exciting and rewarding. *Sex and the City* also can be seen as offering resistance to traditional female portrayals because it returns the typical male gaze most often used in media. It resists marginalization of women by offering a female gaze by using mockery and objectification of heterosexual men while it celebrates the depth and strength of women centered friendships.

Sex and the City uses power language and story lines that initially may appear to identify women as having a variety of choices as to their roles in society. Financial and sexual independence infuse the characters with attributes which identify some as having personal freedom that has never before been seen. However, I maintain that this freedom is only at the level of discourse.

The show doesn't stray far from the power regime of patriarchy as we take a closer look at the words and actions of the female heroines. Carrie, depicting the "normal" woman by her place as an authority, is romantic, focused on fashion, relationship-oriented, and looking to complete herself in a relationship with a man who is higher than her in financial status. Though the women are financially successful and independent, their work life is in the background, secondary to their social life, their constant primping to market themselves to men, and their adventures in heterosexual relationships. Save for a few examples, the relationships in the show represent typical gender relations whereby the men are older and more successful and the women are younger and less financially capable.

Although *Sex and the City* allows for deviancy with regard to single, sexually active and independent heterosexual women and gay men, it does not stray from the hierarchy of heterosexual normalcy and homosexual stereotypes. The women are all heterosexual; the gay men are underrepresented and stereotypical (i.e., Stanford Blatch) or living a heterosexual lifestyle (i.e., gay couple). True to studies of media's representations of lesbianism, lesbianism is reduced to near invisibility except when represented exclusively as genital relations between women. The breadth of the women's relationships among themselves is centered in their support for each other in their issues of beauty and dating. While the high level of sexual adventures of our heroines is a far cry from the typical media's representation of women, those adventures remain within safe sexual boundaries of heterosexuality and "normal" sex.

Aside from maintaining the power regimes of patriarchy and heterosexuality, *Sex and the City* can also be viewed as perpetuating capitalism and the mass

consumerism necessary to keep its existence. The characters in *Sex and the City* represent the postmodern version of freedom: the ability to create oneself by consumption. As O'Dougherty (2003) puts it, "Shopping, consumer goods, and the wider realm of consumption present themselves throughout the US media as the promise of personal liberation and democracy" (p. 69). Through depicting single life in New York as endless days and nights of shopping, exercise classes, manicures, dining out and cocktail parties, capitalism offers to those who have high purchasing power and beauty the ability to realize their true genderized natures through the purchase of goods and services.

The ability for Samantha, Miranda, Carrie, and Charlotte to play out a variety of behaviors and attitudes that in the past might have been unacceptable to the dominant audience may indeed be a step in the direction of freedom from gender constraints. However, even with the subversion of some patriarchal norms, the discourse still maintains the dominance of another power regime--capitalism. It is evident that "the subjectivities offered women in postmodern consumer culture may serve capitalism well even as they undermine some of the controlling dimensions of patriarchy" (Mascia-Lees & Sharpe, p. 135).

As Foucault claims, discourse exists within the current power-knowledge regime which is its source of power. Even as women attempt to find power in a patriarchal society, so-called resistant discourse often leads back to support of the status quo. As the show continues in the following seasons, I have found the characters to be further developed as stereotypical women looking to find themselves through their relationships with men and their abilities to attract and grasp a

heterosexual mate. I contend that the show's producers in fact work from audience reactions as they further develop characters and content. In this way, bio-power functions as citizens remain faithful to their attachments to gender, desiring sexuality discourses that perpetuate strict gender prescriptions. As the show moves on from the first season to the second, third and fourth seasons, even the female gaze that give the first season redeeming qualities with respect to progressive rhetoric is weakened. At the level of language the women become more complex in their relationships with each other; however, camera angles that span their bodies and an increase in sex scenes that are likened to soft pornography are geared for the male gaze. Indeed, as the show moves away from the first season there is a reported increase in male audience members.

