

Sex and the City in Contemporary Culture:
Unraveling the Enduring Allure and Lasting Legacy Through
Social Media Analysis

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Xoxo,
Julia

“I like my money right where I can see it. Hanging in my closet!”

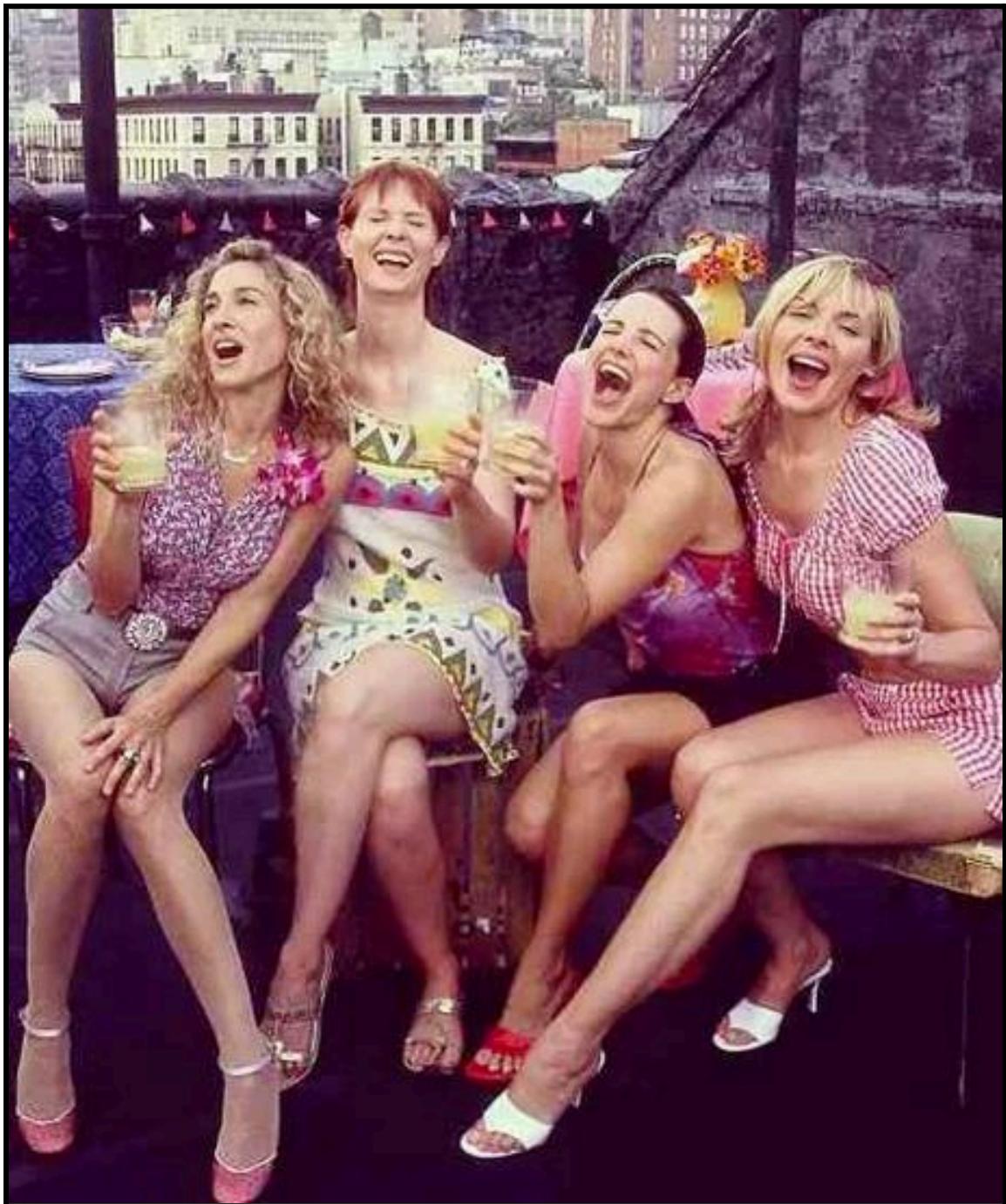
- Carrie Bradshaw, Sex and the City, (6:1)

Abstract

This thesis explores *Sex and the City* as a cultural phenomenon that has left a lasting impact on popular culture, particularly in its portrayal of urban life, fashion, identity, and female empowerment. Even with that enduring legacy, it begs the scholarly question: “Why study this now in 2024?” First airing on June 6, 1998, and set against the vibrant backdrop of New York City, the series introduces four female protagonists navigating the intricacies of friendship, careers, and the quest for love (and sex), all while expressing themselves through their distinctive sartorial choices. This study investigates the original six seasons, *Sex and the City* revival 2008 and 2010 feature films, as well as the reboot series *And Just Like That...* which first aired on December 9, 2021. The purpose of this thesis is to analyze their role in reigniting discussions about the series’ enduring impact on contemporary society, particularly regarding issues of gender, friendship, and female empowerment through social media and discourse analysis.

This inquiry assesses how *Sex and the City* has contributed to postfeminist narratives; reshaped notions of womanhood, autonomy, and style; and, challenged traditional gender roles. Exploring the role of social media, particularly TikTok, in preserving and expanding the show’s cultural footprint, as it provides a space where fans, fashion enthusiasts, and cultural commentators engage in ongoing discussions, pay homage, and reinterpret the show. This research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the show’s influence on contemporary culture, and also highlight its significance in shaping discussions about gender, style, and empowerment and see how audiences derive meaning from the series in today’s ever-evolving society.

Chapter 1:
Thesis Framework



The Leading Ladies¹

¹ Milazzo, Crissy. "What Summer In NYC Is Like, According To *Sex and the City*," *Refinery29*, May 28, 2015.

Introduction

Sex and the City originated as a series of columns authored by Candace Bushnell – first published in the New York Observer from 1994 to 1996 – which were later compiled into a book in 1996. The television series, created by Darren Star, was acquired by HBO in 1996, with executive producers including Michael Patrick King, John Melfi, Cindy Chupack, Jenny Bicks, and Sarah Jessica Parker. Premiering in June 1998 and concluding in February 2004 with 94 episodes broadcast over six seasons, the show followed the lives of Carrie Bradshaw, a sex columnist for the fictional *New York Star*, and her three friends: Samantha Jones, Miranda Hobbes, and Charlotte York. The series gained immense popularity, becoming the most-watched cable program, with more than 7.5 million viewers a week by its conclusion. It was nominated for nearly 100 Emmy, Golden Globe, Screen Actors Guild and Director's Guild of America awards, winning more than 20. The franchise expanded with two feature films, released in May 2008 and May 2010, extending the narrative of the characters, and a 2021 reboot titled *And Just Like That...* Beyond its, at the time, radical and candid discussions on sex, the series is renowned for its portrayal of the characters navigating the challenges and joys of Manhattan, especially Carrie, whose fashion journey became a central motif.

Leaving behind the well-trodden paths of conventional academic inquiry, my departure from traditional research on more scholarly, overtly serious or solemn topics marks a deliberate choice to delve into the vibrant and modern realm and societal importance of popular culture, specifically focusing on the iconic television series, *Sex and the City*. This choice stems from a deeply rooted interest in understanding the profound impact that cultural phenomena can have on shaping societal norms,

perceptions, and discussions surrounding sexuality. Pop culture undoubtedly serves as a mirror reflecting the values, beliefs, and sentiments of a society at a particular point in time. As a 20-something year old who was once a little girl in love with *Eloise at The Plaza* and rom-coms, I always dreamed of moving to Manhattan and living out my NYC fantasy. Throughout my first year of living in the city that never sleeps, the original series of *Sex and the City* was my bible and Carrie Bradshaw, my mentor. I chose this topic because of my profound love for the show, the characters, this city, the fashion, and the powerful female friendships and narratives. Although it is without a doubt a part of the allure, my fascination with *Sex and the City* goes beyond the glitz and glamour of Manhattan's elite, transcending the superficial pop culture charm. Within the series, we encounter four female protagonists embarking on a journey through the intricacies of friendship, careers, and the perennial quest for love, all while articulating their individuality through a nuanced language of sartorial choices. This thesis is an exploration of the show's role in shaping contemporary culture and discourse on feminism, relationships, gender dynamics, fashion, and identity. My interest lies not solely in the subject matter itself but, more significantly, in the ways people engage with and derive meaning from it.

From its unapologetic exploration of diverse sexual experiences to its portrayal of female friendships, the series has become a cultural touchstone for discussions around intimacy, empowerment, and the evolving roles of women in society. However, this exploration is not without its challenges. Firstly, critics have been quick to point out the show's portrayal of privilege, consumerism, and whiteness, highlighting the lack of diversity and the glamorization of materialism and capitalism. In the chapter on *Sex and*

The City in *The Essential HBO Reader*, Ron Simon writes that, “the four are very much cut from the same quality of fabric: white, upper-middle class, stable, with challenging jobs and values informed by post industrial capitalism” (Simon 2008: 197). This has led to important conversations about representation, inclusivity, and the responsibilities of media in shaping societal norms and values. Secondly, the very nature of discussing the series in the context of a popular television series requires a delicate balance between academic scrutiny and an appreciation for the cultural impact of the medium. As I navigate through this project, my purpose is to unravel the layers of meaning embedded in the show’s narrative, dissecting the ways in which it both reflects and influences societal attitudes. The aim is to assess how *Sex and the City* has not just mirrored but truly, distinctively, and actively shaped postfeminist narratives, redefined notions of womanhood, autonomy, and style, and boldly challenged the status quo of traditional gender roles. My gaze extends beyond the confines of traditional academia, casting a discerning eye on contemporary society, particularly the role of the popular social media platform TikTok. Here, in this social media space, fans, fashion enthusiasts, and cultural commentators engage in a ceaseless dance of dialogue, paying homage and offering reinterpretations that perpetuate the show’s enduring legacy on the cultural, societal, and sartorial stage. This thesis will examine the ways in which the series has contributed to the ongoing conversation about sex, relationships, fashion, and identity, transcending its status as mere entertainment to become a cultural force with a lasting impact. As I embark on this exploration, I pose three vital questions:

1. In what ways does the series reflect or respond to the changing dynamics of society in North America?

2. Why/how has the series influenced the fashion system for nearly three decades?
3. How has the digital realm, particularly social media, contributed to the dissemination and reinterpretation of the show's themes in the contemporary cultural landscape of North America?

Though I have personally viewed (numerous times), and will reference many of the 94 episodes of the original series, the two feature films, and the 21 episodes of the 2021 reboot, my primary sources extend beyond the episodic material itself. They encompass the reactions, discussions, and reinterpretations that have proliferated on the social platform TikTok. Through an interdisciplinary lens, this study seeks to explore the multifaceted layers that make *Sex and the City* a fascinating subject for scholarly inquiry almost three decades after its original airing.

In the following chapters, I will traverse the series, exploring the digital spaces where the discourse on the series unfolds. This research endeavors to illuminate the complex intersections of culture, identity, and sexuality as manifested in the phenomenon of *Sex and the City*. In essence, this research's purpose is not only to proffer a comprehensive understanding of the show's influence on contemporary culture, but to underscore its profound significance in sculpting the nuanced discussions about gender, style, and empowerment in our ever-evolving society.

Literature Review

The groundbreaking television series *Sex and the City*, created by Darren Star, has undeniably left an enduring mark on contemporary culture. The show's exploration of themes such as fashion, feminism, consumer culture, and media representation has made it a captivating subject for scholarly examination. As a cultural touchstone, the series has transcended its initial status as a television show to become a sociocultural phenomenon. This literature review seeks to distill the insights derived from an array of academic and critical sources that shed light on the impact of *Sex and the City* on the cultural landscape.

Fashion Studies has found a rich ground for exploration in dissecting the sartorial choices of the characters and their impact on contemporary fashion discourse. Additionally, the intersection of Women's Studies, Media Studies, Film Studies, Feminist Studies, Sexuality Studies, and Popular Culture Studies has provided a multifaceted lens through which researchers analyze the show's cultural relevance. The literature review aims to present a synthesized narrative that captures the breadth and depth of scholarly conversations around *Sex and the City*. By examining the diverse perspectives brought forth by scholars, this review intends to offer a comprehensive understanding of the series' cultural significance and its implications for broader discussions about feminism, media representation, and the evolving dynamics of contemporary society.

