

Sex and the City's Daughters:

The Representation of Women in *Cashmere Mafia*, *Gossip Girl* and *Hart of Dixie*.



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Abstract

My dissertation is an examination of the repercussions and afterlife of the series *Sex and the City*. This project situates *Sex and the City* in its context and analyses its significance as an example of Chick Lit and as an HBO product, as well as a series that challenged the presentation of women on television. The aim of this research is to reach conclusions on how other series have responded to the challenges started by *Sex and the City*, whether they go beyond the established limits or, on the contrary, still fall into conservative notions of femininity. The methodology involves textual analysis within the framework of cultural and gender studies in order to reach conclusions based on the interpretation of the texts under analysis and on the use of relevant secondary sources that support the findings. Results seem to suggest that television series aimed at women, despite being targeted as products of female empowerment, relentlessly promote patriarchy and sexist ideas also present in our current society.

Keywords: *Sex and the City*, *Cashmere Mafia*, *Gossip Girl*, *Hart of Dixie*, Chick Lit, HBO, the presentation of women in the media.

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1. Introduction.

Sex and the City (HBO 1998-2004) is a television series that challenged the presentation of women and femininity in the media by offering progressive ideas. Accordingly, the show's outstanding success led to the creation of several series featuring a group of professional women such as *Cashmere Mafia* (ABC 2008) or *Lipstick Jungle* (NBC 2008-2009), which focus on their lives and vicissitudes. The objective of my dissertation is to consider the influence of *Sex and the City* and analyse how other contemporary series that followed the same or a similar pattern have responded to its challenges. On that account, what I intend to find out is whether these series go beyond the limitations of *Sex and the City* or turn out to be conservative and not to advance the cause of feminism. In the case of *Sex and the City*, after six seasons celebrating sisterhood and singlehood, the show regressed to a fairly conservative discourse because of its reluctance to ultimately present singlehood as a viable choice and its emphasis on romance and marriage as the fundamental objectives for women. Therefore, my aim is to determine whether similar series dare to step beyond the logics of romance as the only 'happy ending' for women or are still constrained by it.

To proceed, I will first introduce *Sex and the City*, taking into account its generic affiliation –Chick Lit– and as an HBO product, a subscription channel that changed the face of television with its daring marketing strategies and bold material. Having said that, I would like to mention that I have watched several series in order to do research for my dissertation, which include *Cashmere Mafia*, *Lipstick Jungle*, *Hart of Dixie* (The CW 2012-), *Gossip Girl* (The CW 2007-2012) or *Pretty Little Liars* (ABC 2010-), but because of the scope of my dissertation I have decided to just focus on three of them: *Cashmere Mafia*, *Gossip Girl* and *Hart of Dixie*.

I have chosen these three in particular because, in spite of their similarities with *Sex and the City*, they also have differences with the show, which will enable me to be more specific in my conclusions. Firstly, *Cashmere Mafia*, like *Sex and the City*, focuses on a group of female professionals, as is also the case of *Lipstick Jungle*. Secondly, *Gossip Girl*, presents a group of females in the glamorous Upper East Side of

Manhattan –like *Sex and the City*– although the series is aimed at a teenage audience. Within this group I could also have considered other shows such as *Pretty Little Liars*. And last, but not least, I examine *Hart of Dixie* which, like series such as *Men in Trees* (ABC 2006-2008), features a female professional as a protagonist but does not focus on female friendship as *Sex and the City* does, since it has a solo protagonist.

As for the methodology, I will rely on textual analysis –to read the implications of what is said in the texts– within the framework of cultural and gender studies in order to understand the presentation of women in the media. According to McKee, through textual analysis researchers can “obtain a sense of the ways in which, in particular cultures at particular times, people make sense of the world around them” (2003: 3). Thus, through a close reading of the texts I will be able to analyse whether patriarchal notions of romance are popularized or challenged in the media.