The ways in which *Sex and the City* handles gender issues, coupled with how the show perpetuates consumerism, leads me to conclude that while *Sex and the City* does undermine some of the gender constraints when representing women of today, the ideals of patriarchy and consumerism remain strongly in tact.

Appendix A

Detailed Girl Talk, Episode 1

Samantha	Miranda	Charlotte	Carrie
If you're a successful saleswoman in this city, you have two choices; you can bang your head against the wall and try and find a relationship or say screw it and just go out and have sex...like a man		You mean with dildos?	
No, I mean without feelings.			
(extraneous conversation)	(extraneous conversation)	(extraneous conversation)	(extraneous conversation)
Sweetheart, this is the first time in the history of Manhattan that women have had as much money and power as men . . . plus the equal luxury of treating men like sex objects.	Yeah, but the men in this city fail on both accounts. They don't want to be in a relationship with you, but as soon as you just want them for sex, they don't like it. All of a sudden they can't perform the way they're supposed to.		
That's when you dump them.			Oh c'mon ladies, are we that cynical? What about romance?
Who needs it?	It's like that guy, Jeremiah, the poet? I mean, the sex was incredible! But then he wanted to read me his poetry, and go out to dinner, and the whole chat bit . . . and I'm like, let's not even go there!	What are you saying? Are you saying you're just going to give up on love? That's sick!	Oh no, no no. Believe me, the right guy comes along, and you two here . . . the whole thing, right out the window.
The right guy is an illusion, den't you understand that? You've got to start living your life!			

Appendix B

Detailed Girl Talk, Episode 4

Samantha	Miranda	Charlotte	Carrie
			Okay, words are essential. Tell me exactly how he worded it.
		"We've been seeing each other for a couple of weeks, I really like you, and tomorrow night after dinner, I want us to have anal sex."	
(extraneous conversation)	(extraneous conversation)	(extraneous conversation)	(extraneous conversation)
	It all depends, how much do you like him?	A lot	
	Dating a few months until someone better comes along a lot, or marrying and moving to East Hampton a lot.	I don't know, I'm not sure.	
	Well you better get sure real quick.	You're scaring me!	Don't scare her!
	It's all about control. If he goes up there, there's gonna be a shift in power. Either he'll have the upper hand or you will. Now, there's a certain camp that believes that whoever holds the dick holds the power. . . . the question is, if he goes up your butt, will he respect you more or respect you less - That's the issue.		
(extraneous conversation)	(extraneous conversation)	(extraneous conversation)	(extraneous conversation)
Front, back, who cares? A hole is a hole.	Can I quote you?		
Don't be so judgmental you could use a little back door.		I'm not a hole!	Honey, we know.
Look, all I'm saying that this is a physical expression that the body was designed to experience, and P.S., it's fabulous.		What are you talking about? I went to Smith!	
Look, I'm just saying, with the right guy, and the right lubricant...	(laughs)		(laughs)

Appendix C

Detailed Girl Talk, Episode 6

Samantha	Miranda	Charlotte	Carrie
		You're obviously going to have sex with him tonight.	C'mon, its our first date
	She's not going to have sex, she's just going to look like sex.		That's right, I'm just the trailer.
Please, if it happens, it happens.		Wait a second I though you were serious about this guy. You can't sleep with him on the first date.	
Oh God	Here she goes again with the rules.		
The women who wrote that book they wrote it because they couldn't get laid. So they constructed this whole bullshit theory so that women who can get laid feel bad		But if you're serious about a guy then you have to keep in a holding pattern for at least 5 dates	You've gone up.
		Yes, because the number of dates that you wait to have sex with a guy is directly proportional to your age.	
	Forget the math. Just don't fuck on the first date, you're fine.		Third date.
		Too soon!	
Reality check. A guy can just as easily dump you if you fuck him on the first date as he can if you waited 'til the 10 th .	When have you ever been on a 10 th date?	And by then at least you're emotionally involved.	
Isn't it best to find out if sex is good, right off the bat, before anyone's feelings get hurt?		But it's okay to have hurt feelings.	
	And you always handle those so well.		Well there is something to be said for restraint.
When did you become such a Victorian?		The Victorians were on to something. They valued romance.	
	True romance cannot exist without good sex.		
Yet you can have good sex with someone you don't like or respect, or even remember.			