Locating *Sex and the City* in Academia

While the academic landscape has long been adorned with the presence of *Sex and the City*, few more recent contributions have further enriched the scholarly discourse. Notably, the work of Stella Bruzzi, Pamela Church Gibson, and Anna Konig in 2004 has laid foundational insights into the examination of the series. Furthermore, Kim Akass and

Janet McCabe have offered nuanced perspectives, deepening our understanding of the show's wide influence. The ever-evolving nature of academic inquiry has prompted a fresh exploration of *Sex and the City*, as well as the 2021 reboot *And Just Like That*, with researchers delving into its lasting impact on gender dynamics, fashion culture, and the broader socio-cultural realm. This thesis situates itself within this vibrant academic conversation, drawing on both established scholarship and the latest research to unravel the enduring significance of *Sex and the City* in contemporary academia.

Key Themes and Theorizing *Sex and the City*

Fashion, Identity, and Empowerment

A recurring theme in the literature surrounding *Sex and the City* is the intrinsic link between fashion, identity, and female empowerment. The show's four main characters – Carrie Bradshaw, Samantha Jones, Charlotte York, and Miranda Hobbes – each have distinct fashion personas that align with their individual personalities and aspirations. These characters and their sartorial choices are instrumental in conveying the message that fashion can be a vehicle for identifying and asserting one's identity, and embracing personal empowerment.

Akass and McCabe's work in *Reading Sex and the City* (2004) delves into the nuanced relationship between fashion, identity, and empowerment within the context of the show. They highlight how the characters' clothing choices are not merely superficial, but rather, they reflect the essence of their characters. Their analysis underscores the idea that fashion in *Sex and the City* is not about conforming to societal norms but rather about embracing one's unique identity and using fashion as a form of self-expression.

Additionally, Barry's exploration in *Fashioning Sex and the City: Spectacular Consumption and the 'New Woman'* (2006) provides further insights into how the characters in the show, particularly Carrie, engage in spectacular consumption, where fashion becomes an integral part of their daily lives. For these characters, fashion is not just about clothing; it's a means to convey their independence, confidence, and defiance of conventional gender roles. The characters' willingness to express themselves through their sartorial choices demonstrates a sense of autonomy, ultimately contributing to their empowerment.

These themes are central to the show and contribute significantly to its enduring influence on contemporary culture as it aided in resonating with audiences and finding a place in cultural discourse. Viewers are not merely spectators but active participants in the characters' fashion journeys, drawing inspiration and emulating the characters' sartorial choices in their styles. Grounded in the principles of active audience theory, the series has fostered an interactive and engaged audience who actively shape and contribute to its cultural impact. The show's portrayal of distinctive fashion choices, lifestyles, and narratives has prompted viewers to become not only spectators but active agents in interpreting and integrating these elements into their own lives. As fans immerse themselves in discussions, fashion challenges, and social media platforms dedicated to the show, they actively negotiate and reinterpret its themes, thereby solidifying their role as contributors to the broader cultural dialogue inspired by *Sex and the City*. Stuart Hall, a prominent cultural theorist, is often associated with the development of this theory. Hall's work in *Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse* (1973) emphasizes the active role of audiences in interpreting and making meaning from media texts. Hall

articulates that far from being a simple act of reception, the decoding of cultural messages is a highly complex, often contradictory process. The audience is not a passive recipient of meaning but an active participant in the construction of meaning. This interaction underscores the series' enduring influence and its ability to resonate with audiences as more than just a scripted narrative, but as a force that actively involves its viewers in shaping the world of contemporary culture.

In *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (2006) Henry Jenkins expanded on Hall's concepts, and further deepened the comprehension of audience engagement and interpretation in media culture, notably through his vision of participatory culture and exploration of convergence culture. Hall's emphasis on the active involvement of audiences in interpreting and deriving meaning from media texts aligns closely with Jenkins's notion of participatory culture, which underscores how audiences actively engage with and contribute to media content through various forms of participation like online discussions. Both scholars challenge the idea of passive audience reception and instead underscore the agency of audiences in shaping media meaning and culture. Furthermore, Hall's grasp of decoding as a many-sided and sometimes contradictory process resonates with Jenkins' study of convergence culture, where media audiences negotiate and reinterpret meanings in the context of digital media platforms and networks. Jenkins' work demonstrates how audiences actively partake in the creation and dissemination of media content, enriching the ongoing cultural conversation sparked by series like *Sex and the City*. Jenkins shows how audiences hold a pivotal role in molding the cultural significance and influence of media texts. Through their active interaction with media content, audiences not only interpret and absorb cultural messages

into their lives but also enrich the broader cultural discourse, reinforcing the lasting impact of series like *Sex and the City* as entities actively shaping contemporary culture. Through the lenses of Akass, Hall, Jenkins, McCabe, and Barry, the relationship between fashion, identity, and empowerment in *Sex and the City* is illuminated, underscoring the series' cultural significance and its role in reshaping the way we perceive fashion as a vehicle for self-expression and empowerment.

Feminism and Postfeminist Narratives

Since its original airing, the series has been a focal point for discussions on feminism and postfeminism in popular culture. Gill, Genz, McRobbie, and Jermyn explore how the show reflects changing gender roles and expectations, providing a nuanced portrayal of women navigating relationships, careers, and sexual liberation – encapsulating elements of third-wave feminism. The characters' quest for self-determination within the context of romantic and professional pursuits is examined, offering insights into the ever-evolving landscape of feminist discourse. Within this context, the research of authors like Genz and Gill offers valuable insights into the show's impact on these discussions.

In her work *Singled Out: Postfeminism's "New Woman" and the Dilemma of Having It All* (2010), Stephanie Genz explores the show's representation of the "New Woman." This term, frequently used to describe a generation of women navigating careers, friendships, and romantic lives in urban settings, is embodied and challenged by the characters in the show. Genz explores how the series both embodies and challenges postfeminist ideals by portraying assertive, sexually liberated women focused on their careers while navigating complex relationships, portraying the tension between

empowerment and the desire for love – often characterized as the dilemma of “having it all.”

Rosalind Gill’s research, as seen in *Media, Empowerment and the Sex and the City Consumer* (2007), further underscores this by examining the ways in which the show has intersected with postfeminist media culture. The show is not merely a reflection of shifting cultural norms but an active participant in the construction of contemporary perceptions of female empowerment. Through Gill’s lens, the show offered a space in which female desires could be explored, debated, and played out without recourse to traditional moralizing. Moreover, Gill’s examination of the show as a cultural phenomenon becomes even more pertinent in understanding the nuanced portrayal of women’s friendships within *Sex and the City*. The relationships among the main characters become a focal point for discussions on female solidarity and support. Gill observes that the depiction of women’s friendships is crucial to the show’s vision of an alternative to the nuclear family as the primary source of support and fulfillment for women.

Expanding on this, Angela McRobbie’s work in *Post-Feminism and Popular Culture* (2008) contributes a valuable perspective on how *Sex and the City* engages with postfeminist ideals. McRobbie’s, known for her work on consumer culture and media studies, examination of postfeminism as a complex cultural phenomenon provides a framework to understand the ways in which the show challenges and redefines traditional notions of femininity, autonomy, and empowerment. This adds an additional layer to our exploration, delving into the broader socio-cultural implications of *Sex and the City* in shaping and reflecting contemporary attitudes towards women and their various roles.

Genz, Gill, and McRobbie's collective research illuminates this theme by examining how the show challenges and redefines notions of empowerment, relationships, and the "New Woman" in a postfeminist context, making it a critical piece of the broader conversation about women's lives in the 21st century.

Consumption, Consumerism, and Media Culture

Sex and the City presents a world of conspicuous consumption and luxury goods, significantly impacting viewers' desires and behaviors. This section explores how the show has had a substantial impact on the world of consumerism and media, drawing insights from the research of authors like Janet M. Cramer, Elke Krasny, Barbara Maier, and Angela McRobbie. These authors delve into the show's association with consumerism, emphasizing the power of the show in shaping consumer preferences and lifestyle aspirations. The series serves as an exposé of materialism and its allure in contemporary society. Previous research has highlighted the influence of *Sex and the City* on consumer culture and media consumption. The show's depiction of glamorous lifestyles and high-end fashion has had a significant impact on consumer behavior, as audiences often seek to emulate the characters' lifestyles and fashion choices. Through an analysis of existing literature, we will examine the ways in which consumerism and media culture intersect with the show's enduring popularity, particularly in the context of social media.

Janet M. Cramer, in her work *Discourses of Sexual Morality in Sex and the City and Queer as Folk* (2007), provides a lens through which to analyze the show's influence on consumer culture. The characters in the series actively engaged in the world of fashion, luxury, dining, and entertainment, creating a narrative where consumption and

identity were intricately intertwined. It elevated shopping to a form of self-expression and framed consumption as a symbol of empowerment making a lasting impression on future generations.

Furthermore, McRobbie explores how women, particularly young women, have been significant contributors to the consumer culture of the 21st century in her 2008 work. McRobbie has explored how young women navigate the complexities of consumer culture, body image, and lifestyle choices in the digital age. Her work sheds light on the ways in which women actively participate in shaping their identities and desires through their consumption practices. Comparatively, social media platforms have become spaces for self-presentation and identity construction. Generation Z women, in particular, use social media to curate and project their desired image, often through fashion, beauty, and lifestyle choices. These online personas can be seen as an extension of the consumer identities they are constructing. McRobbie's work also underscores how young women are often targeted by media and advertising, promoting an often unattainable aspirational lifestyle. This ambitious lifestyle is often characterized by conspicuous materialism and consumerism, and it can be projected and reinforced through social media. Generation Z women may engage in a form of "lifestyle branding" by showcasing their consumer choices and purchases on social platforms.

In essence, McRobbie's research provides a valuable framework for understanding how *Sex and the City* has influenced discussions and practices related to consumerism, fashion, empowerment, and identity, particularly in the context of women's engagement with these themes on social media. The show's portrayal of aspirational lifestyles, empowerment through consumer choices, and defiance of norms continues to

resonate with contemporary audiences and is often reflected in their digital personas and consumer practices.

Social Media and Digital Engagement

Social media platforms have become integral to contemporary culture and have played a transformative role in shaping the way audiences engage with media content. By examining previous studies on social media and digital engagement, we will explore how *Sex and the City* has leveraged these platforms to sustain its relevance and extend its cultural impact. In the contemporary digital age, the cultural resonance of *Sex and the City* extends far beyond its original television run, with social media platforms emerging as vital mediums for both preserving and expanding the show's enduring legacy. Stuart Elliott's insightful analysis, presented in *Sex and the City and Its Lasting Female Appeal* (2008), highlights the series' remarkable ability to maintain its appeal to female audiences over time. An essential aspect of this longevity lies in its second life on social media platforms, where fans actively discuss, celebrate, and reimagine its enduring themes, characters, and iconic fashion. What's interesting in regards to the series and social media users is how Gen Z is interested in and nostalgic for a time of fashion and consumer practices that they weren't even alive for.

Building on this, Louise Crewe and Amber Martin, in their work *Sex and the City: Branding, Gender, and the Commodification of Sex Consumption in Contemporary Retailing* (2017), provide an additional layer to our understanding of the show's impact on social media and consumer culture. The authors delve into how the series' portrayal of consumption, particularly in the context of fashion and lifestyle choices, has left a lasting

imprint on contemporary retailing and branding. This influence extends beyond the screen, permeating into the fabric of consumer behavior and preferences.

Moreover, in the digital age, fans of *Sex and the City* have become active participants in the ongoing celebration and reinterpretation of the show's legacy through platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Pinterest. The engagement on these platforms goes beyond mere discussion; fans create content inspired by the characters' styles, participate in fashion challenges, and initiate conversations about the show's broader cultural significance. These digital spaces have evolved into hubs where the themes of the series, particularly those related to fashion, are explored and celebrated by a new generation of viewers.

A notable addition to this discourse comes from Trevor Boffone, whose work in the field of media studies, particularly focusing on the intersection of popular culture and social media, provides valuable insights into the continued impact of *Sex and the City* in the digital realm. Boffone's exploration of how fans use platforms like Twitter and TikTok to engage with and reshape the show's narrative in contemporary contexts offers a contemporary perspective on the dynamic relationship between television, social media, and audience agency. By examining the participatory culture cultivated by fans on these platforms, Boffone enriches our understanding of how *Sex and the City* remains a living, breathing cultural phenomenon, continually shaped and reshaped by the digital engagement of its audience.