Furthermore, I have made use of secondary sources to contextualize and support my claims, such as Douglas’ *The Rise of Enlightened Sexism* (2010), Whelehan’s *The Feminist Bestseller* (2005) and *Overloaded: Popular Culture and the Future of Feminism* (2000) or Negra’s *What a Girl Wants?: Fantasizing the Reclamation of Self in Postfeminism* (2009). As well as these, I have watched all the seasons of the shows I am working on for my research, which include: *Sex and the City* (6 Seasons, 94 Episodes), *Cashmere Mafia* (1 Season, 7 Episodes), *Gossip Girl* (6 Seasons, 121 Episodes) and *Hart of Dixie* (3 Seasons, 66 Episodes), as well as all the seasons of two of the other shows I mention: *Lipstick Jungle* (2 Seasons, 21 Episodes) and *Pretty Little Liars* (4 Seasons, 96 Episodes). However, and even though I take into account the narrative arcs developed in the three series that I have chosen for analysis, I only provide examples from a few episodes in order to keep the length of this dissertation as close as possible to the established limits.

2. Situating *Sex and the City*: Generic Affiliation and Repercussions.

2.1. Situating the Series.

Sex and the City (HBO 1998-2004) is a series that openly challenged the presentation of women on television. The series focuses on the situation of women who, despite having reached the age of thirty, push marriage into the background –not to mention maternity– in order to enjoy their careers as professional women, and rejoice in the freedom of being economically independent.

Contrarily to the trend followed in some network comedies of the nineties, which started portraying feminist concerns on TV, such as *Murphy Brown* (CBS 1988-98) or *Roseanne* (ABC 1988-97), by focusing the entire plot on a single character, *Sex and the City* features four lead characters, which in my opinion is key to its success. Each of these women represents a valid option of femininity, as there is not just one model to follow. Therefore, it is easier for the female audience to identify with at least one of the characters. Nevertheless, despite being different in some way, all share some basic features: they are independent, successful career women, who believe in their right to choose and equal opportunities for both men and women. Their economy allows them to live comfortably in their own apartment and to enjoy special treats. Moreover, they have sexual freedom and do not believe in marriage as the magic answer to their happiness.

Carrie Bradshaw (Sarah Jessica Parker) works as a journalist for the *New York Star* newspaper. She writes a column entitled 'Sex and the City', in which she gives advice regarding dating and relationships. She uses her friends for inspiration and research and after having discussed a particular topic in a nice café or drinking a Cosmopolitan in the hottest club in Manhattan she is ready to write her new column. She is a fashion lover and in spite of her independence she is still a true romantic. Miranda Hobbes (Cynthia Nixon) works at a law firm. She is the most cynical of the group and boasts of her singlehood instead of regarding it as something outrageous, for she does not believe in love or in social conventions which she thinks limit women's freedom. Samantha Jones (Kim Cattrall) manages her own public relations firm. Samantha is a clear example of how to satisfy one's sexual desires: she does whatever she feels like doing, when and with whom she wants, without

being afraid of what society thinks of her –an unconceivable character had feminism not existed. Finally, Charlotte York (Kristin Davis) directs an art gallery. She still believes in marriage and dreams of finding her soul mate. Charlotte defends the point that the Women's Movement has to do also with the right to choose and she chooses marriage and the right to create a happy family.

The appeal of the series lies, first and foremost, in the deconstruction of the patriarchal assumptions that have relentlessly conditioned women's lives and have dictated what women need or want. *Sex and the City's* characters prove that a woman's fulfilment does not need to be subordinate to a male figure. Although sex, as its title indicates, is one of the central themes of the show, *Sex and the City* focuses mainly, as I have mentioned above, on the situation of professional and liberated women that are still single at the age of thirty and, therefore, are regarded as anomalous in the eyes of society. Even nowadays, it is still taken for granted that a woman can only feel totally accomplished if she has found somebody to share her life with. Even if women have succeeded in other areas, have found a challenging job, are smart or have a higher revenue than a man, nothing counts if we do not end up finding Prince Charming. The series questions this assumption and gives examples that prove that marriage is not all women's ultimate goal in life. To put it bluntly, *Sex and the City* challenges the notion that women do only feel fulfilled if they are in a relationship or married.

The series also brings to the surface that the ideal man may not exist, and it might be harmful to keep on reading fairy tales, for if we do not find *him*, we will spend the rest of our lives feeling frustrated and incomplete. In order to compensate for this emotional gap, *Sex and the City* promotes friendship as a purer form of love. Yet, we do not have to be mistaken, the series does not reject love relationships, it just teaches us to be more demanding and find somebody that meets our expectations. In short, *Sex and the City* is a celebration of women's singlehood and independence in a context in which a woman who enjoys her sexuality freely and does not conform to the social roles ruled by a patriarchal tradition is strongly criticized.