Appendix D

Detailed Girl Talk, Episode 7

Samantha	Miranda	Charlotte	Carrie
		I think this might be it, I think this might be the one.	
We've met him, he's perfect.	Even his fucking dog is perfect.	But, there is one thing.	(Last night after Michael took Charlotte to the Philharmonic, they went back to his place and began the classic dating ritual - The blow job tug of war.
		Truth is, I hate doing it.	
Honey, you can't be serious!	Are you telling us you never perform this act?		She'll juggle, she'll spin plates, but she won't give head.
		I don't like putting it in my mouth! I have a very sensitive gag reflex, and it makes me want to puke.	
	That's one way to say no.	It's not like I haven't tried! I practiced on a banana, I pretended it was a popsicle, but, I just don't like it.	
	Personally, I'm loving it up to the point where the guy wants me to swallow.		Well, that's just a judgment call.
Some men take it so personally if you don't.	Some guys don't give you a choice.		Well, that's just bad behavior.
		Are you honestly telling me you like it?	Well, its not my favorite thing on the menu, but, you know, I'll order it from time to time, and with the right guy, it can be nice.
	Oral sex is like God's gift to women. You can get off without worrying about getting pregnant.		
Plus, the sense of power is such a turn on. Maybe you're on your knees, but you got him by the balls.		Know you see, that is the reason I don't want to go down this road.	Well, sweetheart, if you're going to get all choked up about it...just don't do it, don't do it.
	Well, if you don't go down on him how do you expect him to go down on you?	I don't.	
	Oh, well, forget it! I only give head to get head.		
Me, too.			

Appendix E

Detailed Girl Talk, Episode 8

Samantha	Miranda	Charlotte	Carrie
		Jack wants us to do a threesome.	
	Of course he does, every guy does.		
Threesomes are huge right now. They're the blow jobs of the nineties.		What was the blow job of the eighties?	
Anal sex.			Any sex, period.
	Don't let him pressure you into it. It's just this guy's cheap ploy to watch you be a lesbian for the night.		
Don't knock it 'til you've tried it.	I did a three-some once, I think. In college. I was drunk, I woke up in someone else's bra.		
The only way to do a threesome is to be the guest star.			The guest star?
Yeah! The girl the couple gets to come in, screw, and leave.			The pitch hitter.
Exactly. Its perfect. All the great sex without worrying about what its going to do to your relationship.		But you don't have relationships.	
Which is why I have great sex.			I've never done a threesome.
	Because you have relationships.	Well I've never done a threesome.	
Well, of course you haven't. You in a threesome? You won't even wear a thong!		Jack thinks I'm sexy.	
	He's just buttering you up. First you start thinking you're hot, then he brings up the threesome thing. . . boom! Suddenly you're kissing another woman while he beats off.	Please!	
Just make sure the other woman is a friend.			

Appendix F

“Person on the street” Interviews, Episode 3

Interview Question: Is there a secret cold war between marrieds and singles?

- Stanford: “It isn’t a cold war, it’s an out and out battle!”
- “I love my single friends, but now that I’m married, I don’t see them as much as I used to. It’s too painful. They remind me of how desperate I used to be.”
- “When women get married, they forget who they are. “I” becomes “we.”
- “My best buddy and I did everything together. But then he married this girl who doesn’t like me. Now I only see him on Super Bowl Sunday.”
- “It’s all about what you want out of life. Some people, like me, chose to grow up, face reality and get married. And others choose to, what, leave an empty haunted life of stunted adolescence.”

Appendix G

“Person on the street” Interviews, Episode 10

Interview Question: What was still buried deep inside the mummies downstairs?