Methodology

To investigate the questions I have set out to answer, I methodologically conduct a social media platform and discourse analysis. The purpose of doing so is to understand why the series has remained at the forefront of contemporary culture almost three decades years after its airing. The literature review serves as a foundational guide, extracting essential characteristics and values from the series that have contributed to its sustained relevance. Subsequently, the social media and discourse analysis, central to the third chapter, hopes to unravel the contemporary impact of the show, with a particular focus on TikTok as the chosen platform. TikTok is a widely embraced and culturally relevant social media platform as it has 1.2 billion monthly active users. This platform was selected for its unique features that facilitate a nuanced exploration of the show's cultural footprint. The platform's versatility in accommodating static images, short-form videos, a plethora of user-generated content and online fan discourse aligns seamlessly with the visual nature of *Sex and the City*. TikTokers actively participate in the ongoing dialogue surrounding the series by recreating iconic outfits, reenacting memorable scenes, reimagining it under a contemporary lens, analyzing pivotal moments, and sharing quotes and clips supporting the lasting legacy. This active engagement not only sustains the show's cultural significance but also breathes new life into its core values. These values include independence, empowerment, the importance of strong and complex female characters, self-expression, individuality, and open and honest communication about topics such as relationships, sex, and personal struggles, urging viewers to confront taboos and embrace authenticity in their interactions.

Over a two month period – from January 7, 2024 to March 9, 2024 – I conducted social media research by being present on TikTok in the *Sex and the City* community. On TikTok, I focused on researching popular hashtags, all boasting millions or even billions of views, to demonstrate the vibrant discourse shaped by TikTok's diverse user base. I selected the following hashtags to look into: #SexandTheCity (820M views)², #CarrieBradshaw (1.5B views), #CarrieBradshawoutfits (4.4M views), #SexandTheCityReboot (16M views), #SexandTheCityFashion (220K views), and #AndJustLikeThat (1.1B views). These hashtags serve as entry points into the diverse discussions, interpretations, and reinterpretations of the show's legacy. Additionally, I researched and analyzed certain accounts dedicated to the series, and trending audios that have surfaced from the show. The accounts I followed and analyzed were @AndJustLikeMatt (20K followers), @SATCclips (8K followers), @DawnannaWilliamson (16K followers), and Caroline Vazzana @CVazzana (566K followers). I chose these accounts for the wide variety of content they post, the clear influence the show has had on the users behind the accounts, and for the lively discussions that take place in the comment sections on each video. Each of these accounts focuses on a different aspect of the show, which causes a difference in discourse. In order to gain a holistic view of the current and relevant discussions taking place regarding the series, its films, and the reboot, it was important to select different kinds of accounts, all popular for a unique trait. The chosen methodology ensured a lively and thorough exploration of how TikTok, as a digital space, plays a pivotal role in preserving,

² All numerical figures in this section were pulled on January 21, 2024. They may have increased or decreased since then.

reimagining, and disseminating the cultural significance of *Sex and the City* in the contemporary media environment.

By employing a comprehensive approach that integrates an in-depth literature review and a thorough social media and discourse analysis on TikTok, this research has effectively shed light on the enduring and profound cultural impact of *Sex and the City*. Delving into the diverse array of discussions, fan interactions, and innovative reinterpretations present on the chosen platform, it becomes increasingly apparent that the series maintains a strong resonance with audiences spanning multiple generations. The ever-evolving landscape of social media not only sustains the relevance of the show but also fosters opportunities for the creative reimagining and preservation of its fundamental principles within the modern-day media sphere. This scholarly investigation convincingly emphasizes the pivotal role of digital platforms in molding and perpetuating meaningful cultural dialogues surrounding iconic television productions such as *Sex and the City*.

Conclusion

As *Sex and the City* continues to stand as a formidable cultural force, its far-reaching influence on popular culture and societal narratives remains distinctly palpable, solidifying its place as a profoundly influential piece of media that continues to captivate, inspire, and deeply resonate with its audience. This enduring impact is evident in the myriad ways the show's characters, narratives, and themes have permeated popular discourse, sparking conversations, reflections, and reimaginings that further cement its significance in the cultural landscape. The show's ability to evolve beyond its original medium and adapt to the digital age underscores its adaptability and enduring relevance in a rapidly changing media environment. Furthermore, the nuanced exploration of how

Sex and the City navigates complex social issues, challenges traditional norms, and champions individuality within a dynamic urban setting has positioned it as a beacon of progressive storytelling and cultural reflection. Through its portrayal of diverse characters, intricate storylines, and bold fashion choices, the series has become a touchstone for discussions on gender, relationships, and personal empowerment, resonating with audiences of varying backgrounds and generations. The show's resonance lies not only in its entertainment value but in its profound ability to provoke thought, inspire change, and spark critical conversations that delve into the intricacies of contemporary society.

By immersing into the intricate themes of fashion, feminism, consumer culture, and digital engagement, this research has effectively underscored how the show not only shapes but actively influences contemporary dialogues surrounding identity, empowerment, and societal norms. The dynamic and vibrant engagement of audiences on the chosen social media platforms serves as a testimonial to the show's remarkable capacity to transcend its original broadcast, captivating new generations and fostering dialogues that not only celebrate but also reinterpret its rich legacy.

Chapter 2:
Reimagining Media, Feminism, and Fashion:
The Lasting Legacy of *Sex and the City*



The Tutu Seen 'Round the World³

³ Vogue UK. "The Hidden History Of Carrie's Sex and the City Tutu." *Vogue UK*, February 21, 2023.

Introduction

As the allure of *Sex and the City* persists, captivating audiences more than a quarter-century since its initial debut, the show's enduring legacy transcends its narrative charm. Beyond the riveting tales of love, friendship, and cosmopolitan adventures, the series has left an indelible mark on the realms of fashion, identity, and empowerment. In this chapter, we embark on an immersive journey through the intricate tapestry of *Sex and the City*'s fashion world, diving into its pivotal role in reshaping and redefining conversations surrounding feminism and postfeminism in North America; though it did have a broader influence.

Sex and the City, from its inception, emerged as more than a television show; it became an immensely popular and pervasive cultural touchstone that resonated deeply and virally (ironically, well before social media's existence) with viewers across the globe. The characters' sartorial choices were meticulously curated by the visionary costumer designer Patricia Field, who famously dressed the series and its two spin-off movies, but notably didn't return for the reboot. These choices transcended mere clothing, instead becoming visual narratives, shaping and reflecting the evolution of the characters' identities. Through a nuanced exploration of the show's fashion language, this chapter unravels the complex interplay between the fashion, the city, and the societal narratives. In doing so, I investigated how the characters' wardrobes served as both mirrors and architects of cultural attitudes towards femininity, empowerment, and the shifting paradigms of feminism. The purpose of unearthing the layers of meaning embedded in the fabrics, accessories, and stylistic choices that adorned the characters of Carrie, Miranda, Charlotte, and Samantha is to contribute to a richer understanding of

how the show's fashion choices have functioned as both a reflection and an instigator of cultural conversations. And, in turn, making *Sex and the City* a repository of insights into the relations between fashion, identity, and the ongoing dialogue surrounding feminism and postfeminism.

“It’s Not TV, It’s HBO”: A New Tone with Uncensored Dialogue and Dynamic Female Friendships

HBO, or Home Box Office, played a crucial role in the production and success of *Sex and the City* as it allowed for the creation of taboo content, uncensored dialogue and sexually-charged focus on female friendships that resonated with – and at that time sometimes shocked – its audience during the time of original airing and, again through a resurgence of streaming platforms. Its ability to produce and distribute content that pushes boundaries helped to sustain the show's popularity and cultural impact, as it was ahead of its time during its original release. HBO's tagline “It's not TV, It's HBO,” from 1996 to 2009, created by Richard Ellenson, highlighted the network's marketing strategy to distinguish its programming, particularly original content, from traditional TV (Weeks 2022: 1).

HBO had a transformative impact on television during the first decade of the digital era which influenced the careful selection of storyline, production, and character development in the show (Edgerton 2008: 8). Avi Santo writes about the culture and design of HBO in his article, “Para-television and discourses of distinction: The culture of production at HBO.” Santo explains that HBO's strategy is to provide subscribers with something that cannot be found on free TV networks or basic cable, and that is perceived as superior to these alternatives by providing more seemingly realistic shows. During its

early years, HBO relied heavily on promoting quality and exclusivity as central to the subscription experience, which proved to be remarkably successful as its subscription rate skyrocketed. They also were counter programming at the time, which meant their shows aired during the summer, while other networks were on in the fall. Other HBO shows from the late '90s and early 2000s helped set it apart as the superior television network. Series such as *The Sopranos* (1998-2007), *The Wire* (2002-2008), *Oz* (1997-2003), *Six Feet Under* (2001-2005), and *Entourage* (2004-2011) exemplify HBO's strategy by offering innovative storytelling, complex characters, and provocative themes that pushed the boundaries of television in ways that hadn't been done before. These shows not only attracted critical acclaim but also garnered a dedicated fan base, solidifying HBO's reputation as a premium destination for high-quality, cutting-edge programming. By consistently delivering content that was both artistically ambitious and commercially successful, HBO differentiated itself from traditional networks and cemented its status as a leader in the television industry. According to scholar, Tony Kelso's *And Now No Word From Our Sponsor: How HBO puts the risk back into television*, HBO established:

A larger production budgets than its commercial counterparts...because it depends on subscribers rather than ratings... yet overall, in spite of its economic constraints, when placed side-by-side with the commercial networks, HBO's structure and philosophy seem to promote an environment in which creative individuals can collectively express their talent and inventiveness can flourish. (Kelso 2008: 52,53)

Sex and the City played a vital role in this branding strategy, showcasing the qualities of a great television series and redefining portrayals of women and sex on screen. HBO, in its own right, was a cultural phenomenon.

In her book *Sex and the City: Kiss and Tell* (2004), Amy Sohn describes the pilot episode of *Sex and the City* as a female point of view comedy about sex, and explains that

this arena has thus far remained untouched on TV. Amy Sohn claims, “When *Sex and the City* premiered in June 1998, audiences knew they were witnessing television history...[The show’s] deconstruction of sexual and social conventions, mixed with a healthy dose of screwball comedy, seduced us from the beginning” (Sohn 2004: 26). Additionally, Sohn writes that the show’s creator, Darren Star, initially approached ABC with his concept but felt that the network could not fully realize his vision. Star wanted to create an adult comedy that handled sex in an upfront and honest way, departing from the polite and adolescent approach of traditional sitcoms. Star approached HBO in 1996 with the idea, and “they embraced the concept immediately and gave him a deal to write and produce a pilot” (Sohn 2004: 14). Thus, as television and media scholars Bambi Haggins and Amanda D. Lotz confirm in their article, “At Home on the Cutting Edge,” “the breakout success of *Sex and the City* marks an important transition for HBO comedies and audience’s expectations of them” (Haggins and Lotz 2008: 164). While the show provided character-driven comedy and challenged broadcast, or traditional, standards in its depiction of dating lives and discussions, it diverged from conventional norms in many other aspects. It evolved into a “girls’ show,” striking a delicate balance between exploring dramatic struggles and maintaining a comedic edge. The series defined a generation and invented the idea that a show about women could be just a risqué as anything else on television.

Academics Janet McCabe and Kim Akass argue in *Reading Sex and the City* that HBO broke new ground in its portrayal of gender and sexuality in their 2008 article, “What Has HBO Ever Done for Women?” They suggest that feminism is being redefined by a generation that has a different perspective on feminist politics, sexuality, and

lifestyle choices. Sarah Jessica Parker noted how feminism informed both the actors and their roles: “These characters, and the actresses playing them, reap enormous benefits from the women’s movement. The characters have sexual freedom, opportunity, and the ability to be successful” (Parker qtd in Sohn 2004: 24). HBO shows continue to tackle these concerns and themes, addressing the struggles faced by those reconciling with feminist values in a time of supposedly unlimited opportunities prompting typical questioning of women’s lifestyle choices. McCabe and Akass note that media commentators had mixed opinions about the characters in *Sex and the City*. The foursome faced criticism for being either too feminist or not feminist enough, praised for their intelligence, independence, and sassiness, yet condemned for their traditional pursuit of finding Mr. Right. They were also accused of appropriating feminist language while complaining about men and simultaneously applauded for candid conversations about sex while being labeled as promiscuous.

