

**From Carrie to Nico:
Female Journalists in Candace Bushnell Novels**

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Abstract

This work examines the image of the female journalist in five novels by Candace Bushnell. Each novel features a female journalist who struggles to balance her demanding job and private life. This paper explores how the female protagonists in these modern novels differ and the ways in which they fit into the major stereotypes of female journalists. This paper will look at the characters' professional lives, relationships with the opposite sex, and moral compasses. This paper also examines how the protagonists in the novels *Sex and the City* and *Lipstick Jungle* differ from their television counterparts. Lastly, this work will look at how Candace Bushnell's images of the journalist fit into larger social theories about women in the media.

Introduction

“Chick lit,” a pop culture abbreviation for chick literature, is a growing sector of the \$23-billion publishing industry.¹ This genre of books is considered to a subsection of women’s fiction and features “everyday women in their 20s and 30s navigating their generation’s challenges of balancing demanding careers with personal relationships.”² These books made publishers \$71 million in 2002 according to ABC News.³ Sessalee Hensely, a fiction buyer for giant retailer Barnes & Noble, explains, “The mega authors John Grisham, Michael Crichton, Tom Clancy all have had a fall-off in sales, but the chick lit is growing and they’re growing exponentially.”⁴ The increase in sales of these novels has made Hollywood take notice. Major film studios and television networks have clamored to turn these books, including *The Devil Wears Prada*, *Bridget Jones’ Diary*, and *The Starter Wife* into feature films and television programs. One of the most notable of these properties is the *Sex and the City* franchise, which is based on the Candace Bushnell novel of the same name. It has been made into a long-running HBO series, a box-office hit, and its highly anticipated sequel, which is scheduled for release in May 2010.

The novel *Sex and the City* is a series of essays based on Bushnell’s popular and often candid *New York City Observer* column.⁵ “My first assignment was to go to the sex club Le Trapeze, and the second was to write about a man who was a womanizer, and then interview all of his girlfriends about him,” Bushnell explains of the column. “I’d write about personal experiences as well as observations of other people’s lives.”⁶ The author attributes the success of her column and the subsequent franchise to the fact that

women were talking about sex like men, which was rarely seen before in the mainstream media.⁷ The popularity of *Sex and the City* brought Bushnell to the forefront of the publishing world and made Carrie Bradshaw a household name across America. Bushnell went on to write four more “chick lit” novels, which have become best sellers, and has signed on to write two young adult books for publisher HarperCollins.⁸

Each one of Bushnell’s novels looks at the fictional lives of some of Manhattan’s most prominent women. All of her stories feature female journalists as they balance their careers, friends, relationships, and family. Bushnell developed characters that were passionate about their work and unafraid of how others might view them. The female protagonists in her novels are open about their feelings and don’t see men as a hindrance to their goals. In *Sex and the City*, readers are introduced to Carrie Bradshaw, a columnist for *The New York Star*, as she navigates working and finding love in the Big Apple. Carrie is a single woman who embraces her friendships and love for fashion, but is still looking for that elusive Mr. Right. Bushnell’s novel, *Four Blondes*, features successful political and stylist columnist Winnie Dieke who is unhappily married to a fellow journalist. *Trading Up* is a story of model Janey Wilcox’s escapades in New York but also discusses the life and work of Dodo Blanchette, a lifestyle reporter for the local CBS affiliate. *Lipstick Jungle*, another of Bushnell’s works that was later turned into a television show, looks at four women with established careers who are still working to find their happily ever afters. One of these women is Nico O’Neilly, the high-powered editor of *Bonfire Magazine* who is trying to fit in with the male executives who surround her, be a mother to her young daughter, and make time for an extramarital affair with a younger man. In her most recent book, *One Fifth Avenue*, Bushnell focuses on the life of

Enid Merle, a gossip columnist living in a desirable Manhattan apartment building with her nephew. These female journalists are driven career women who are always looking for ways to edge out their competition.

These representations of female journalists are stereotypical of many of the images of the female journalist seen throughout popular culture. In this paper, each of Bushnell's images of the journalist will be examined in greater detail and compared to their television counterparts when necessary. In addition, these representations will be compared to other images of journalists in society and how they fit into major stereotypes of the female journalist. Lastly, this work will look at how Bushnell's images of the journalist fit into larger social theories about women in the media.