The series is based on the characters of a book by Candace Bushnell published in 1996 under the same title. Bushnell was a columnist in the *New York Observer* and using the alter-ego of Carrie Bradshaw, she provided

her readers with an exploration of the art of mating. After having written several entries, she decided to exploit her work in the form of a narrative. The producer Darren Star became interested in Bushnell's book and was inspired to produce a sex comedy from a single woman's perspective. He took the project to ABC, but the commercial network was concerned by its adult content and turned the offer down. Eventually, Star was given the funding by HBO to produce a pilot.

Sex and the City has been a knockout since its premiere on the 6th June 1998 on the American premium cable channel HBO (Home Box Office). The series consists of ninety-four episodes which are divided into six seasons (1998-2004). The audience grazed 6.5 million becoming a complete success for a paying channel at the same time that assured HBO an important place in the industry.

As for awards, in 2001 *Sex and the City* received the Emmy for Outstanding Comedy Series, becoming the first cable show to win the most important prize. Moreover, giving evidence to the show's capacity to engage viewers from around the world, the Hollywood Foreign Press Association awarded the series with the Golden Globe for Best Television Series: Musical or Comedy for three consecutive years (2000-2002). In 2002, another Golden Globe was given to Sarah Jessica Parker for Best Performance by an Actress in a Television Series Musical/Comedy. Additionally, the series also won the Screen Actors Guild for Outstanding Performance by an Ensemble in a Comedy Series, besides three more Emmys for Casting, Costuming and Outstanding Directing for a Comedy Series.

Nobody would deny the fact that *Sex and the City* not only became a media phenomenon but also had an impact on our contemporary culture like no other series had before. As the *New York Times* stated in 2004, its comedy "so perfectly captures the mood of a culture that it becomes more than a hit: it becomes a sociological event" (Edgerton and Jones 2008: 193). In fact, the series even reached *Time* magazine in 2000 featuring its four characters on the cover under the headline 'Who Needs a Husband?' in an issue that focused on the increasing number of women who supported single life as an option to marriage.

Sex and the City has had a lucrative afterlife since it was on air for the first time. The series is available on DVD and, into the bargain, HBO's website offers a wide range of products –from clothes and jewellery to limited edition videos– as well as a list of restaurants and shops that the characters attend regularly, contributing to nurture the hype around the series.

However, the *Sex and the City* phenomenon would not have been possible without a channel that was able to produce such a risky project, and this is HBO. From the early beginning, HBO has sold itself as the place to find 'quality television' offering innovative products that are different from other channels. It is evident that HBO's success is the result of how it defines and brands itself: something worth paying for. Actually, HBO has largely benefited from stating that the channel is aimed at an educated audience that apparently does not watch TV. Thus, HBO offers value for money, it sells knowledge and 'cultural capital', a term used by Pierre Bourdieu (Edgerton and Jones 2008: 27), which will elevate their subscribers' status in society.

Apart from branding, technological innovation and original programming have been other key factors that have contributed to HBO's international success. Furthermore, we should not forget that HBO is financed by its subscriptions and not advertisements. This gives total freedom to the channel to incorporate the content that other networks are not allowed to offer in order to please advertisers, and this content is shown without commercial breaks. Thus, HBO gives autonomy to directors, producers and writers to be creative and contribute to the cause of exclusivity.

But why does HBO advertise itself as better? To put it briefly, subscription channels must make viewers believe they will not find what they offer on public television. Therefore, HBO has to continually sell itself as being selective and only offering high-quality products. As Eric Kessler, Executive Vice President of Marketing at HBO points out "the consumer makes a purchase decision on [their] brand every single month, so [they] need to convince the consumer that [their] brand is different and is worth paying for" (qtd. in Leverette 2008: 31).

In the past, TV was not seen as a conveyor of knowledge. However, with the emergence of cultural studies, it has been argued that television programs can have cultural and historical references and deal also with social concerns. Unfortunately, for a long time, television has lacked such institutions and critics with enough cultural authority to assert that commercial television series can have the same narrative complexity and character building as a novel. Yet, during the past decades, cultural studies' critics have found it acceptable to assume television series are a work of art. In some way, HBO is responsible for this change, as it has encouraged its viewers to consume television series with a more serious attitude, which the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu named 'aesthetic disposition' (Edgerton and Jones 2008: 26). This means that certain television series demand some knowledge and aptitude which not everybody possesses, and HBO wants to make this clear with the slogan it uses to advertise itself, "It's Not TV, It's HBO".