HBO Max, the streaming service, launched on May 27, 2020, which oddly enough is the same release date of both *Sex and the City* movies in 2008 and 2010. The streaming service must be credited for supporting the relevance of *Sex and the City* and other HBO shows. With the rise of streaming platforms, the accessibility and reach of these vintage shows have expanded exponentially, allowing not only existing fans but also new generations to engage with the groundbreaking and influential content. HBO Max, which combined with Discovery plus in May 2023 to become what is now just called Max, continues to serve as a powerful platform for boundary-pushing storytelling, offering a diverse range of narratives that challenge societal norms and push creative boundaries. Its role in the evolving landscape of television and streaming services cannot

be overstated, as it has become a significant player that sets the standard for quality and innovative programming. Though following in the footsteps of other streaming giants like Netflix, Hulu, and Disney+, the HBO content specific platform provides a home for its' iconic shows, and now being where HBO's new shows are released, Max has cemented its position as a leader in the streaming industry. More recent shows like *Game of Thrones* (2011-2019), *Curb Your Enthusiasm* (2000-2024), *Girls* (2012-2017), *Veep* (2012-2019), *Barry* (2018-2023), and *Succession* (2018-2023) have followed HBO's original blueprint, upheld its legacy, and significantly impacted society, popular culture, and public discourse.

All in all, the enduring and impactful legacy of *Sex and the City* as a cultural touchstone has not only reshaped but revolutionized conversations surrounding feminism and female empowerment. Through its groundbreaking and trailblazing storytelling, intricately woven with complex characters and a pioneering portrayal of female friendships, the series not only transcended traditional norms but also set unprecedented benchmarks in the realm of television. By deliberately steering clear of a rigid feminist agenda and instead embracing the celebration of individuality, HBO's approach to *Sex and the City* has fostered an enduring and impactful discourse that has resonated with audiences over the course of the past quarter of a century. Through its daring and provocative content, HBO distinguished itself in the television landscape. *Sex and the City*, with its groundbreaking portrayal of women and sexuality, played a vital part in executing this strategy, as well as the network's many other popular shows. Through its exploration of the complexities of womanhood, the show has sparked conversations about gender roles, relationships, sexuality, and personal empowerment, contributing to a

broader understanding and application of feminism and its relevance in contemporary society. Furthermore, HBO's pivotal role in championing and nurturing such groundbreaking content, coupled with the transformative rise of streaming platforms such as HBO Max, has significantly magnified and perpetuated the show's profound influence across diverse generations. There is another aspect of the show that helped make it as popular and influential as it is, and it isn't just the riskiness of the content or the likable characters... It's the *fashion*.

The Fashion Language of *Sex and the City*

Beyond HBO's influence and guidance to success, the fashion in *Sex and the City* was consequential to the show's popularity and long-lasting relevance. The costume transcends its role as mere clothing, assuming the status of a character in its own right. It embodies its own unique personality, influencing the plotlines, character development, and societal narratives within the series. The show's unique fashion language spoke volumes about the characters' personalities, relationships, and the vibrant city they inhabited. New York City, of course, also has a hugely powerful influence on the fashion in the series, and has been called the fifth character, as well; just like the fashion. From Carrie Bradshaw's daring outfits to Samantha Jones' power suits, each character had their own archetypal, distinct style that spoke to their individuality. The fashion choices in the show were not just about trends; they were a form of self-expression and a way to tell a visual story. In the chapter on *Sex and The City* in *The Essential HBO Reader*, Ron Simon writes:

Luxury items by designers such as Jimmy Choo, Fendi, Manolo Blahnik, and Bulgari, sprinkled in every episode, became not only objects of desire for upscale HBO viewers, but also linchpins for the railings against the show's supposed endorsement of conspicuous consumption. But few characters in the history of

television have been defined as sartorially as Carrie, whose psyche was on display each week via her dresses, shoes, and accessories. If Carrie is lucid and articulate in her voice-overs, her wacky clash of designer couture and vintage chic betray an often-divided self. (Simon 2008: 202)

Whether it was a statement-making dress or a carefully curated accessory, fashion became a powerful and symbolic tool for character development and storytelling in the world of *Sex and the City*.

In Editor-in-Chief Valerie Steele's *The Encyclopedia of Clothing and Fashion* (2010), fashion is intricately defined as the cultural construction of embodied identity, encompassing various forms of self-fashioning. The Encyclopedia emphasizes that any discourse on fashion invariably involves considerations of modernity and mythology. Three prevailing fashion myths are identified: the distinction between high fashion and everyday attire, the notion that men don't engage in fashion, and the belief that changes in fashion are attributed to societal shifts or the financial motivations of designers and manufacturers (Steele 2010: 13). However, in the world of *Sex and the City*, fashion assumes a central role, not merely as a backdrop but as an influential force shaping plotlines, character arcs, and societal narratives within the cinematic landscape. The idea that fashion is the fifth (and arguably most important) character in the series was coined by Sarah Jessica Parker. Parker, who has become a fashion icon in her own right, will be forever intrinsically linked to her character, Carrie Bradshaw. This suggestion has been deeply studied and argued by Stella Bruzzi and Pamela Church Gibson in their article, "Fashion is the Fifth Character: Fashion, Costume, and Character in *Sex and the City*" (2004).

Academics Cara Louise Buckley and Brian L. Ott also agree that the fashion plays a significant role in the series's popularity with audiences in their 2008 article, "Fashion (able/ing) selves: Consumption, Identity, and *Sex and the City*," arguing:

The bond that Carrie shares with fashion on the show and her own assertion of identity through the consumption of fashion gives *Sex and the City* moments of uniquely resistive character that rupture the show's place, nestled firmly in the dominant culture and dominate ideologies of gender, class, race, and sexuality. In watching Carrie literally fashion her identity, viewers are taught how to (re) fashion theirs. They are shown how to use fashion to create their own sense of personal style... [Furthermore] she provides actual symbolic resources in the form of styles and fashions that viewers can (re)appropriate and put their own personal stamp or spin on. (Buckley and Ott 2008: 224)

Despite being a fictional character, Carrie Bradshaw has made a lasting impact since her creation in 1998 brought to life by actress Sarah Jessica Parker and styled by Patricia Field. Though the clothes are fantastical and almost at times seem unrealistic for any person to have in their own wardrobe, Patricia Field declares, "I'm here to entertain. The show is not a documentary. Its success is that it elevates itself a bit above reality" (Field qtd in Sohn 2004: 67). Sarah Jessica Parker also recognizes the significance of the fashion, "I knew the clothes were important because I knew women in the city looked a certain way. They don't look like women in other cities, and that doesn't mean they all look like each other...the clothes are fun, exciting, and intentionally provocative, and they tell a story" (Parker qtd in Sohn 2004: 67,70).

To punctuate the overwhelming influence and importance of fashion in *Sex in the City*, it's beyond fascinating how a seemingly simple and inexpensive piece of clothing, like the tutu Sarah Jessica Parker wore in the opening sequence of the show became such an iconic and valuable item over time. The fact that Patricia Field discovered it in a Manhattan bargain bin and it eventually sold for \$52,000 in a 2024 fashion auction

speaks to the enduring influence of the show, its influence on the fashion industry, and its impact on popular culture.

Fashion as Identity Expression and Empowerment

Drawing upon the principles of film theory, this analysis examines the series' visual storytelling, dissecting the curation of clothing to reveal a language that speaks volumes about the characters. Utilizing Judith Butler's concept of performativity theory, the characters use their fashion choices and objects as a means of performing and expressing their unique identities (their personality archetypes) and female empowerment. Analyzing iconic fashion moments in the series, we gain insight into the agency and autonomy exhibited by the characters through their stylistic choices. Additionally, the symbolic power of accessories becomes evident, as they serve as potent symbols of individuality and character traits.

The fashion choices of the characters in *Sex and the City* play a pivotal role in their individual development and story arcs. Each character's style reflects their personality, values, and personal journey. While the show is primarily a work of fiction and entertainment, it is interesting to relate the women to Carl Jung's archetypes. Jung founded analytical psychology and wrote extensively about archetypes in his book *The Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious* (1969). In his work, he identified several archetypes that he believed were innate to the human psyche and shared across cultures. A large portion of the discourse surrounding the series includes relating to and identifying yourself as one of the four archetypes. The question has hung over many women's heads for the last 25 years: Are you a Carrie, Charlotte, Samantha, or Miranda?

Despite the seemingly light-heartedness of this question based on a work of fiction, this question subtextually implies that all women must fit into a certain box or archetype.

Carrie Bradshaw's fashion evolution, for example, mirrors her growth as a writer and as a person. In the early seasons, Carrie's style is eclectic and experimental, mirroring her free-spirited and adventurous nature. In Jung's archetypal terms, Carrie would be the Heroine, often representing a character on a quest for self-discovery and growth. As the main character, she embarks on a journey of self-exploration, both personally and professionally. Her columns serve as a narrative thread reflecting her internal struggles and triumphs. She seeks togetherness and security, passion and fun, sensuality and pleasure. The optime of Carrie's Heroine style is shown in the opening sequence of every episode – her pale pink tank top unaccompanied by a bra, paired with a tiered tutu, strappy heeled sandals, and her huge curls on full display. This outfit set the tone for her fashioning throughout the series, though Patricia Field openly and proudly admitted she sourced the, now iconic, \$5 tutu (the \$52,000 auction tutu) from a showroom bin. As the series progresses, Carrie's fashion choices become more refined and sophisticated, reflecting her increasing success and confidence, as she pairs more high-end luxury pieces with her statement quirky vintage-seeming items. Stella Bruzzi and Pamela Church Gibson have said, her clothes are more so worn to express complete independence and self-expression, not to conform to manipulation by the garment industry: "Carrie's behavior and clothes are not circumscribed by either social or professional constraints; fashion for her is a means of personal expression" (Bruzzi and Gibson 2004: 117). The visual transformation of her character through fashion serves as a

visual representation of her journey towards self-discovery and empowerment, but her classic, unexpected high and low pairings never falter.

Acting as the opposite to Carrie's style is Charlotte York, characterized as the optimistic, ever-hopeful American girl in timeless, preppy fashions. Though not an archetype in Jungian psychology, Charlotte could be referred to as the American WASP, epitomizing everything that falls under that title. However, within Jung's archetypes, Charlotte personifies the Mother archetype as she embodies maternal caregiving qualities. Charlotte, with her desire to nurture, and her constant pursuit of marriage and motherhood, aligns with the Mother archetype's themes of stability and supportiveness. Charlotte's struggle to become a mother, the identity she yearns for most, displays an issue many women face making her even more relatable for many women in the audience. Her predictable fashion classic-ness matches the Mother archetype and significantly contrasts with Carrie's whimsical, out-of-the-box choices. Charlotte's fashion idols include Elizabeth Taylor, Jackie Kennedy, and Grace Kelly, which is reflected in her conservative fashion choices and objects. The waspy, uptown girl was constantly seen on screen wearing items like Ralph Lauren sweaters, Burberry coats, Dior skirts, and Chanel tweed, often accompanied by a simple single string of pearls adorned around her neck. Charlotte York's frequent choice of pearls in *Sex and the City* symbolizes tradition and refinement. Her pearls, highly symbolic of her Mother archetype, become a recurring motif that reflects Charlotte's adherence to societal norms and her pursuit of an idealized traditional family life.

On the other hand, Samantha Jones's bold and fearless approach to life is mirrored in her fashion choices. Her wardrobe is filled with statement pieces, vibrant colors, and

daring silhouettes serving as a visual representation of her empowered and unapologetic personality. Her ability to embrace her sexuality and challenge societal norms is reflected in her bold and confident style. Samantha is the quintessential Seductress archetype. She is confident, sexually liberated, and embraces her desires without conforming to societal norms. The Seductress archetype is characterized by a celebration of sensuality and a rejection of constraints, aligning with Samantha's bold and unapologetic (some say primal) approach to connect both in sex and in her fashion choices.