Carrie Bradshaw in *Sex and the City*

As a newspaper columnist, Carrie Bradshaw gets to experience glamorous parties and wear designer labels, but she wasn't always one of Manhattan's elite. Carrie once lived in a studio apartment "where an old lady had died two months before."⁹ She had no money and slept on a borrowed piece of foam. However, this is not the character that readers will meet in the novel *Sex and the City*. Carrie is now able to take weekend getaways and gets behind the velvet ropes at many of the city's hot spots. This novel explores Carrie's friendships, family, and relationships, specifically her complex romance with Mr. Big.

Carrie is a single woman who is looking for love and material for her column on sex and relationships. She begins to explore the difference between how women and men

have sex and eventually tries to have sex like a man, without an emotional commitment. Carrie explains, “You remember when I slept with that guy Drew? Well, afterwards, I didn’t feel a thing. I was like, Gotta go to work, babe. Keep in touch. I completely forgot about him after that.”¹⁰ However, when she least expects it, she finds a new man, Mr. Big.

She explains her theory of how men sleep with women to Mr. Big and then asks if he is like that, too. He responds, “Not a drop. Not even a half a drop.”¹¹ They begin a relationship in which Carrie tries to transform herself and become the woman that she believes Mr. Big wants her to be. She tries to be more domesticated by cooking and caring for houseplants.¹² However, she still questions his intentions and worries when other women flirt with him in public. Throughout her life, Carrie has not only demonstrated insecurity in romantic relationships but also in other areas of her life. Bushnell explains, “Carrie would never sleep in the same bed with other girls or undress in front of them, even though you were supposed to be able to do that, because it was just girls. She used to think, what is wrong with me, why can’t I just be like everybody else and not be uptight about it?”¹³ Carrie’s anxieties make her relationship with Mr. Big turbulent.

Due to the differences in their lifestyles, Mr. Big and Carrie always have arguments. “Carrie wasn’t always good with people she thought were too conservative. She wasn’t used to it. She was used to everybody being drunk and doing drugs (or not doing them),” Bushnell writes. “Mr. Big got mad when Carrie said outrageous things like, ‘I’m not wearing any underwear,’ even though she was.”¹⁴ It’s behavior like this that

makes Mr. Big fear a long-term commitment with Carrie and the couple eventually break up.

During their final argument, Mr. Big finally admits to Carrie, “You’re a little crazy. You’re too old to act the way you do. You’ve got to grow up. You’ve got to take care of yourself. I’m afraid for you. You can’t think that people are going to take care of you all the time.”¹⁵ In the end, neither Mr. Big nor Carrie is miserable after their relationship ends. Mr. Big finds a girl to marry and Carrie is “happily single.”¹⁶ In the introduction of the novel, Bushnell explains, “If you read closely, you’ll discover that even Mr. Big himself points out that he is a fantasy in Carrie’s imagination, and you can’t love a fantasy. And so we leave Carrie to enter a new phase in her life when she understands that she will have to find herself (without a man), and in doing so will hopefully be able to find a relationship.”¹⁷ Carrie realizes that her independence is more important to her than any relationship with a man.

Throughout the novel, Carrie turns to her friends as she endures the trials and tribulations of trying to find Mr. Right. Carrie always makes time for her friends, including: Miranda, a cable executive; Sarah, a public relations firm owner, and Belle, a banker and “the only married woman of the group.”¹⁸ These four women discuss their own relationships, marriage, and the parenting abilities of their friends. Meanwhile, another one of her friends, Samantha Jones, may have served as inspiration for her have-sex-like-a-man column. Of Samantha, or Sam for short, Bushnell writes, “Sam is a New York inspiration. Because if you’re a successful single woman in this city, you have two choices: You can beat your head against the wall trying to find a relationship, or say ‘screw it’ and just go out and have sex like a man. Thus: Sam.”¹⁹ The romances and

flings of Carrie's friends often become anecdotes in her column. International socialites like Amalita Amalfi, whom she spends time with when they are both in New York, are also a source of material for Carrie's column.

Nico O'Neilly in *Lipstick Jungle*

Nico O'Neilly is the high-powered editor of *Bonfire Magazine* and one of *The New York Post's* "50 Most Powerful Women." Nico "exudes an air of importance that causes other people to wonder who they are, and at first glance, with her stunning hair and glamorous clothes, one might take her for a movie star. On closer inspection, one saw that Nico wasn't technically beautiful."²⁰ However, Nico makes up for her lack of beauty with smarts, confidence, and being seen at the most important industry events. She has everything she has ever dreamed of: a successful career, respectable husband, and beautiful young daughter. However, she feels "tired. Like all those things belonged to someone else."²¹ Throughout the novel, she tries to balance working at her demanding job, being a good wife and mother, making time for her friends, and having an extramarital affair with a younger man.