Critics and viewers, to conclude with this section, value HBO for its polemical, provocative content that always leaves food for thought. Without exception, television has been redefined and the network that turned the switch is no other than HBO. As Leverette notes, Ray Solley, head of cable's development consultants, once said: "there is a feeling about HBO that when that name goes on a program, you at least know that it's going to be –whatever genre– the top of its line" (2008: 84).

2.2. *Sex and the City* as Chick Lit.

Sex and the City is one of the most prominent examples of Chick Lit, a genre which is also known as post-feminist fiction. Chick Lit focuses essentially on women's vicissitudes and concerns from their point of view and it pays particular attention to the development of personal relationships. As I will illustrate later, the protagonists are professional women in their late 20s and early 30s who are still interested in finding Mr. Right but do not want to sacrifice their professional lives for the 'happily ever after'. The genre uses a confessional tone of narration by employing the first person, often through diaries or emails the readers identify with. Another important characteristic of this genre is that the issues and problems it deals with – although serious– are tackled humorously.

Chick Lit originated as a response to the legacy of Second Wave feminism, as this was unable to answer some questions regarding sexuality, relationships and romantic love and how to combine family life with a career. Contemporary women needed a space to explore and express their fears and anxieties and they found it in Chick Lit. As Whelehan states, Second Wave feminism is “the source of all their problems and anxieties” since it could not remedy “some of the most intimate problems for women –how to conduct heterosexual relationships, how to negotiate self-identity, and how to deal with power” (2005: 218). Therefore, Chick Lit reflects the anxiety of the modern woman about the heritage left by the Women’s Movement in the 1990s, specifically, the burden of choice.

Like every popular narrative, Chick Lit follows a formula –the term used to make reference to the pattern followed by different genres. The action is set in an urban city and the book covers usually feature fashion items such as high-heels or handbags. Typically, the genre contains the same kind of characters. The protagonist, the heroine, is a female post-graduate in her late 20s early 30s. She is normally single and has a chaotic personal life. In short, our heroines no longer cook or do the housework. Despite being a mess at home, they are efficient and highly responsible in their professional careers. Furthermore, these heroines are not pleased with their physical appearance, in particular with their weight, so they struggle with miraculous diets. Yet, that is nothing new. Brown (1962) in *Sex and the Single Girl* anticipated that being single was not an easy matter for, in order to be successful, women had to be on a diet and exercise regularly. Equally, Whelehan remarks that “to be sexually powerful, the lot of the successful single girl is self-sacrifice, so that self-discipline in matters of diet, exercise, social networking, interior design and fashion are all equally important” (2000: 142).

As for the secondary characters, there are the friends –either females or males, the latter generally homosexual– with whom the heroine shares her fears and anxieties. The relatives are mostly portrayed as a source of discomfort for the protagonist, as they are constantly reminding her it is high time she found a partner. Her colleagues and workplace are seldom a cause of distress, though they are important parts of the

narrative and a great deal of the story is devoted to the vicissitudes at work. Finally, these works would not be possible without the figure of men, who are the main source of conflict. As I have mentioned above, the heroines are still looking for Mr. Right and during this quest they will undergo a long process of trial and error, for the protagonist will be fooled most of the times by the character of Mr. Wrong. Regardless of her romantic adventures, the protagonist will remain single throughout much of the text and will sorely lament her status until she can eventually solve her love conflicts.

It is universally acknowledged that Chick Lit originated with Helen Fielding's second novel, *Bridget Jones's Diary* (1996), although some scholars suggest that the genre stemmed in the nineteenth-century novels which were written by women, such as Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), whose plot, in fact, is reproduced in Fielding's novel. *Bridget Jones's Diary* became an extraordinary publishing success by rendering the choices contemporary young women had to come to grips with, especially how to negotiate between a career life and personal relationships. The central character is a single girl named Bridget who, through a personal diary, confesses her own vulnerabilities –and largely those of all contemporary women of her age– when facing the freedoms modern life puts at her disposal, yet admitting the tension and unease that emerge from this freedom. As Whelehan explains in *The Feminist Bestseller*, the Chick Lit heroine “is crippled by the burden of choice –most particularly the freedom to remain single– and suffers indefinable lassitude at the prospect of career advancement” (2005: 176).