In the eighteenth and final episode of season two, "Ex and the City,"⁴ Samantha is shown strutting down the streets of Manhattan during a shopping trip. She is wearing a purposefully sexy, low cut, spaghetti strap, cherry-red dress with a monochromatic matching lip and heel, paired with a cheetah print Fendi Baguette purse. Self-assured, she makes eye contact with a man, referred to as the stallion, whose attention is caught by her cockiness, and fashion choices. The stallion, later referred to as Mr. Too Big because of his extremely large penis size, asks her out on the spot, in front of the Prada shop window. Though Samantha is about 10 years older than Carrie, making her the oldest character of the four, her youthful sartorial choices and openness of her sexuality is reflected in her costume. Furthermore, in the second film, Samantha is looking for a red-carpet dress for her ex-boyfriend's movie premiere. She berates the sales associate for commenting that a strapless, metallic, mini dress might be a little too young for her, and winds up buying it and wearing it. Once on the red carpet, she gets photographed twinning with the, then, teenager Miley Cyrus. Despite this fashion faux pas, Samantha's confidence and poise never waver. Throughout the franchise, Samantha's age was a

⁴ *Sex and the City*, Season 2, Episode 18, "Ex and the City," directed by Michael Patrick King. Aired October 3, 1998, in broadcast syndication. HBO.

recurring theme that challenged traditional perceptions of aging and style. Her fearless approach to fashion and sexuality defied societal expectations of what was deemed appropriate for a woman of her age. By embracing her youthfulness and confidence, Samantha shattered stereotypes and showed that style, and great sex, knows no age limits.

Lastly, Miranda Hobbes's fashion choices reflect her career-focused and analytical ambition and determination. Miranda is every part of the Sage archetype, linked to wisdom and rationality. Her legal profession and pragmatic, and oftentimes cynical, approach to relationships reflect the Sage archetype's emphasis on intellect and critical thinking. Her initial role, albeit unglamorous, was to be a reminder that the show was based in reality. Her wardrobe was dictated by her profession. Power suits, structured bags, and statement jewelry showcased her professionalism and desire to be taken seriously in the workplace as a lawyer. In the first season, Miranda is mostly shown sporting a classic, professional pantsuit. Though out of the quartet, Miranda has the least interest in fashion (specifically in season one), her style still evolves to reflect her growth and self-discovery as she navigates the complexities of balancing her career and personal life. For example, in the episode "The Post-It Always Sticks Twice,"⁵ Miranda struts into a bar with the girls for a night out, wearing her skinny jeans that she hadn't fit into for over a decade. After having a baby, and subsequently losing the baby weight, once she puts on and easily zips up the pair of pants, she has a new found confidence. In Patricia Field's autobiography titled *Pat in the City: My Life of Fashion, Style, and Break All The Rules*, she commented on Miranda's costuming saying:

A partner at her law firm, the character was, in Cynthia's own words, 'smart and independent and determined.' Did that also mean she had to look terrible? No! I

⁵ *Sex and the City*, Season 6, Episode 7, "The Post-It Always Sticks Twice," directed by Alan Taylor. Aired August 3, 2003, in broadcast syndication. HBO.

thought we dressed her way too seriously in that first series. I don't like formulaic and I felt like Miranda looked like a cliche of a lawyer. From the first episode of season 2, we made her character more playful. I put her in pencil skirts with slim-silhouette jackets that were kept open to show her waist. High heels, drop earrings, all that fun stuff — and no more buttoned-up collars. (Field 2023: 151)

Miranda's evolving fashion choices serve as a visual representation of her journey towards self-acceptance and confidence. As the series progresses, her style becomes more relaxed and expressive, reflecting her growing comfort in her own skin, also reflecting Cynthia Nixon's own personal not-so-tailored style. This evolution in her fashion mirrors her personal growth, especially as she negotiates the challenges of motherhood and professional success.

The fashion in *Sex and the City* serves not merely as a backdrop for the narrative but as a critical component in the expression and development of its characters. Through the lens of Judith Butler's performativity theory and Carl Jung's archetypes, we observe how each character's wardrobe choices act as an extension of their personality, embodying their struggles, aspirations, and empowerment. From Carrie's eclectic mix symbolizing her journey of self-discovery to Samantha's bold selections reflecting her unapologetic embrace of herself and her sexuality, the series skillfully uses fashion as a language to communicate deeper themes of identity, autonomy, and female empowerment. This thesis underscores the importance of clothing and accessories in storytelling, highlighting how fashion can be a powerful tool for character development and a mirror reflecting the multifaceted nature of women's lives and aspirations.

The Symbolism and Analysis of Accessories

In analyzing accessories and fashion objects in the series, there are a few that have become synonymous with *Sex and the City*. The Fendi Baguette, a Manolo Blahnik

heel, Jimmy Choos, Hermes Birkin bags, and last, but not least, Carrie's nameplate necklace are all items that carry significance throughout the show, and simultaneously gained popularity in real life fashion. In a *Town & Country* article from December 2021 titled, "Do the Status Pieces from *Sex and the City* Still Hold Up?" Rozanne Adamiyatt, the author, writes, "The women on the show wore pieces that were important to them and those items, in turn, became important to the women who watched" (Adamiyatt 2021). She recounts the Manolo Blahnik blue Hangisi pump that is central to the first film, and how it became a "something-blue-staple" for brides, though Carrie's relationship with Manolos began long before the 2008 film. In her autobiography Patricia Field details how her and Carrie's relationship with Manolo Blahnik came to be. At the time of the first season, though they were a well-made shoe worn by fashion industry insiders, they were not a household name. She explains that after the first season aired, and made such huge waves in the fashion industry Manolo Blahniks would never be bargain basement fodder again (Field 2023: 157). The last scene of the last episode of the original series shows Carrie trotting down the streets of Manhattan, just as we had watched her do for six seasons, wearing her staple racoon fur coat, her nameplate necklace, a statement red heel with her legs on display (as always), and she is carrying what has become an extension of her arm – a shopping bag from Manolo Blahnik. Another item that became an extension of Carrie's arm, Field shares how the Fendi Baguette bag feature came to be:

Shopping for the second series at Fendi, I suddenly became aware they were rolling out the red carpet for me. Assistants fell over themselves to tell me I could have my pick of the many variations of their new Baguette bag – a cute little shoulder bag which tucked under the arm like a loaf of French bread – to use on the show. It represented a turning point, where people went from ignoring my calls to throwing their clothes at me...It was solely the success of the Baguette – which women lined up around the block to buy – that led the luxury goods conglomerate LVMH to purchase Fendi in October of the same year for \$850

million. It was clear that *Sex and The City* was defining culture in many ways. Women all over the world came to idolize these characters and find a personal sense of freedom through them – and their sense of style...By season six we had become a bona fide juggernaut. Each episode was like doing a weekly version of *Vogue*, with every designer under the sun wanting their stuff to be in our show. (Field 2023: 161,173)

This highlights the immense influence and impact that the show had on popular culture. It showcases how the success of the Baguette bag, featured on the show, not only elevated the brand but also led to the acquisition of Fendi by LVMH. The series not only had power in shaping fashion trends, but could also make or break a brands' success.

In addition to the iconic Fendi Baguette and Manolo Blahnik heels, another fashion item that made a lasting impression in *Sex and the City* was Carrie's nameplate necklace. This personalized piece of jewelry became a symbol of her identity as it became a symbol of her New York-ishness. In *Pat and the City*, Field shares the inspiration for the necklace came from seeing them on her young Hispanic and African American customers. She writes:

The glamorous golden name tag was self-identifying in a positive way and immediately brought Sarah Jessica to mind. This was a time in fashion when every market editor used to wear the same black Jill Stuart pants and black Prada backpack, so the idea of putting a sophisticated New Yorker in an accessory more likely to be spotted in Hollis, Queens, than on the West Village's Hudson Street was a leap of the imagination...For \$189 I had the name 'Carrie' made up into a yellow gold necklace at one in a strip of little jewelry shops on Canal. Sarah Jessica liked it-and soon made it famous. To this day, the Carrie necklace is the top-selling item in my gallery. (Field 2023: 148)

The necklace became a distinctive marker of her identity, emphasizing her unique persona and unwavering sense of self. Its presence in significant moments underscores Carrie's confidence and assertiveness, while its absence in certain scenes reflects her vulnerability and moments of introspection. In the final two episodes of the series, titled

“An American Girl in Paris (Part Une)”, and “An American Girl in Paris (Part Deux),”⁶ Carrie uproots her life and moves to Paris with her lover and famous artist, Aleksandr Petrovsky. Very unlike her, she is leaving behind her friends, her apartment, her column, her city, and her one true love, Mr. Big. Though she is extremely happy when she originally arrives in Paris, the city appears to reject her presence including Aleksandr being too busy to spend time with her, falling on her face in the Dior store, stepping in dog poop in her white Louboutin high heels, and, worst of all, losing her Carrie necklace during said fall. When she returns to the hotel with arms full of Dior shopping bags, as if her spending made up for her embarrassment, she begins to check her purse to make sure she collected all of her belongings, only to find her Carrie necklace is missing.

Carrie: “Aw, no, no! Oh my god. My Carrie necklace was in here. I put it in here and I don’t see it. It’s not in here. Aw, no! I can’t have lost my Carrie necklace! No!

Taking a second-long break from his phone call, Aleksandr asks: “Was it insured?”⁷

Carrie: “No, no. It’s not like that. It costs like nothing, but it’s priceless. I’ve just had it forever.”⁷

Then, Aleksandr returned to his more important phone call signaling to Carrie that being with him in Paris might not be the right place for her. As the necklace is lost, it marks a turning point in Carrie’s narrative, mirroring the challenges and uncertainties she faces in her personal and romantic life. The absence of the necklace during these crucial moments becomes a powerful metaphor for her sense of loss and the unraveling of her once unshakeable identity. Its disappearance becomes a visual representation of Carrie’s

⁶ *Sex and the City*, Season 6, Episode 20, “An American Girl in Paris (Part Deux),” directed by Tim Van Patten. Aired February 22, 2004, in broadcast syndication. HBO.

⁷ *Sex and the City*, Season 6, Episode 19, “An American Girl in Paris (Part Une),” directed by Tim Van Patten. Aired February 15, 2004, in broadcast syndication. HBO.

internal conflicts and emotional turmoil, offering viewers a nuanced portrayal of her vulnerability. It isn't until she finds the necklace tucked away in the lining of her vintage purse, that she feels like herself again, and gains the courage to leave Aleksandr, and subsequently move back to New York and find her happily ever after with Mr. Big.

As Carrie's journey in Paris unfolds, it becomes clear that her experiences are more than just a personal adventure; they serve as a reflection of the broader themes that *Sex and the City* has explored since its inception. The loss and subsequent rediscovery of Carrie's nameplate necklace symbolize not only her personal growth but also underscore the show's deep engagement with issues of identity, love, and self-empowerment. This narrative arc, rich with symbolism and emotional depth, bridges the gap between Carrie's individual story and the larger cultural impact of *Sex and the City*. Moreover, this storyline serves as a poignant reminder of the show's unique ability to intertwine individual stories with broader cultural and social themes. It demonstrates how personal growth and self-discovery are not merely private endeavors but are connected to larger societal issues such as the quest for love, the importance of self-identity, and the empowerment of women.