Nico is responsible for making *Bonfire Magazine* into a "glossy, pop-culture bible for entertainment, media, and politics."²² She has held the position of editor-in-chief since the age of thirty-six, when she became the youngest to hold that position in the magazine's history.²³ Nico is a detailed and precise businesswoman who is always looking to get ahead of the competition and move up the corporate ladder. She eventually steals her co-worker Mike Harness's job but later regrets her actions.²⁴ Throughout the

novel, she consistently shows business savvy, yet at times a questionable moral compass. She simply believes that “the trick [to business] is in understanding what you can and can’t tolerate in your own behavior.”²⁵ However, this policy could also be applied to her personal life.

Nico married her husband, Seymour, at a young age and has an eight-year-old daughter, Katrina, whom she adores. Over the years, the excitement in her marriage wanes and she gradually starts having less sex with her husband.²⁶ She longs for a sexual connection with a man and thus, begins an affair with Kirby Atwood, a well-known model. She lives in fear that her family, especially her husband, will discover their relationship. Of Nico’s relationship with Kirby, Bushnell writes, “She was completely vulnerable. The fact that she was allowing herself to be so open was itself exciting, because she was never like this...not with Seymour.”²⁷ Nico is paranoid about being seen with Kirby, and yet she continues to arrange secret meetings with him until she finally breaks off the affair and turns to her friends for support toward the end of the novel.²⁸

Nico is best friends with Wendy Healy, the president of Parador Pictures, and Victory Ford, a successful fashion designer. Nico is a fiercely loyal friend. When Victory started her fashion line, Nico appeared “like a fairy godmother” and loaned \$40,000 to jump-start Victory’s business.²⁹ These women rally around one other as they navigate through the “lipstick jungle.”

Winnie Dieke in *Four Blondes*

Four Blondes consists of four separate short stories. Two of these stories, “Highlights (For Adults)” and “Single Process,” prominently feature female journalists as they balance their professional and personal lives. In “Highlights (For Adults),” Winnie Dieke is a successful columnist who is unhappily married while “A Single Process” tells the story of an unnamed journalist who goes abroad to find out about dating in other cultures.

Winnie Dieke lives with her husband James on the Upper West Side in New York City. They are both serious journalists who are well respected in the industry. Whitney graduated from Smith and now writes a political and style column while James is a Harvard graduate who has work published in *Sunday Times Magazine*, *The New Republic*, and *The New Yorker*.³⁰ Both hate anyone who isn’t like them. Bushnell explains, “They hate anyone who is wealthy and successful and gets press (especially Donald Trump). They hate trendy people and things....They hate TV; big-budget movies; all commercial, poorly written books on *The New York Times* best-seller list (and the people who read them); fast-food restaurants; guns; Republicans; neo-Nazi youth groups; the religious right wing anti-abortion groups, fashion models (fashion editors); fat on red meat; small, yappy dogs and the people who own them.”³¹ However, even with all these similarities, the Diekes don’t always see eye to eye. Winnie believes that she is as smart and capable as James. He has just had more breaks because of his gender. Winnie’s confidence often makes James feel he isn’t “the man” in the marriage.³² Their sexual relationship suffers due to their conflicts. Bushnell notes of Whitney, “Her loss of interest

in him sexually has decreased at the same rate as her loss of interest in his work.”³³ James wants to have more sex with Winnie while she simply wants to feel loved. Bushnell writes, “She wants to be cherished. She wants to be valued...She wants a man to say, ‘I love you, Winnie. You’re so beautiful.’”³⁴ As their needs begin to differ, they both have extramarital affairs; however, their marriage remains intact.

It’s not only her marriage that puts stress on Winnie, she considers her sister, Evie, to be the black sheep of the family. Evie, or Evil as Winnie calls her sometimes, goes to important events dressed too provocatively and embarrasses her sister.³⁵ Evie and her colleagues make Winnie feel like she is the “only nice girl left in the world.”³⁶ James also realizes that Evie is far from perfect but he sometimes “wonders if he should have married her instead.”³⁷ Winnie leads an imperfect life but comes to realize her successes and failures toward the end of the story.