Like other Chick Lit heroines, Bridget also has an obsession with her body. As she states, “[she] [is] a child of Cosmopolitan culture” (Fielding 1996: 52) and recognizes the impact the media has had on her conception of her own physical image; she has been “traumatized by supermodels and too many quizzes and knows that neither [her] personality nor [her] body is up to it if left to its own devices” (Fielding 1996: 52). Nevertheless, she accepts humorously her inability to live up to this ideal of femininity. In fact, in an interview on the BBC's Bookworm programme, Helen Fielding declared that “these are complicated times for women” and that “Bridget is groping through the complexities of dealing with relationships in a morass of shifting roles, and a bombardment of idealized images of modern womanhood” (qtd. in Whelehan 2005: 176-177).

Therefore, it looks as if Bridget is not the only woman who feels confused, and this identification with the protagonist is what made the novel so popular.

In spite of its capacity to deal with women's concerns, Chick Lit has been thought to be quite conservative. Even though Whelehan (2005) claims that the new genre shares common traits with the bestselling novels written by female authors during Second Wave feminism because they both use confessional narrative techniques and deal with women's concerns regarding sexuality, work, family and friendship, she also states that while Consciousness Raising novels¹ lead women from marriage to singledom, Chick Lit novels do the opposite. The final goal of the heroine is to abandon her single status. Reading or watching examples of Chick Lit, it looks as if the only thing women really want is to find Mr. Right and spend the rest of their lives together. Whelehan explains this situation in the following way:

Chick Lit seems to be built on an acknowledgement of the 'failure' of feminism and in each case 'empowered' women must find true self-determination through the right kind of men and some form of truce with their own family. It is as if because feminism seemed to support single life as one ideal in its celebration of autonomous identity, that Chick Lit is committed to showing the obverse –that the only happy ending to aimless singledom is coupledness of the quite traditional one. (2005: 188)

Whelehan (2005) gives several examples of well-known Chick Lit novels in order to support her idea. For instance, Haran's *Having It All* (1992) conveys the idea that you can't have it all. The final message of this story seems to be that even if you have the most high-powered job, "none of it [means] anything if you [love] a man and he [doesn't] want you" (Haran 1992: 221). Hence, while the genre depicts modern career women, its underlying messages are conservative. It seems literature for women has made a step back in the feminist discourse. As Whelehan states,

¹ The term 'Consciousness Raising novel' was coined by Lisa Hogeland and gives name to a new kind of novel written during the 70s whose content reflected the Women's Liberation Movement's ideas about sexuality, gender, race, and politics.

[E]verywhere in contemporary Chick Lit the heroines seem to be on a quest for rules or commanding logic which clarify the meaning of the dating game, yet in virtually every novel the rulebook is thrown out when The One comes through, and the romance breaks every convention as the narrative draws to a close. This notion that true love breaks all the rules of course returns us to the precepts of classical romance and the message that true love is individual and unique, which Second Wave feminists challenged and dismissed as the sugar coating of patriarchy. (2005: 179)

Another example is Katherine Reddy, the protagonist in Pearson's *I Don't Know How She Does It* (2002). Like Liz Ward in *Having it All*, Katherine abandons her important job in order to look after her children and remedy the guilt she feels for not having devoted much time to them. She moves to Derbyshire, like Liz, substituting the city for the country, and finds happiness through motherhood, something she feels she might have lost as a career woman.

Thus, while women in Consciousness Raising novels felt repressed by their relationships with men and the most common solution was to abandon the marital home, what is constraining in Chick Lit narratives is the fact of being single. Single women are still regarded as an anomaly in the twenty-first century. This fact creates frustration among Bridget and her literary and televisual descendants who, in turn, represent every single woman of their age who has still not found Mr. Right. As I stated at the beginning of this section, these messages can have harmful effects on women's consciences if they do not end up succeeding in their quest. For instance, Bridget views her single status with abject fear, predicting that one day she will perish "all alone, half-eaten by an Alsatian" (Fielding 1996: 33).

Ultimately, Whelehan claims that Chick Lit is a "constant re-enactment of the myth that true love seeks you out" (2005: 205). As a result, these narratives end most of the times with a wedding and a family-oriented relationship, even though throughout the story it has been made clear that for young women with "means and style" (Whelehan 2005: 202) there are plenty of possibilities beyond marriage and a nuclear family.

2.3. *Sex and the City*: Significance and Limitations.