Conclusion

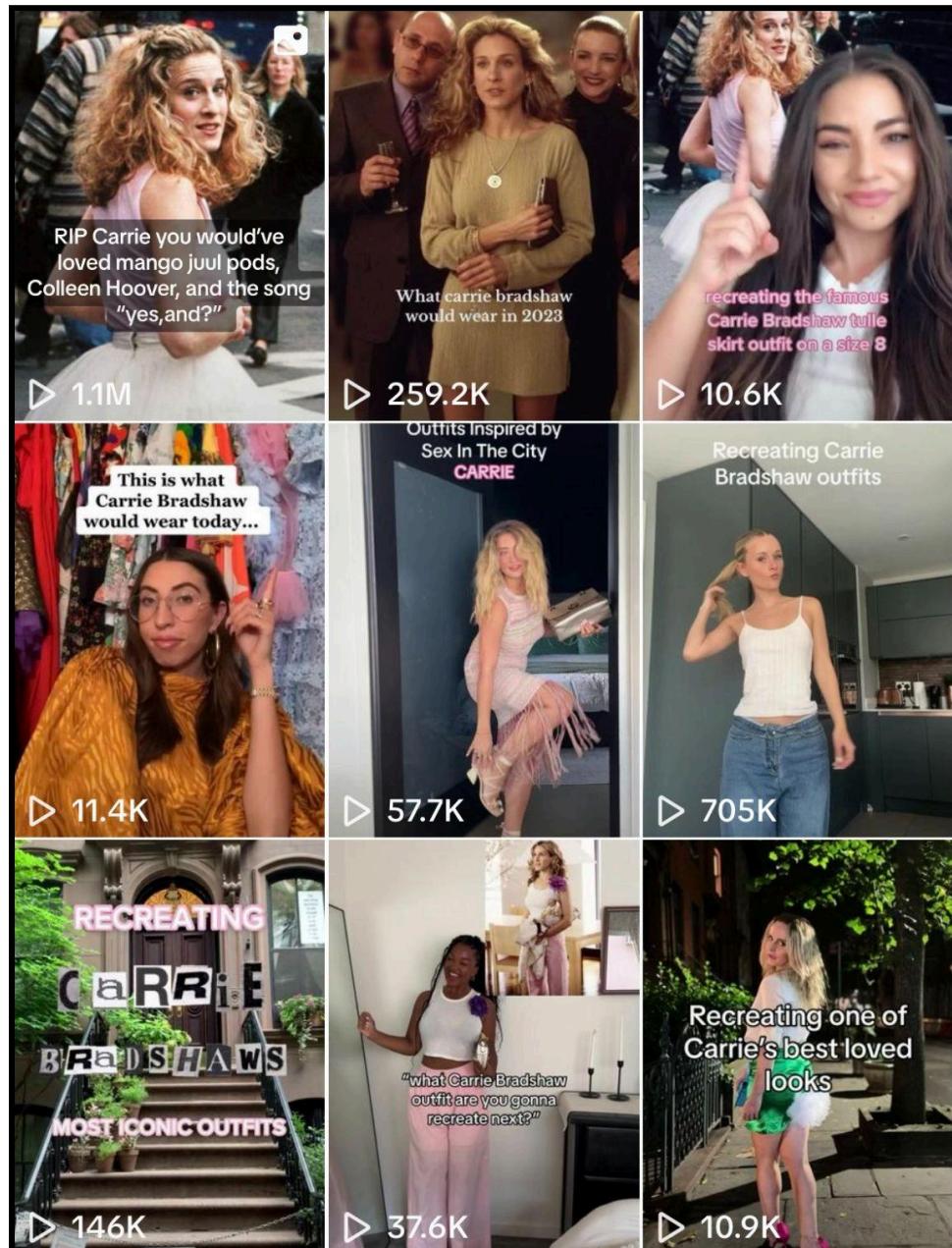
Sex and the City has not only had a profound impact on the fashion industry but has also influenced the way women perceive themselves and their identities. By showcasing confident, independent, and fashion-forward female characters, the show has empowered women to embrace their own unique styles and express themselves through fashion. The characters' wardrobes have become iconic and have inspired countless fashion trends and styles. Furthermore, the show's exploration of relationships, sexuality,

and societal expectations has resonated with audiences of all backgrounds. The characters' experiences and struggles have sparked important conversations about gender roles, feminism, and the complexities of modern relationships. *Sex and the City* has been praised for its honest and unapologetic portrayal of women's lives, addressing issues that are often overlooked or stigmatized in mainstream media. It has also left a lasting legacy in the entertainment industry. The show's success paved the way for more diverse and female-centered storytelling, challenging traditional narratives and providing a platform for women's voices. It has inspired countless television shows and films that center around female friendships, empowerment, fashion and the city, and self-discovery including series such as *Gossip Girl* (2007-2012), *Girls* (2012-2017), *Younger* (2015-2021), *Euphoria* (2019-current), and *Emily in Paris* (2020-current). Moreover, the fashion-forward nature of *Sex and the City* set a new standard for on-screen style, inspiring costume designers and fashion enthusiasts alike. They continue to resonate with audiences by capturing the complexities of modern life and offering compelling narratives centered around dynamic female characters. The show has not only provided entertainment but has also sparked important conversations, empowered women, and shaped the landscape of popular culture. Whether it's through its iconic fashion moments, its exploration of complex themes, or the digital age and reinforcement from social media, *Sex and the City* will forever be remembered as a groundbreaking and influential television series. The following chapter will analyze social media's role in sustaining the series.

Chapter 3:

Digital Dialogues:

The Role of Social Media in Sustaining *Sex and the City*



The Series On TikTok⁸

⁸ For this cover image, I selected a few TikTok posts that I analyzed during my research period to showcase the visual aspect of the series online.

Introduction

In the ever-evolving landscape of digital communication, social media platforms have played a pivotal role in keeping the spirit and discussions around *Sex and the City* alive. This thesis explores the multifaceted interactions between fans, critics, users, and the creators through various social media channels, with a focus on TikTok, in order to examine how these digital dialogues contribute to the series' sustained popularity and relevance in contemporary culture. As previously stated, my interest in the series lies not solely in the subject matter itself but, more significantly, in the ways people engage with and derive meaning from it.

Diving into the series, *Sex and the City*'s portrayal of aspirational lifestyles, defiance of norms, and empowerment through consumer choices have resonated with contemporary audiences and are often reflected in their digital personas and consumer practices. Within this digital age, social media platforms have become hubs for engaging with and celebrating the show's themes, characters, and iconic fashion. Trevor Boffone's exploration of how fans use TikTok to engage provides a contemporary perspective on the dynamic relationship between television, social media, and audience agency. Boffone says:

TikTok is public pedagogy. Especially considering TikTok's accessibility, it teaches us how to act, what to listen to, what to buy, how to speak, how to interact with one another, and more. We learn how to be ourselves on TikTok. We learn about music, memes, trends, and fashion. In this case, TikTok is what Danah Boyd calls a 'cultural mindset': we use the platform as identity blueprints to mold our behaviors to fit within the app's culture. As TikTokers mimic, reenact, and reimagine the platform's trends and its influencers' activity, TikTok becomes embedded into our personalities, muddying where our online activity ends and where our offline lives begin. And, perhaps most significantly, the public space of TikTok bolsters the status quo while also remaining a space of resistance and disruption. TikTok is filled with joy, escapism, pleasure, education, and

community-building, even if the platform bolsters systemic racism, classism, ableism, and the like. (Boffone 2022: 5-6)

The platform acts as a cultural mindset, shaping our behaviors, preferences, and interactions. While TikTok fosters joy, escapism, and community-building, it also perpetuates systemic issues. This dual nature of TikTok as both a space of conformity and resistance reflect their complex role in contemporary culture. The platform's influence extends beyond entertainment, shaping our identities and blurring the boundaries between our online and offline lives. By actively utilizing this digital platforms, fans immerse themselves in a vibrant online community where they not only consume content but also actively participate in discussions, share diverse interpretations of the series, and even take creative liberties by crafting their own unique storylines inspired by the themes and characters of *Sex and the City*. This active engagement goes beyond mere viewership, allowing fans to contribute their perspectives, theories, and creativity to the ongoing dialogue surrounding the show, fostering a collaborative and interactive space where they can connect with the series in a meaningful way. This interactive relationship demonstrates the evolving nature of television consumption and the significant influence of social media in amplifying fan voices.

Contextualizing TikTok

TikTok has emerged as one of the most influential and widely embraced social media platforms in recent years, with its own unique features and appeal. For context, Instagram, another widely influential social media platform, founded in 2010, initially gained popularity as a photo-sharing app but has since evolved into a diverse multimedia platform where users can share photos, videos, stories, and live streams. With over 2 billion monthly active users globally, Instagram has become a powerhouse for visual

content and social networking. Its user-friendly interface, sophisticated editing tools, and algorithm-driven feed have made it a go-to platform for individuals, brands, and influencers alike to showcase their lifestyles, products, and creativity. In contrast, TikTok, launched in 2016, has rapidly risen to prominence as a leading destination for short-form video content. With over 1.2 billion monthly active users worldwide, TikTok captivates users with its addictive scrolling interface and algorithmically curated “For You” page, which delivers personalized content based on user preferences and behavior. TikTok’s emphasis on user-generated content, coupled with its easy-to-use video editing features and viral challenges, has fueled its meteoric growth and cultural impact, particularly among younger demographics.

Both Instagram and TikTok wield considerable influence in shaping consumer trends, cultural norms, and online discourse. Instagram’s visually driven platform has transformed how users discover new products, travel destinations, and lifestyle trends, often serving as a catalyst for consumer behavior and brand engagement. Influencers and content creators leverage Instagram’s reach and engagement tools to build personal brands, promote products, and cultivate communities around shared interests and aesthetics. Similarly, TikTok’s immersive and interactive nature has revolutionized how users consume and create content, driving trends and conversations across various genres, from comedy and music to fashion and activism. Its democratized approach to content creation has empowered individuals to become content creators and influencers, blurring the lines between creators and consumers. The platform’s virality and algorithmic discovery mechanisms have propelled ordinary users to internet stardom overnight, amplifying their voices and shaping cultural conversations on a global scale. Both of the

platforms have redefined how we connect, consume media, and express ourselves online. Their immense popularity and influence underscore their significance as cultural touchstones and powerful tools for communication, creativity, and commerce in the 21st century. While both Instagram and TikTok offer compelling platforms for analyzing cultural trends and societal phenomena, I chose to focus on TikTok for my analysis due to its unique features and rapidly growing influence. TikTok's emphasis on short-form video content and algorithmically curated feed make it an ideal platform for exploring how users engage with and reinterpret cultural touchstones like *Sex and the City*. Additionally, TikTok's viral challenges and user-generated content provide valuable insights into how contemporary audiences relate to and reinterpret the themes and characters of the series in today's virtual world.

The extensive reach and user engagement are highlighted by Boffone, who reports, "TikTok has had over three billion global downloads and has around one billion active users who engage with the platform to create 3-60-second-long videos featuring a wide spectrum of aesthetic, thematic, and stylistic choices" (Boffone 2022: 2).⁹ TikTok's widespread reach and diverse content showcase the platform's ability to shape culture and influence behavior on a global scale. It serves as a dynamic space where creativity, trends, and social commentary intersect, fostering both conformity and resistance within its community. User engagement and participation in shaping content on TikTok is a reflection of the platform's influence extending beyond entertainment, shaping identities and blurring the boundaries between online and offline lives.

⁹ In February 2022, TikTok began allowing for up to 10-minute-long videos in order to compete with their competitor, another popular entertainment and social media platform, Youtube.

***Sex and the City* “Coded”**

On October 27, 2023, Kim Kardashian launched a new product for her clothing and undergarment company, Skims, called the Skims Ultimate Nipple Bra. This bra is a completely normal bra, except for the built-in pointy nipples which achieve a “hard nipple” look when worn under clothes. The campaign launch for the product was posted to TikTok and Instagram.¹⁰ The posts went viral, even more than a normal Kardashian level, as it was an outside of the box product, and it featured Kim wearing the bra. Out of the nearly 10,000 comments on the TikTok post, one of the top read, “This is so Samantha Jones coded.”^{11, 12} The comment was referring to the 6th episode of season 4 titled, “Baby, Talk is Cheap,” in which while the girls are getting cocktails, Samantha Jones whips out a pair of fake hard nipples telling Carrie to wear them to try to get her ex-boyfriend, Aiden Shaw, back. Samantha tells the girls:

I know what you do. Don’t call. Don’t email. Just show up at his furniture store wearing these... They were sent to me as some kind of promotional thing... Nipples are huge right now. Open any magazine. It’s not that cold! Those girls are either tweaking or they’re wearing these.¹³

Then, the girls play a fun little game, making Miranda put them on and walk around the bar to see if they help her gain male attention. The reference to Samantha Jones and her infamous “hard nipples” moment encapsulates a striking parallel between the fictional world of *Sex and the City* and Kim Kardashian’s real-life entrepreneurial

¹⁰ @KimKardashian, “The Skim’s Ultimate Nipple Bra.” Tiktok, October 27, 2023, [<https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZTL8SfSQM/>].