In the short story “Single Process,” an unnamed journalist leaves America because “this big English newspaper was paying me a ridiculous amount of money to find out about sex in London.”³⁸ She knows this assignment will involve alcohol and visiting countless London pubs. However, her major fear remains that Englishmen would be horrible in bed.³⁹ She soon realizes that she wants to find a new love herself. She explains, “I wanted the story. I wanted the big, great, inspiring story about an unmarried career woman who goes to London on assignment and meets the man of her dreams and marries him.”⁴⁰ On the plane ride back to New York City, she meets a businessman who makes that fantasy a reality.

Dodo Blanchette in *Trading Up*

Dodo Blanchette is a lifestyle reporter covering everything from movie premieres to “the best place to get a fake tan” for the New York CBS affiliate.⁴¹ Dodo has a successful career and marriage. Bushnell writes, “She was unabashedly ambitious, joyfully competitive, and called herself a neofeminist; she believed in helping other women (hence her hiring of Sally), she was always thinking about how to get ahead in her career, how to take over the world, and how to get her name in the papers.”⁴² She spends her days on location, editing her pieces, and on air. At night, she keeps up with friends by going to events at trendy bars or inviting them over to the “McMansion” that she shares with her husband, Mark.⁴³

She began her journalism career as intern at the *New York Times* at the age of twenty-two where she learned about both “cocaine and the power of her breasts: After six months she was fired, ostensibly because she could never get to work before eleven o’clock, but secretly because she was sleeping with her boss who was married – when his wife found out, she forced him to fire Dodo.”⁴⁴ Following that incident, she was able to get her drug problems under control but still fell for powerful men.

Now, Dodo wants to demonstrate her own power and can’t understand how other professions especially modeling are as fulfilling as her career as a journalist.⁴⁵ She doesn’t want to mentor other young reporters because she is driven to stay at the top of the field. Yet, being a reporter puts pressure on Dodo to keep a slim figure and she is constantly trying to lose ten pounds. By nature, she is a “hefty girl” who was athletic as a teenager and went on to play soccer at Tufts University. She worries about the way she

looks and if her husband still shows an interest in her. She gauges his interest by whether or not he is tuning into her news broadcast nightly.⁴⁶

Dodo feels used by her husband and can't imagine having children with him in the future. She exclaims, "Can you imagine *me* with a child? But that's all they want, these men. They want us for sex and breeding – as if I don't work hard enough as it is! I have to take care of this house, and God knows he doesn't do anything..."⁴⁷ Dodo demonstrates little loyalty to her husband or friends as she is only interested in her own success.

When Dodo becomes frustrated with her husband, she begins sleeping with his married best friend, Paul Lovelady.⁴⁸ While she continually calls Paul, he merely considered it to be a "friendly neighborhood fuck."⁴⁹ By sleeping with Paul, she was also being disrespectful to Paul's wife and her good friend, Carolina.⁵⁰ Throughout the novel, Dodo demonstrated insecurity about her body and marriage but managed to maintain a successful career.

Enid Merle in *One Fifth Avenue*

Enid Merle is a gossip columnist and longtime resident of One Fifth Avenue, a desirable Manhattan address. She lives with her nephew, Philip Oakland, and is constantly concerned about his romantic relationships.⁵¹ She immediately didn't like Philip's new girlfriend, Lola; yet, she still tried to get along with her.⁵² Enid is known as one of the most notorious and oldest residents of the building, but she considers herself lucky to live in a place "with lots of other people and interesting things going on all the

time, it was very pleasant to be old.”⁵³ She believes that even at 82 years old it is important to remain active. She is also adamant about not becoming “one of those women who accumulated dust and junk.”⁵⁴ She wants to stay in the know and continue to enjoy all that New York City has to offer.

Enid, who has never married, made New York City her home. She enjoys favorite lunch spots and regularly attends the ballet. “She always sat in the first row in the first ring in seat 113, which she considered the best seat in the house, and she always treated herself to a glass of the most expensive champagne during the intermissions,” Bushnell writes.⁵⁵ The ballet is an escape for Enid away from One Fifth Avenue and the pressures of her job.