As I have stated in the previous sections, the series *Sex and the City* interrogated different ideas about women and femininity as well as advancing several progressive ideas related to the perception of women, the treatment of female sexuality, the portrayal of professional women, the celebration of sisterhood and singlehood, the glamorization of New York, among others. Nevertheless, in spite of such innovative and progressive elements, *Sex and the City* has some limitations. Although it was promoted as a post-feminist series which celebrated women's liberation, it ended up being quite conservative.

2.3.1. *Sex and the City*'s Progressive Agenda.

Sex and the City challenges the presentation of women in the media by offering progressive ideas. The show presents modern women who choose to remain unmarried and offers forms of female empowerment and sexuality. The characters in the series question the idea that what women really want is to get married and have children. Therefore, the most important characteristic that the series highlights is the right to choose. Women no longer need to be in a relationship or married in order to succeed; they can be independent and autonomous. According to Henry, throughout *Sex and the City*'s six seasons, "individual life choices have been a staple plot device –from choices regarding sexual partners to sexual acts, marriage, motherhood and careers" (2004: 71-72).

The same idea is reinforced by Davies quoted in Nelson's chapter from the edited collection *Reading Sex and the City* entitled 'Sister Carrie Meets Carrie Bradshaw: Exploring Progress, Politics and the Single Woman in *Sex and the City* and Beyond'. There she states that "the show is really about a cultural movement" and that "[their] generation and those since have grown up with choices". She highlights that "[they] didn't have to be married by a certain age; [they] could be career women if [they] wanted to be" (Nelson 2004: 88).

Another important feature found in *Sex and the City* is the treatment of female sexuality, sex and relationships. Sex is explicitly discussed, but this time from a woman's point of view, which brings a totally new perspective to the way sexuality is portrayed in the media. In short, the series examines relationships and

mating habits of the single girl with no place for taboos. Akass and McCabe state that “never in an American film or TV series has sophisticated girl talk been more explicit, with every kink and sexual twitch of the urban mating game noted and wittily dissected” (2004: 3).

During the six seasons of *Sex and the City*, women are presented as being demanding in bed and manifest that sexuality and pleasure are not just masculine concerns. Experimenting sexuality with different men is not regarded as immoral. As Henry expresses the idea:

[W]hile all of the characters on *Sex and the City* take an assertive approach to sexual satisfaction, a woman’s right to pleasure is most persistently expressed through the character of Samantha, who is the most sexually active and sexually satisfied of the quartet. ... In its insistence on female orgasm as a fundamental right and essential part of sex, *Sex and the City* challenges dominant media images of heterosexuality, such as pornographic ones, in which female orgasm is secondary to male pleasure. (2004: 75-76)

The four protagonists do not reject the idea of having a heterosexual relationship. Yet, as Mr Right is more difficult to find because women have grown more selective, they want to have fun in between. Therefore, the series celebrates singlehood and highlights the idea that there are women who choose not to marry. Nelson asserts that “we no longer see singlehood as some limbo to be rushed through headlong on the search for a mate. We no longer see those mates as necessarily male. We seek out romantic commitments for the personal and emotional satisfaction they can bring – not to avoid ‘spinsterhood’” (2004: 73).

In the ethos of the series, single women are no longer depicted as wretched as they once were, as is the case with fictional characters such as Bridget Jones or Ally McBeal. Nelson claims that “far from being presented as the pathetic, childish or whorish creatures of times past (and present), these women are proud and protective of their individual accomplishments. When their confidence wanes, they don’t go berserk or kill a jerk, they take themselves to lunch all alone, just to prove they can” (2004: 94-95). Thus, even though *Sex and the City* does not have answers for everything, it “saves the stereotypical spinster from a sad death, even as it presents her with new challenges” (2004: 94-95).

Another important characteristic of *Sex and the City* is its celebration of sisterhood. The show promotes the importance of female companionship and depicts the four friends perfectly happy without men. Female friendship is portrayed positively and the women give each other support, contrarily to more conservative texts. Edgerton and Jones point out that “the women revel in one other’s company, building third-wave friendships based on intimate sharing and raucous laughter” (2008: 198).

The show even suggests that “platonic female friendships are more important than sexual and romantic love and that women can be each other’s life partners in a way that men cannot” (Henry 2004: 67). All in all, the value of female friendship is one of the most important themes of the series. *Sex and the City*’s women help each other to make sense of their lives. In each and every episode, the four women meet “to talk, usually over brunch, something Carrie describes as ‘our Saturday morning ritual: coffee, eggs, and a very private dish session’” (Henry 2004: 67).

