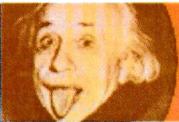


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Lawrence Schwartzwald / Liaison

Falling again? Mr. Big (Chris Noth) and Ms. Bradshaw (Sarah Jessica Parker) in a scene from this Sunday's season finale

'Sex' Appeal

Women and men—some of them even straight—discuss why they're stuck on 'Sex and the City'

By B. J. Sigesmund
NEWSWEEK WEB EXCLUSIVE

October 12— Phyllis Milia goes out on dates on Friday and Saturday. But never on Sunday. The single Chicago woman has a standing engagement that night with three girlfriends, close pals Chris, Cindy and Monica.

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B.J. Sigesmund
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

EACH WEEK, the four gather at one of their homes to eat supper, drink wine—and indulge in “Sex and the City.” The moment the credits wrap on the racy HBO program, their tongues start wagging. “You sit around with your core group of girls and talk about it,” says Milia, a 35-year-old technical recruiter. “It’s cheaper than therapy.”

And a heck of a lot more fun. The trend-setting, Zeitgeist-surfing series, which details the dating and sexual travails of four (usually) single Manhattan career women, finishes its third season on Sunday night. This year, as many as five million viewers have tuned in each week for a dose of its outrageous bedroom antics and guffaw-worthy sex talk. But like Milia and her friends, legions of female fans have watched to see a reflection—albeit, a highly exaggerated one—of their own lives.

“You get a profile of four women who have depth,” says Amber Hamilton, a Washington, D.C., publicist who started making “Sex and the City” appointment TV early this season. “I appreciate how honest it is,” says the 23-year-old. “It shows them making mistakes. You know, even business-like, responsible women do stupid things from time to time. We all have lapses in judgment.” Hamilton was particularly affected this season when Carrie (Sarah Jessica Parker) cheated on her new boyfriend Aidan (John Corbett) with her old flame Mr. Big (Chris Noth). “After she and Aidan broke up, she took off and ended up with someone else the next week. I thought she needed to take some time, to be alone and give some serious thought to what she had done. Instead, she got right back into it,” says Hamilton. “[The show] has been a way for me to look at someone else’s relationships and see some of the common mistakes

"Men think that if you're a hard-ass, that's all there is to it. Samantha shows that even as a hard-ass, you can have a soft, insecure side you show to your girlfriends."

— JULIE CARRASCO

I've made in mine."

Julie Carrasco, a 34-year-old Albuquerque haircolorist whose phone starts ringing immediately after each week's episode, believes men can learn a lot about women from watching the show. "They learn what women want, what women talk about and what they want to *know* about," she says. She even uses Samantha (Kim Cattrall), the hard-driving, promiscuous public relations executive, as an example. "Men think that if you're a hard-ass, that's all there is to it. Samantha shows that even as a hard-ass, you can have a soft, insecure side you show to your girlfriends."

Though we don't have any hard numbers, men *do* watch "Sex and the City." But what, exactly, do they see? For starters, "they're definitely all pretty hot," says Josh Abramson, a 31-year-old Web

entrepreneur in New York, who describes his personality as somewhere between Aidan and Mr. Big. "Women who are candid with me seem to say similar things to what women express on the show." But Abramson sees mixed messages for men in the program. To him, the Aidan plot line—debated widely among female viewers—simply reaffirmed that "nice guys finish last." And don't get him started on the episode in which uptight lawyer Miranda (Cynthia Nixon) becomes smitten with a guy who's disguised as a six-foot-tall sandwich, a walking advertisement who repeatedly mutters "Eat me" as she passes him on the street. "You're supposed to be a gentleman," Abramson says. "But then she starts *fantasizing* about the guy. What's that tell you? Instead of being crass and rude, he's mysterious."

Abramson's coworker, Steven Yee, has even less patience for the program, which his fiancé makes him watch every week. (In payment, he forces her to watch "Arli\$\$," a comedy about sports agents that immediately follows "Sex.") "A lot of my girlfriend's friends are like those women, very cliquey and trendy," says the 31-year-old. "Carrie's a good woman, but she's a stupid little ho in my opinion. Women identify with Carrie because they want to look at her and say she's thirtysomething and not married and life is just that complicated. It gives them reason to be like, 'It's OK to be that way'."

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Of course, gay men seem to get it.

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“The banter between those women is the same as with the gay boys I hang out with—they’re frank and they don’t hold back,” says Steven Westman, a 38-year-old Albuquerque writer who will watch the Oct. 15 finale with

Carrasco and a group of friends at a gathering in San Francisco. Everyone in attendance has to wear fancy designer shoes, just like the show’s heroines. “All week long we’ve been talking about it on the phone. We’re going to do sangria and cosmos and get naughty and drunk and laugh our asses off,” says Westman. “Then we’ll be stuck without them for a year.” But at least they’ll be free on Sunday nights.

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