Enid has always been interested in journalism. She graduated from Columbia University and took a job as a secretary at the *New York Star* in 1948 which gave her “fascination with the antics of humanity, and possessing a sympathetic ear, had worked her way into the gossip department, eventually securing her own column.”⁵⁶ She has written a gossip column for more than 50 years and now employs a staff to help her. She struggles to use computers but still wants to have final say about her column.⁵⁷

Beyond working on her column, Enid is the former board president at One Fifth Avenue, but she still battles with Mindy Gooch, a cultural columnist for a magazine, about how the building should be run. She still enjoys some of the perks of being the board president, including having access to apartment building keys.⁵⁸ Enid organizes residential events including a memorial service for Louise Houghton, who was her long-time friend and oldest resident of One Fifth Avenue.⁵⁹ She also makes time to visit her stepmother, Flossie Davis, across Fifth Avenue.⁶⁰

As Seen on TV

Bushnell's *New York Observer* column, which was later turned into the novel *Sex and the City*, had a cult following in New York City. Among those readers was television creator, writer, and producer Darren Star. Bushnell eventually met with Star who optioned her book and began developing it for HBO.⁶¹ The show, also named *Sex and the City*, became a hit for the channel and ran from 1998 until 2004. Sarah Jessica Parker was cast as Carrie Bradshaw, the lead character and narrator of the series. At the beginning of the series, she is described as a "sexual anthropologist" as she focuses on various types of Manhattan singles.⁶²

In the novel, Carrie's circle of friends is larger than in the television series. The show primarily focuses on: Miranda Hobbes, a lawyer; Charlotte York, a New York art gallery director, and Samantha Jones, a public relations firm owner. Cynthia Nixon, Kirsten Davis, and Kim Cattrall portray these characters, respectively. Also, unlike the novel, the series doesn't just focus on Carrie's relationship with Mr. Big. Instead, she has various suitors but ultimately finds her way back into Mr. Big's arms during the series finale.

Carrie's happily ever after in the series is also different from the book where she is happily single at the end of the story. However, when audiences meet Carrie again in the New Line Cinema's release *Sex and the City: The Movie*, she is no longer romantically attached and living happily as a single girl in New York City. Yet, Carrie's life changes once again when Mr. Big returns. They get married and live in Carrie's

dream home. Carrie's story will continue in May 2010 when New Line Cinema releases the highly anticipated sequel to *Sex and the City: The Movie*.

Sex and the City is not the only Bushnell work that has been adapted for the small screen. With much less fanfare, *Lipstick Jungle* was made into an NBC dramedy that aired for only two seasons during 2008 and 2009. Nico Reilly, whose name was changed from Nico O'Neilly, is played by Kim Raver in the series. Brooke Shields and Lindsay Price, respectively, played Wendy Healy and Victory Ford.

In both the series and the novel, Nico is unhappily married and begins an extramarital affair with Kirby. However, in the series, Nico's husband dies of a heart attack leaving her to have a full-fledged romance with Kirby. She also has no children in the series and must come to terms with always putting her career before her personal life.

Lipstick Jungle did not receive the commercial or critical acclaim of *Sex and the City*. Ken Tucker of *Entertainment Weekly* writes, "The chums spend a lot of *Sex and the City*-ish time dishing walking, eating, or drinking; they have man problems (their guys are sensitive wimps, including Andrew McCarthy's mega-billionaire whom I call Mr. Small.)"⁶³ The series failed to connect with audiences and was canceled in 2009.

The Image of the Journalist

In each of Bushnell's novels, the female journalist is willing to do anything to get the story or obtain career advancement. All of these women are independent and hold powerful positions within New York society. The women appear less interested in finding true love, as they repeatedly claim, and would simply rather sleep with men to get

sexual satisfaction. Struggling to balance their demanding jobs and private lives, these characters differ from many of the stereotypes of the female journalist found in popular culture today.

All of Bushnell's characters are journalists that do not report "hard" news. Instead, they focus on style, dating, and gossip, which has been a staple of female journalists in films and television. According to Alex Barris in *Stop the Presses! The Newspaperman in American Films*, Hollywood's female reporters "did more glamorous work than most of those who toiled on real papers. Too often, young female reporters, even on big city papers, have been confined to covering 'social' news, 'women's page' features..."⁶⁴ None of Bushnell's characters appears to have a desire to cover stories that would not have been seen on the lifestyle pages. However, oftentimes in popular culture, these female journalists are fighting their editors to cover hard-hitting stories as seen in the film *How to Lose A Guy in 10 Days*. Andie Anderson is *Composure Magazine's* "How To" columnist, but she would rather do stories about "things that matter like politics, the environment, and foreign affairs."⁶⁵ Andie is willing to do anything to please her editor in hopes of getting more assignments to her liking.