- Woman holding a baby: “ Before I married my husband I slept around with everybody.” She sighs unhappily. “Now I have an internet lover...no one knows.”
- Older woman: When I was senior vice president, 212 people reported to me on a daily basis. Now I just yell at the gardener...who doesn't understand a single word.
- Young mother changing a baby's diaper: “I'm exactly the same. I love my life. But every now and then, I can't help but think of ... Lisa.”
- Woman swinging her son: “Sometimes I climb up into the kids' tree house, with my walkman, light up a joint, and listen to Peter Frampton.”

Appendix H

Awards (HBO's Sex and the City News and Awards)

2003

American Cinema Editors ACE Eddie Awards
BEST EDITED HALF HOUR SERIES FOR TELEVISION
Sex and the City: "Luck Be An Old Lady" - Wendy Stanzler, A.C.E.

American Women in Radio and Television (AWRT) Gracie Allen Award
National/Network/Syndication Award Winners
ENTERTAINMENT PROGRAM/COMEDY
Sex and the City

Emmy® Awards
OUTSTANDING CASTING FOR A COMEDY SERIES
Casting by Jennifer McNamara

Golden Globe® Awards
BEST PERFORMANCE BY AN ACTRESS IN A SUPPORTING ROLE IN A SERIES, MINI-SERIES OR
MOTION PICTURE MADE FOR TELEVISION
Kim Cattrall - Sex and the City

Makeup Artists and Hair Stylists Guild Awards
BEST CONTEMPORARY HAIRSTYLING FOR A TELEVISION SERIES
Sex and the City - Wayne Herndon, Donna Fischetto, Suzana Neziri

2002

ACE Eddie Awards
BEST EDITED HALF-HOUR SERIES FOR TELEVISION
Michael Berenbaum - Sex and the City: "The Real Me"

CINE Golden Eagle Film and Video Competition
CINE GOLDEN EAGLE AWARD
Sex and the City: "Easy Come, Easy Go"

Columbus International Film & Video Festival
HONORABLE MENTION
Sex and the City

Primetime Emmy® Awards
OUTSTANDING DIRECTING FOR A COMEDY SERIES
Sex and the City: The Real Me - Michael Patrick King
OUTSTANDING CASTING FOR A COMEDY SERIES
Sex and the City - Jennifer McNamara
OUTSTANDING COSTUMES FOR A SERIES
Sex and the City: Defining Moments - Patricia Field, Rebecca Weinberg

Golden Globes®
BEST TELEVISION SERIES - MUSICAL OR COMEDY
Sex and the City
BEST PERFORMANCE BY AN ACTRESS IN A TELEVISION SERIES - MUSICAL OR COMEDY
Sarah Jessica Parker - Sex and the City

Golden Satellite Awards
BEST TELEVISION SERIES, COMEDY OR MUSICAL
Sex and the City

Appendix H (Continued)

Awards (HBO's Sex and the City News and Awards)

Gracie Allen Award: American Women in Radio and Television
OUTSTANDING COMEDY PROGRAM
Sex and the City

Monte Carlo Television Festival
GOLDEN NYMPH AWARD - OUTSTANDING PRODUCER OF THE YEAR (COMEDY)
Sex and the City
OUTSTANDING ACTRESS OF THE YEAR
Sarah Jessica Parker - Sex and the City

New York Festivals
GOLD WORLDMEDAL - SITUATION COMEDY
Sex and the City: "Don't Ask, Don't Tell"

Producers Guild Golden Laurel Awards (PGA)
DANNY THOMAS PRODUCER OF THE YEAR AWARD IN EPISODIC TELEVISION (COMEDY)
Sex and the City: Michael Patrick King, Cindy Chupack, John P. Melfi & Sarah Jessica Parker

Screen Actors Guild Awards (SAG)
OUTSTANDING PERFORMANCE BY AN ENSEMBLE IN A COMEDY SERIES
SEX AND THE CITY
Kim Cattrall, Kristin Davis, Cynthia Nixon, Sarah Jessica Parker

SHINE Awards COMEDY EPISODE
Sex and the City - "Coulda, Woulda, Shoulda"

WIN Awards
TV COMEDY SERIES ACTRESS
Cynthia Nixon - Sex and the City: "My Motherboard, My Self"