¹¹ @Andjustlikematt, “This is so Samantha Jones coded.” TikTok, October 27, 2023, [<https://www.tiktok.com/@andjustlikematt/video/7294678676342426922>].

¹² “Coded” preceded by an identifying word has become a popular slang term on social media. For instance, when someone on social media feels they relate to something they might say it is, “Me coded.” Furthermore, another more detailed example that is commonly used on social media is “queer coded,” which is when someone or something is giving off subtextual queer energy.

¹³ *Sex and the City*, Season 4, Episode 6, “Baby, Talk is Cheap” directed by Michael Spiller. Aired July 1, 2001, in broadcast syndication. HBO.

endeavors. Despite the two events occurring over two decades apart, the cultural resonance of Samantha's bold move resonates strongly in the modern-day landscape of influencer marketing and celebrity entrepreneurship. Kim Kardashian's Skims Ultimate Nipple Bra launch not only pays homage to this memorable television moment but also reflects a savvy understanding of contemporary consumer trends and the power of provocative marketing tactics. The connection between the two fake nipple examples, as well as hard nipples being fashionable opened my eyes to how TikTokers engage with the series online. Just as Samantha's gesture sparked conversation and intrigue among her friends, Kim Kardashian's product launch sparked widespread attention and discussion across social media platforms, showcasing the enduring impact of *Sex and the City* on popular culture and the art of branding. Furthermore, just as Samantha embodies confidence and fearlessness in expressing her sexuality, Kim exudes a similar aura of empowerment through her own sexuality, bold fashion choices, and unapologetic self-expression. Sohn writes, "Whether you love Samantha or are appalled by her, the one thing you cannot do is ignore her" (Sohn 2004: 105), which can undisputedly be applied to Kim Kardashian, as well. Both figures challenge societal norms and redefine femininity on their own terms, making them emblematic of modern womanhood. As such, the comparison between Samantha and Kim goes beyond just fake hard nipples, revealing a shared ethos of empowerment and individuality that resonates with audiences worldwide.

On February 12th, 2024, another similar comment stuck out to me on a smaller content creator's TikTok, @Libbyfitch with less than 1,000 followers, who posted a video about an inexpensive jewelry store in Midtown Manhattan, that she visited and picked up

some pieces from. She showed off chunky, statement gold and silver pieces, while styling them. A user named @hotandtotallyunstable commented, “All of this is giving Samantha Jones.”¹⁴ ¹⁵ The comment on the TikTok video further highlights the enduring influence of Samantha Jones, demonstrating how her bold fashion choices continue to captivate and inspire contemporary audiences. In a digital landscape dominated by influencers and trendsetters, Samantha’s legacy serves as a timeless reminder of the power of self-assurance and fearless self-expression. These online interactions, of which there are countless similar ones, exemplify one way in which social media users engage with *Sex and the City*, drawing parallels between the iconic moments or fashion choices from the show and relating them to contemporary cultural references. By likening the jewelry showcased in @Libbyfitch’s video to Samantha Jones’s style, the user not only pays homage to the character’s fashion influence but also reinforces the enduring impact of *Sex and the City* on recent fashion discourse. Through such interactions, TikTokers participate in a collective celebration of the show’s legacy, highlighting its relevance and resonance in today’s digital age.

Recreating The Iconic Fashions on TikTok

An important way TikTokers engage with the series is through recreating the iconic fashions and offering a fresh perspective with a contemporary lens. Countless users even create their own TikTok series containing multiple parts titled things like, “Recreating Iconic Carrie Bradshaw Outfits,” or “How to Dress Like [different character’s names from the show]”, or “*Sex and the City* Inspired Outfits”. Creators alike

¹⁴ @Hotandtotallyunstable, “All of this is giving Samantha Jones” TikTok, February 12, 2024, [<https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZTL8Su4o1/>].

¹⁵ The phrase “It’s giving” serves as a means to convey that something exudes a particular vibe or energy. Generally, it’s employed as a form of praise or compliment to acknowledge the positive impression created by a person, thing, or situation.

choose some of their favorite fashion moments and either recreate them with items they already have in their closet, putting current twists on the looks, or they make DIY (do it yourself) projects to make clothing items look as close to the actual fashion in the show as possible. Many fashion objects and entire ensembles worn by the four main characters stand out as iconic moments in fashion history, which is evident through these kinds of reenactments. One example is the green satin mini skirt from Vivienne Westwood with the tulle bustle paired with the collared white button-down that Carrie wears in season 4 episode 9, “Sex and the Country.”¹⁶ One of the selected accounts mentioned in my research, @dawnannawilliamson, who goes by Carrie by Dawn, and is a fashion collector, including collecting countless actual fashion items worn on the show. She constantly posts recreating outfits from the original show, and speaking about the history behind her collection. Though she doesn’t have the actual Vivienne Westwood skirt worn by Sarah Jessica Parker, she recreated the outfit two different times for TikTok making the tulle bustle herself and adding it to a kelly-green satin skirt. Once the look was finished with a bright blue bag and pink sparkly shoes, Carrie by Dawn walked down the streets of New York and re-enacted the scene wearing the ensemble. Though living in New York, this creator is English, which speaks to the wide-spread distribution of the show. Though this example comes from an older TikToker who was alive when the original series was airing, it is one of many examples of how users engage with the source material. Another user in her early 20s, @Madisonwalker, whose post I found through the hashtag #carriebradshaw, also recreated this same look but with a deep-plunge long sleeve, more of a olive green skirt than kelly green, and nude heels

¹⁶ *Sex and the City*, Season 4, Episode 9, “Sex and the Country” directed by Michael Spiller. Aired July 22, 2001, in broadcast syndication. HBO.

instead of fuschia. With her youthful, 21st-century inspired spin, the look holds true to its origin, but works for a more everyday and practical outfit. Also, the two examples differ extremely as Madison Walker re-enacts the series in a more modern, or Gen Z, way than Carrie by Dawn does. Walker uses an audio clip from the show and simultaneously showcases her outfit and while she mouths along to the words, “I spent \$40,000 on shoes, and I have no place to live? I will literally be the old woman who lived in her shoes,” which Carrie says to Miranda in the 16th episode of season 4, “Ring a Ding Ding.”¹⁷ This is common practice on the app, with trending sounds being instrumental in shaping the viral content landscape and providing users with a shared audiovisual language to express themselves creatively.¹⁸ Other Gen Z creators do the same, putting their modern-day twists on the iconic outfits, using contemporary brands as replacements, and choosing other popular lines from the series. One of the common looks that users chose to recreate include John Galliano’s newspaper dress for Christian Dior, that has been replicated too many times to count.¹⁹ To name a few more, I constantly saw recreations of the previously mentioned opening sequence tutu look, the post-breakup little gray dress,²⁰ the controversial take on a Hamptons Hoedown party outfit,²¹ and the post-falling in the pond at The Central Park BoatHouse outfit where she changes into Big’s white button down

¹⁷ *Sex and the City*, Season 4, Episode 16, “Ring a Ding Ding” directed by Alan Taylor. Aired January 27, 2002, in broadcast syndication. HBO.

¹⁸ A trending sound on TikTok is a popular piece of audio that creators use in their videos, often associated with specific challenges or memes. TikTok’s algorithm promotes videos using these sounds, making them widely seen and encourages more creators to use them. They can come from songs, viral clips, television shows or movies, or original recordings.

¹⁹ Worn by Carrie Bradshaw in *Sex and the City*, Season 3, Episode 17, “What Goes Around Comes Around,” directed by Allen Coulter. Aired October 8, 2000, in broadcast syndication. HBO.

²⁰ Worn by Carrie Bradshaw in *Sex and the City*, Season 2, Episode 15, “Shortcomings,” directed by Daniel Algrant. Aired September 12, 1999, in broadcast syndication. HBO.

²¹ Worn by Carrie Bradshaw in *Sex and the City*, Season 2, Episode 17, “Twenty-Something Girls vs. Thirty-Something Women,” directed by Darren Star. Aired September 26, 1999, in broadcast syndication. HBO.

shirt and styles it with a classic Hermes H buckle belt.²² Repeated fashion items included strappy heels, fur coats, Fendi bags, mini skirts, whimsical tops and dresses, Prada accessories, and, of course, Manolos Blahniks sticking to the class high to low pairings that Carrie frequently sported in the original series.

By making these TikToks, these creators not only pay homage to the iconic fashion of *Sex and the City* but also contribute to the ongoing conversation surrounding its influence on contemporary style. By recreating these looks, users celebrate the series's impact on fashion trends, even 25 years later, and showcase their admiration for the characters' distinctive styles. Moreover, these recreations serve as a form of nostalgia, allowing fans to relive memorable moments from the show while putting their own creative spin on them. Through these recreations, TikTok users continue to engage with the series in unique and contemporary ways, demonstrating its enduring relevance in today's cultural landscape.

Reinterpreting the Series in Contemporary Culture

Whether recreating iconic fashion moments or breathing new life into the show through contemporary interpretations, TikTok users continue to find creative ways to engage with *Sex and the City*, showcasing the enduring relevance and influence of the iconic series. One way TikTokers choose to derive meaning from the series is by reimagining if the show took place in more recent years. Posts with themes like, “What Carrie Bradshaw would wear in 2023,” or “RIP [character name] you would have loved...”²³ allow for social media users to engage with the characters and themes of *Sex*

²² Worn by Carrie Bradshaw in *Sex and the City*, Season 3, Episode 18, “Cock-a-Doodle-Do” directed by Allen Coulter. Aired October 15, 2000a, in broadcast syndication. HBO.

²³ The phrase “RIP [name] you would’ve loved” is a meme format commonly used to humorously speculate about what deceased famous individuals or past fictional characters might have enjoyed if they were still alive. It typically involves expressing condolences for a deceased person and then suggesting something

and the City in a contemporary context. By envisioning how the characters would navigate modern-day scenarios or trends, users can explore parallels between the show's narrative and current cultural phenomena. These posts often spark discussions about societal changes, fashion evolution, and the enduring relevance of the series themes. Additionally, the “RIP [character name] you would have loved...” format humorously extends the personalities of the fictional characters into hypothetical contemporary situations, creating a playful interaction between past and present. During my research period three TikToks stood out in particular. The first was a post from @RachelReiniger posted on March 8, 2024, that falls under the latter, humorous trend and gained over 1 million views within a week of being posted.²⁴ The user contextualized the four leading ladies, as well as other main and recurring characters including Big, Aidan Shaw, Anthony Marantino, Stanford Blatch, and Steve Brady. With text overlaying photos of each character, using TikTok's slideshow feature, each slide read:²⁵

Carrie: RIP Carrie you would've loved mango juul pods, Colleen Hoover, and the song “yes, and?”

Charlotte: RIP Charlotte you would've loved Pookie and Jett, Sofia Richie, and Taylor and Travis dating

Miranda: RIP Miranda you would've loved quarantine, NYT games, and true crime podcasts

Samantha: RIP Samantha you would've loved Julia Fox, RuPaul, and Skims

Big: RIP Big you would've love Zyn and Raya

Aidan: RIP Aidan you would've loved Luke Combs' “Fast Car” cover and that Stanley surviving a car fire

unrelated, often humorous and from a modern-day perspective, that the person would have appreciated. This meme gained widespread popularity in March 2021, although earlier iterations date back to late 2020.

²⁴@RachelReiniger, “RIP SATC”, TikTok Video, March 8, 2024, <https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZTL8qPBtR/>

²⁵The TikTok slideshow feature allows users to create a sequence of images with text overlay, enhancing storytelling and content presentation within the app.