Andie and Bushnell's character of Carrie in *Sex and the City* are similar because they are both portrayed as being career-orientated. Historian Donna Born explains that the typical female journalist in popular culture is "single and young, attractive, independent, reliable, courageous, competent, curious, determined, economically self-supporting, professional and compassionate."⁶⁶ These characteristics can be found in both Andie and Carrie, but these women are also driven to succeed at almost any cost. They risk relationships and, at times, their own personal happiness for their careers. Each story

deals with themes of gender equality, which have been a staple of journalism films since the early 1930s.⁶⁷ Howard Good, a professor of journalism at the State University of New York at New Paltz, writes, “In the films, journalism functions as a vehicle for exploring certain gender-based conflicts – career versus marriage, workplace versus home, co-workers versus family, freedom of the night versus middle-class domesticity.”⁶⁸ These issues are not only discussed in *Sex and the City*, but are also key problems in all of Bushnell’s stories. Her characters will do anything to get ahead in their careers.

From Carrie using her personal life as a social experiment for the column to Nico’s efforts to climb the corporate ladder, these women show that they are not afraid of what people might think and are always working on ways to get ahead of their competition. However, readers meet these characters when they are already established journalists. Thus, they do not see these women go through the stereotypical sob sister scenario of rising through the reporting ranks. “The sob sister always has to prove herself,” Joe Saltzman writes in *Frank Capra and the Image of the Journalist in American Film*. “She has to persuade the males around her that she is worthy of their respect. She often screws up before winning her stripes, but, by and large, she is an independent, hardworking reporter who never lets her newspaper down.”⁶⁹ Bushnell’s characters are fiercely independent and hardworking, but their rise to success is not chronicled in her novels.

Bushnell’s characters also do not fit into the sob sister stereotype, as they do not typically give up their careers to sustain a happy home life. Saltzman writes, “By the end of the film, most sob sisters, no matter how tough or independent during the film, would give up anything for marriage, children, and a life at home.”⁷⁰ Bushnell’s characters don’t

all have happily ever afters or perfect families. In fact, in Bushnell's novels, Nico in *Lipstick Jungle* is the only female journalist to have a child.

Due to their focus on work, Bushnell's characters also face romantic dilemmas with the exception of Enid in *One Fifth Avenue* who was never married. These women are always trying to make their relationships work even though they take a back seat to their careers. Nico's life mirrors the character of Miranda Priestly, played by Meryl Streep, in the 2006 film *The Devil Wears Prada*. Beyond both women running successful magazines, Nico and Miranda allow their personal lives to suffer in order to maintain their professional lives.⁷¹

Miranda and Nico, along with the rest of Bushnell's female protagonists, share a love of fashion. Previously, female journalists were portrayed as wearing styles that were similar to men's fashions. They used their fashion choices as a way to appear equal to the opposite sex in the workplace. In a series of Warner Brothers films released from 1937 to 1939, Torchy Blane, a female journalist, typically dressed in "a tailored jacket and a skirt of matching fabric, sometimes with a blouse under the jacket, sometimes just an artfully arranged scarf."⁷² However, over time, the image of female journalists changed to show how women were bringing feminine fashion to the workplace. In her novels, Bushnell pushed the envelope of fashion in the workplace and on the streets of New York City. Consequently, her characters' television counterparts become known as fashion icons of their generation.

Regardless of what they are wearing, female protagonists often wonder if they can really "have it all." Through Bushnell's portrayal of the female journalist in novels, it becomes clear that these women cannot. Enid, the oldest journalist portrayed by

Bushnell, was never married. Carrie loves Mr. Big but still can't seem to make it work and is left "happily" single at the end of the book. Both Winnie and Nico stay in loveless marriages. Dodo turns to extramarital affairs to add spice to her life. The only Bushnell character to get the fairytale ending is the unnamed journalist in her short story "The Single Process." Bushnell's novels make it seem impossible to have the best of both worlds: a successful career and happy home life.