2001

Gracie Allen Award: American Women in Radio and Television
GRACIE ALLEN AWARD
Sex and the City: "Attack of the 5'10" Woman"

Columbus International Film & Video Festival
HONORABLE MENTION
Sex and the City

Costume Designers Guild
EXCELLENCE IN COSTUME DESIGN CONTEMPORARY FOR TELEVISION
Patricia Field - Sex and the City

Primetime Emmy® Awards
OUTSTANDING COMEDY SERIES
Sex and the City

Entertainment Industries Council Prism Awards
PRISM AWARD FOR TELEVISION SERIES COMEDY STORYLINE
Sex and the City: "Quitting Smoking"
COMMENDATION
Sex and the City: "What Goes Around Comes Around"

Appendix H (Continued)

Awards (HBO's Sex and the City News and Awards)

Golden Globes®

BEST TELEVISION SERIES - MUSICAL OR COMEDY

Sex and the City

BEST PERFORMANCE BY AN ACTRESS IN A TELEVISION SERIES- MUSICAL OR COMEDY

Sarah Jessica Parker - Sex and the City

Golden Satellite Awards

BEST TELEVISION SERIES - COMEDY OR MUSICAL

Sex and the City

Makeup Artist & Hairstylist Guild Awards

BEST CONTEMPORARY MAKEUP - TELEVISION (for a single episode of a Regular Series, Sitcom, Drama or Daytime)

Judy Chin - Sex and the City: "Don't Ask, Don't Tell"

BEST CONTEMPORARY HAIR STYLING - TELEVISION (for a single episode of a Regular Series, Sitcom, Drama or Daytime)

Michelle Johnson - Sex and the City: "Don't Ask, Don't Tell"

National Council on Family Relations Media Awards

FIRST PLACE - STD/AID

Sex and the City: "Running with Scissors"

Producers Guild Golden Laurel Awards (PGA)

DANNY THOMAS PRODUCER OF THE YEAR AWARD - EPISODIC TV COMEDY

Sex and the City

Screen Actors Guild Awards (SAG)

OUTSTANDING PERFORMANCE BY AN ACTRESS IN A COMEDY SERIES

Sarah Jessica Parker - Sex and the City

TV Cares

RIBBON OF HOPE AWARD

Sex and The City

Women's Image Network WIN Femme Film Festival

WIN AWARD - TV SERIES ACTRESS

Cynthia Nixon - Sex and the City: "My Motherboard, My Self"

2000

Gracie Allen Awards: American Women in Radio and Television

GRACIE ALLEN AWARD

Sex and the City: "Twenty-Something Girls vs. Thirty-Something Women"

CINE Golden Eagle Awards

GOLDEN EAGLE AWARD

Sex and the City: "Ex and the City"

Columbus International Film & Video Festival

HONORABLE MENTION

Sex and the City

Golden Globe® Awards BEST TELEVISION SERIES - MUSICAL OR COMEDY

Sex and the City

BEST PERFORMANCE BY AN ACTRESS IN A TELEVISION SERIES - MUSICAL OR COMEDY

Sarah Jessica Parker - Sex and the City

Appendix H (Continued)

Awards (HBO's Sex and the City News and Awards)

Media Project SHINE Awards

SCENE STEALER

Sex and the City

1999

CINE Gold Eagle Film and Video Competition

CINE GOLDEN EAGLE AWARD

Sex and the City: "They Shoot Single People Don't They?"

Columbus International Film & Video Festival - Chris Awards

THE BRONZE PLAQUE

Sex and the City

New York Festivals - Television Programming and Promotion Competition

SILVER WORLD MEDAL: SITUATION COMEDY

Sex and the City: "They Shoot Single People, Don't They?"

Women In Film

LUCY AWARD

Sex and the City

WorldFest - Houston International Film Festival

GOLD AWARD IN THE TELEVISION & CABLE PRODUCTION - TV SERIES - Comedy Division

Sex and the City: "Secret Sex"

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