Anthony: RIP Anthony you would've loved George Santos

Stanford: RIP Stanford you would've loved Jake Shane videos

Steve: RIP Steve you would've loved the Nova Knicks (@RachelReiniger, RIP SATC: 2024)

This form of trend operates similarly to memes, where cultural references gain meaning and significance over time through repetition and reinterpretation. By associating these characters with specific cultural phenomena like mango juul pods, quarantine, or true crime podcasts, the TikTok user taps into the collective understanding and shared experiences of the online community. Over time, these references become imbued with meaning, creating a shared language and cultural shorthand that resonates with internet users. For instance, associating Miranda with quarantine and true crime podcasts plays on her pragmatic, cynical, and analytical personality, while linking Samantha to Julia Fox and Skims draws on her sexual boldness, feminist qualities, and avant garde character traits. It is also interesting to relate this to the comments mentioned in the prior section regarding the similarities between Samantha Jones and Kim Kardashian. Multiple different TikTok users came up with the same modern-day tie between the character and the celebrity and her brand. Additionally, the post sparks conversations and interactions among viewers as they share their own interpretations and reactions, further reinforcing the sense of community and collective understanding within the online space. In the comment section of this post countless users agreed with the speculations made by Rachel Reiniger, and even added their own interpretations of the material. The top comment on the post came from a user named Bailey, @Beemull8, who

added on, “Carrie would fight with Colleen Hoover at a book launch party.”²⁶ Others added on agreeing with this take, and emphasizing how much they agreed with Rachel Rainiger’s original takes.

As individuals continue to discover, reinterpret, and recontextualize *Sex and the City* through online platforms like TikTok, the series maintains its status as a cultural touchstone, inspiring new generations to embrace self-expression and empowerment in their own unique ways. Additionally, the relationship between the celebrities and their characters in *Sex and the City* plays a significant role in the show’s enduring influence.

The Celebrity Factor

On the first day I began my primary research, January 7th, 2024, the TikTok account @andjustlikematt posted a clip from Sarah Jessica Parker’s acceptance speech for Best Actress at the 2000 Golden Globes, and I was immediately delighted as I had never seen the video. I found myself thinking that, in typical SJP fashion, she was funny and sexy - wearing a strapless, nude dress and making the whole crowd laugh with her nervous jokes. I dashed to the comment section, which had over 700 comments, and found countless TikTokers speaking to the similarities between SJP and her character, Carrie. The top-liked comment with almost 18K likes reading, “She is Carrie Bradshaw.”²⁷ The next most liked comment at 12K read, “Why is this low key an episode of SATC?”²⁸ And on and on, these comments read similarly, “She literally just played herself in SATC. The whole cast honestly.”²⁹ This kind of discourse wasn’t shocking.

²⁶ @Beemull8, “Carrie would fight with Colleen Hoover at a book launch party,” TikTok, March 9, 2024, [<https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZTL8qPBtR/>].

²⁷ @Lamuchachauecant, “Sbe is Carrie Bradshaw,” TikTok, January 7, 2024, [<https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZTL8SSuWR/>].

²⁸ @NikkiKellner, “Why is this low key an episode of SATC?” TikTok, January 8, 2024, [<https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZTL8SSuWR/>].

²⁹ @Naomixrene, “She literally just played herself in SATC. The whole cast honestly,” TikTok, January 8, 2024, [<https://www.tiktok.com/t/ZTL8SSuWR/>].

Since the show began, it has been said that the cast members are “playing themselves,” or that it is difficult to separate the actresses from their characters. Many of the actresses’ characteristics and qualities even made it into the series throughout the years. For example, Sarah Jessica Parker’s real life aversion to parsley becomes a storyline and, ultimately, a fight between herself and one of her many boyfriends, Jack Berger.³⁰ Regarding the costuming, the characters, and the actresses, in her book Field writes, “Kim is not Samantha; Sarah Jessica is not Carrie; none of the actors of *Sex and the City* were like their characters. Yet, when I began my work on their wardrobes, I always started with the human in front of me. The real-life person always came before the one on the page” (Field 2023: 156). Perhaps this choice is what caused the actual women’s characteristics to shine so brightly through each of their characters.

Through social media, a new generation has been able to interact and engage with a show and with characters from 25 years ago in a unique way. On TikTok, users, specifically those living in New York City or visiting, post “Spotted Carrie Bradshaw” videos whether it is Sarah Jessica Parker, herself, or if she is filming *And Just Like That...* in public in New York and playing the character. Additionally, just as TikTokers relate Sarah Jessica to her character, users on Youtube make the same connections. In a mini series episode with *Vogue* called, “Sarah Jessica Parker Breaks Down 17 Looks From 1987 to Now, Life in Looks,”³¹ Parker analyzes and discusses the origins of and reasons for certain outfits throughout her life. However, out of the 17 looks, 12 of them were either worn while filming and playing her character or at premieres or award shows for

³⁰ *Sex and the City*, Season 6, Episode 6, “Hop, Skip, and a Week” directed by Michael Engler. Aired July 27, 2003, in broadcast syndication. HBO.

³¹ @Vogue, “Sarah Jessica Parker Breaks Down 17 Looks From 1987 to Now, Life in Looks,”, Youtube Video, February 23, 2022, https://youtu.be/3xIw7SO5ln4?si=xpdMro_VawuaDNSZ

the series. The other five included covers of *Vogue* that featured Parker and street style looks. This video features the similarities between her and her character, and how the character kind of morphed into the actress. Her mannerisms, dialogue, fashion sense, poise, and quirkiness all parallel her character making it easy to see the connection between the two. A Youtube user named @CiaraOh9102 commented on *Vogue*'s video seeing the similarities between all four women and their characters:

I don't think I've ever seen an actress who is so intertwined with a character as SJP is with Carrie. It's like Carrie is her and she is Carrie. When people were hoping for a third film, I told them that, to me, the third film is playing out in real life. SJP started her own shoe line and continued to contribute to *Vogue* over the years, that's something Carrie would have done. Cynthia Nixon ran for governor which seemed like a real life natural progression for the attorney Miranda. Kristin Davis is, and continues to be involved in charity and philanthropy which is very much like her character, Charlotte. Samantha was always the tough, driven, career focused woman which is pretty much how Kim Cattrall treats her career.
(@CiaraOh9102, Youtube)³²

While Cynthia Nixon and her character Miranda Hobbes may have differences, they also share notable similarities. Both women exhibit a strong sense of determination and independence, characteristics that are evident in their career choices and personal lives. Miranda's ambition as a Harvard Law-educated successful lawyer mirrors Nixon's own drive and dedication, not only in her acting career but also in her pursuits outside of Hollywood, such as her foray into politics. Additionally, both Nixon and Miranda are known for their outspokenness and advocacy on important social and political issues. Nixon's activism for LGBTQ+ rights and education reform resonates with Miranda's assertive personality and willingness to speak up for what she believes in, whether in her professional or personal life. Additionally, it relates to Miranda's fluid sexuality in the reboot series after she leaves her husband, Steve Brady, and dates a non-binary person.

³² @CiaraOh9102, "I don't think I've ever seen an actress who is so intertwined with a character as SJP is with Carrie", Youtube Video, February 23, 2022, https://youtu.be/3xIw7SO5ln4?si=xpdMro_VawuaDNSZ

Moreover, both the actress and her character are celebrated for their intelligence and wit, with Miranda's sharp humor mirroring Nixon's own quick wit and charm. These shared qualities serve as a testament to the depth of Nixon's portrayal of Miranda and highlight the resonance between the actress and her iconic, long-term character.

Furthermore, this discourse highlights the enduring impact of *Sex and the City* on popular culture, as well as the seamless integration of real-life experiences into the show's narrative fabric. The blurring of boundaries between actor and character serves as a testament to the authenticity and relatability of the series, endearing it to audiences worldwide. Sarah Jessica Parker's embodiment of Carrie Bradshaw resonates deeply with viewers, evoking a sense of familiarity and connection that transcends the screen. Similarly, her co-stars have been praised for infusing their performances with elements of their own personalities, lending an air of authenticity to the characters they portray. This symbiotic relationship between actor and character has become a defining feature of *Sex and the City*, contributing to its enduring popularity and relevance across social media platforms today.

Through this social media and discourse analysis, it becomes evident that social media platforms, particularly TikTok, have evolved into dynamic arenas where fans actively engage with and celebrate the enduring legacy of *Sex and the City*. Through activities such as recreating iconic fashion moments and reinterpreting the series in contemporary contexts, TikTokers demonstrate a profound appreciation for the show. Moreover, the seamless integration of fiction and reality, particularly evident in the relationship between the show's characters and its real-life celebrities, enriches the viewing experience and deepens the audience's connection to the series. This fusion of

fictional narratives with real-world personalities not only enhances the show's appeal but also highlights its ability to resonate across generations and cultural contexts. In essence, the digital dialogues surrounding *Sex and the City* serve as a testament to the enduring power of storytelling and the profound influence of narratives that transcend temporal and spatial boundaries. Through social media, fans continue to find a vibrant community where they can actively participate in the ongoing celebration and reinterpretation of the timeless allure of *Sex and the City*. It is also interesting to point out that the majority, if not all, of the creators on TikTok actively engaging with the series online are women or gay men. Though not surprising, as shows with female leads typically do not appeal to a majority of straight-North American men, the types of creators we see online show what audience the show is continuing to resonate with even 25 years later. Additionally, I must touch on the fact that TikTok users also engage with many other past and present shows and movies in similar ways, as a non-current show it is interesting how *Sex and the City* seems to always be at the forefront of these trends. It is a part of an entire cultural and social phenomenon, showcasing its enduring cultural currency.

Conclusions

And just like that the exploration of *Sex and the City*'s enduring allure and lasting legacy through social media analysis concludes, demonstrating the show's profound impact on contemporary culture. Returning to my three original research questions posed in chapter one, the social media and discourse analysis conducted demonstrates the profound impact this groundbreaking television series continues to wield on contemporary culture. From engaging with iconic fashion moments to reinterpreting the series in modern-day contexts, TikTok users continue to celebrate and engage with the

show in unique and creative ways. The seamless integration of real-life experiences with fictional characters, as seen through the parallels between the actors and their roles, further solidifies the show's influence and relevance. TikTok users, in particular, have embraced the show with fervor, celebrating its characters, themes, fashions, and messages in unique and creative ways. Yet, perhaps the most striking aspect of *Sex and the City*'s enduring relevance is its ability to seamlessly integrate real-life experiences with fictional characters. The parallels between the actors and their roles serve as a powerful reminder of the show's influence and resonance with audiences worldwide. Through social media interactions, discussions, and creative expressions, the series, and franchise as a whole, continues to captivate audiences, inspiring meaningful dialogues and reflections on themes of empowerment, individuality, and feminist representation. Its legacy as a groundbreaking and influential television series endures, shaping cultural conversations and resonating with audiences across generations.

By delving into the multifaceted ways in which the show has been celebrated, critiqued, and reinterpreted across digital social platforms, particularly TikTok, this research highlights the dynamic interaction between media content, audience engagement, and cultural discourse. The series' ability to resonate with audiences decades after its debut, through its iconic characters, fashion statements, and candid exploration of womanhood, once seen as taboo, underscores its lasting legacy as a cultural touchstone in the digital age. Through this analysis, it becomes evident that *Sex and the City* continues to inspire, provoke, and connect with viewers, transcending its original medium to remain a relevant and influential force in shaping contemporary culture and societal norms. In essence, the fusion of fashion, identity, and empowerment

in popular media representation not only echoes the evolving societal norms but also serves as a canvas for self-expression. Characters and personalities within these representations don garments that speak volumes, transcending mere aesthetic appeal to symbolize their beliefs, aspirations, and cultural heritage. This convergence of fashion and identity in the public sphere fosters a dialogue about individuality and societal acceptance, encouraging viewers to embrace their uniqueness while acknowledging the power of clothing as an extension of one's persona.

In addressing the research questions posed in the initial chapter, the analysis conducted throughout this thesis sheds light on the multifaceted ways in which *Sex and the City* reflects and responds to the changing dynamics of society in North America, influences the fashion industry for nearly three decades, and is disseminated and reinterpreted through social media. Firstly, the series serves as a mirror to the evolving societal norms and cultural shifts, tackling taboo subjects with candor and wit, thereby resonating with audiences across generations. Secondly, its impact on the fashion industry stems from its iconic portrayal of aspirational lifestyles and bold fashion choices, which have not only influenced contemporary trends but also inspired countless fashion enthusiasts to emulate the characters' styles in real life and online. Finally, the digital realm, particularly platforms like TikTok, has played a pivotal role in perpetuating the show's legacy by providing a space for fans to engage, celebrate, and reinterpret its themes, characters, and fashion moments. Through social media interactions and creative expressions, audiences continue to engage with *Sex and the City* in meaningful ways, showcasing its enduring relevance, influence, and currency in the contemporary cultural landscape of North America.

Filmography

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