Women in the Media

Beyond portraying female journalists, Bushnell's work opens the door to a larger discussion about the way in which females are portrayed in the media. Feminist author Naomi Wolf declared Carrie Bradshaw the icon of the decade. She explains, "Bushnell was brave enough to lay bare the secret – that for many women the search for love is the same urgent, central, archetypal quest story that for men is played out in war narratives and adventure tales. Bushnell was gutsy enough to disclose that even we, serious, accomplished, feminist women spend a lot of time, when we are alone with our female friends, telling stories centered on the men with whom we are romantically entangled, exploring the quality of the love and attraction, the romance and the sex."⁷³ Bushnell's portrayal of women living in the Big Apple focuses on friendships among women and their struggles to find the right man.

The book *Sex and the City* was released on September 1, 1997 and subsequently the HBO series first aired June 6, 1998.⁷⁴ During the same year, *Time* magazine posed the question, "Is Feminism Dead?" on its cover.⁷⁵ Astrid Henry, an assistant professor of

Women's Studies and English at Saint Mary's College, Indiana explains that feminism, at the time, was not only alive, but thriving. A new "third wave" of feminism had just emerged which females who had never lived in a world without the women's movement spearheaded.⁷⁶ The show *Sex and the City* became a mirror of the movement of the time and "functioned as a forum about women's sexuality as it had been shaped by the feminist of the last 30 years."⁷⁷ Bushnell created characters that openly discussed their sexuality and relationships with one another.

In the article, "Sex and New York: Female Relationships in Wharton and Bushnell," Satoko Kakihara of the UCLA Center for the Study of Women describes the friendships portrayed in Bushnell's work as supportive, unlike those found in other novels, including Wharton's *The House of Mirth* and *The Age of Innocence*. "The strong female friendships in Bushnell's novels contrast with the lack of such relationships in Wharton's novels, in which the female protagonists battle the male-dominated city alone, sometimes receiving criticism rather than support from other female characters," she writes.⁷⁸ According to Kakihara, the female relationships in Bushnell's novels depict female friendships as "the ideal partnerships in inherently masculine spaces."⁷⁹

Each character featured on *Sex and the City* became an archetype of contemporary women. The series shows four women who had their own opinions about careers, relationships, and sex. Kirsten Davis, the actress who played Charlotte, explains, "I love that the four of us are so different, that we have the variety of choices displayed without saying, 'This is the right one' and 'This is the wrong one.'"⁸⁰ Each week, the program focused on the real issues that women in living in America were facing at the time.

Bushnell writes about women who are looking for love and those who are unhappily married. She doesn't see one way of living as the fairytale. She allows her characters to not only find themselves over the course of her novels, or television series, but also permits them to discover if marriage and children are right for them. Michael Patrick King, the executive producer of the series, explains, "We get to say what no one would ever say to single people in their thirties, which is 'Maybe your life is better than the married people's?'"⁸¹ Bushnell writes about female characters that take charge of their own lives, which is not often seen in books written by males. Wolf explains, "Male writers have structured stories around exactly this character from F. Scott Fitzgerald to JD Salinger to Philip Roth; but Carrie showed audiences week after week that a lively female consciousness was as interesting as female sexuality or motherhood or martyrdom – the tradition(al) role model options."⁸² Carrie became the champion of single women everywhere.

Carrie is an example of a woman who doesn't need the traditional nuclear family. Instead, she finds love and support through spending time with her friends. Henry writes, "One of the most important themes of *Sex and the City* is the value of female friendships and the role of these friendships in helping each of the women characters to understand herself and her life."⁸³ Over the course of the series, Carrie breaks up with men and finds new relationships over and over again, but she always comes back to her friends. In one voiceover, Carrie explains, "The most important thing in life is your family...in the end, they're the people you always turn to. Sometimes it's the family you're born into and sometimes it's the one you make for yourself."⁸⁴ For Carrie, her family is clearly made up of her female friends as they appear indispensable to her.

However, some feminists disagree with the notion that Bushnell's work provides a good example for women. Elizabeth Kaufer Busch, an assistant professor of American studies at Christopher Newport University, argues that characters, including Ally McBeal of the Fox drama of the same name, Bridget Jones in *Bridget Jones's Diary*, and Bushnell's Carrie Bradshaw clearly show "single women as distressed, lonely and miserable."⁸⁵ She argues that over the course of these television series that women forgot about their own identities and feel pressure to conform to the women that their significant others want them to be. Of the *Sex and the City* television show, she explains, "The series finale finds the women abandoning their sexually liberated, independent status in which they 'have sex like men' for not-so-single, not-so-sexy positions as supportive wives, doting mothers, domestic homemakers, and monogamous partners."⁸⁶ This may be true of the series *Sex and the City*. However, it is important to note that Bushnell keeps Carrie "happily single" in her own novel.

Conclusion

Bushnell's column and novels were popular but it was *Sex and the City* on HBO that boosted the status of frank-talking women on television shows and in works of fiction. All of Bushnell's novels feature female characters that are relatable to 21st century women and break the traditional stereotypes of female journalists often found in popular culture today. Bushnell is at the forefront of changing the way that female journalists are seen in film, television, and books.

When viewers and readers met Carrie, she may have stood alone as a feminist icon for women who were still trying to figure out how to balance their professional and personal lives, but today, she is joined by a growing league of female journalists who do not fit into the traditional model of the sob sister. These women are unwilling to give up their careers to get married and have children. Bushnell is redefining what it means to be a journalist, or simply a career woman, for today's generation. Her characters make no apologies for doing anything to get ahead in their careers and are always willing to put their own personal lives on the backburner.

While feminists may disagree about the message that Bushnell is sending to her readers, it is clear that Bushnell wanted her characters to have their own goals, develop friendships with other females, and not be dependent on men to obtain their self-worth. Bushnell refuses to dictate how women should choose to live their lives or create cookie-cutter characters that appear flawless to readers. Instead, she takes readers on a journey with her characters as they discover who they want to be and how they fit into society. In a *New York Times* article, Bushnell explains, "It's really about the struggle for self-actualization, the struggle to believe in yourself against the odds of what society tells women. How do we live life on our own terms? It's an issue for all of us."⁸⁷ Bushnell may not yet have the answer to her own question, but she is writing about issues that matter to women, breaking away from the traditional images of female journalists found in popular culture today, and making her readers think about their own roles in society.

Endnotes

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 - ¹⁷ Op. cit., p.x.
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 - ²³ Op. cit., p.30.
 - ²⁴ Op. cit., p.235.
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 - ³³ Op. cit., p.126.
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- ⁵³ Op. cit., p.17.
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Appendix A: Novel Summaries

Four Blondes (2000) By Candace Bushnell

Four Blondes tells the stories of four women facing up to the limitations of their rapidly approaching middle age in an era that worships youth. In one story, Winnie, a successful columnist, is married to a mediocre literary journalist. The victims of relentless ambition and disappointment, they lash out at one another with insults, each finding their only solace in one-night stands. In another story in the novel, an unnamed 40-year-old

journalist, disillusioned with Manhattan males, travels to London on a magazine assignment to compare English and American men's attitudes about sex.

Lipstick Jungle (2005) by Candace Bushnell

Lipstick Jungle tells the story of three high-powered Manhattan career women, each caught in a midlife crisis. Victory Ford, Nico O'Neilly, and Wendy Healy have achieved success in fashion, glamour, and media, but boardroom triumphs and bathrooms trysts leave them still unsatisfied. Nico O'Neilly is the glamorous, brilliant editor of *Bonfire Magazine*—the pop-culture bible for fashion, show business, and politics. Considered one of the most powerful women in publishing, she seems to have it all. But in a midlife crisis, she suddenly realizes this isn't enough.

One Fifth Avenue (2008) by Candace Bushnell

One Fifth Avenue tells the story of a group of females, who live out or dream of living out, their fantasies in an Art Deco building in Manhattan. One woman is gossip columnist Enid Merle who lives in the building with her screenwriter nephew, Philip Oakland. They both struggle to uphold traditions and their own souls.

Sex and the City (1996) by Candace Bushnell

Sex and the City is a collection of sex columns by Candace Bushnell, originally published in *The New York Observer*. The novel chronicles the mating habits of New York's cultural elite as Bushnell infiltrates celebrity affairs, sex clubs, and posh suburbs to give an inside account of the quintessential '90s romance and the never-ending search for the perfect marriage partner in high society. This novel introduced the world to Carrie Bradshaw, a columnist, who was prominently featured in the HBO series of the same name.

Trading Up (2003) by Candace Bushnell

Trading Up tells the story of a lingerie model named Janey Wilcox, whose reach exceeds her grasp and whose newfound success has gone to her head. Wilcox was first introduced to readers in *Four Blondes* as a mildly famous one-time model. Dodo Blanchette, a lifestyle reporter for a New York CBS affiliate, also is featured.