Another example of the show’s progressive messages is the portrayal of professional women who are successful. In this case, female power is shown by presenting strong working women who do not “spin out of control emotionally” (Whelehan 2000: 139). Furthermore, these professional women are set in an alluring and captivating environment which strengthens this image of power and high standards of living. New York is glamorized and treated as another protagonist.

Likewise, fashion and cultural identities are central aspects of the show. The character of Carrie deals with matters of identity and consumption. Fashion has historically been associated with frivolity and shallowness and the women who are passionate about shopping and glamour are mostly regarded as foolish and immature and as a threat to the advancement of feminism. Nevertheless, fashion for Carrie is a means of personal expression and a way of asserting her own identity.

Kondo’s study of the fashion industry highlights the importance of abandoning the notion of fashion as frivolous and asserting its “constructive power in culture and identity” as well as “the aesthetic pleasures, desires and political possibilities that can open up within particular regimes of power” (1997: 106). Thus,

Carrie exploits these “aesthetic pleasures, desires and political possibilities” (Kondo 1997: 106) when she consumes fashion. Consequently, through the consumption of fashion Carrie challenges the dominant culture and ideologies of sexuality, class, gender and race as fashion becomes one of the ways in which she asserts her identity and expresses her power.

2.3.2. Engaging but Dangerous: The Limitations of *Sex and the City*.

In spite of the progressive messages in the series, *Sex and the City* failed to adhere to the agenda that had made it such a popular show among women who identified with the spirited, independent and autonomous heroines. Furthermore, it still contains some conservative notions. For instance, all characters are beautiful and glamorous and their standard of living is not realistic. Moreover, the sixth season has some messages that contradict those in the previous seasons. The protagonists obsess about men all the time, singlehood is not an option at the end of the series and marriage and romance are the most important aspects in women’s lives. Besides, women who are too liberal end up being punished.

The clearest example of *Sex and the City*’s backlash is the series’ reluctance to contemplate an ultimate celebration of singlehood and its stereotyped visions of femininity. Although it was promoted as a post-feminist series which celebrated women’s liberation, it ended up advancing a conservative agenda in its sixth and last season and, therefore, it did not advance the cause of feminism.

Akass and McCabe remark that despite the fact that *Sex and the City* was advertised as being a show about sex and the single girl, “it features an active engagement by its female protagonists in the renegotiation of the classic romance fantasy” (2004: 17) and subsequently it focuses on romance and marriage as the ultimate objectives for women and as a protection from loneliness and desolation.

Negra also notes that “while often cited as an example of the kind of female-oriented life-style fiction that has flourished over the last 15 years in a variety of media forms, the much-celebrated/much-debated *Sex and the City* nevertheless came to closure in a strikingly ideologically conservative fashion with the safe settlement of its four ensemble members into commitment and motherhood” (2009: 10).

Considering the above, nobody can deny the fact that singlehood is not an acceptable option by the end of the series. As a way of illustration, Miranda finally marries Steve, her childish and demanding boyfriend and the father of her child. Charlotte converts to Judaism and takes the vows with Harry Goldenblatt, and Carrie is rescued by Mr. Big, her love interest throughout the series. Even Samantha, after having been presented as the most promiscuous of the four and after overcoming a breast cancer, ends up afflicted by the ‘disease’ she had been trying to avoid throughout the series: monogamy. Thus, evidence suggests that “having a career is all well and good, but not if it is at the expense of finding Mr. Right” (Whelehan 2000: 136) and, at the end of the day, “all warn implicitly that the heady days of youth, glamour and social freedom are all too soon replaced by the lengthy twilight of terminal single status” (Whelehan 2000: 136).

Mention should also be made to the fact that all characters are white, belong to the upper-middle class, have challenging jobs and are beautiful and glamorous. Thereby, the series seems to embrace the idea that only sexy and wealthy, as well as well-dressed, women can be successful. Thus, *Sex and the City* falls into stereotyped visions of femininity and promotes an idea of female success based on physical appearance.

We should not overlook the fact that the show also falls into conservative notions by punishing women who are too liberal, no matter if they were celebrated during the previous five seasons. According to Santaulària, in almost all examples of Chick Lit “the Rebecca effect” (2005: 145) is reproduced. Even in the most liberal stories, the sexually aggressive woman who does not respect the law of happiness and marital fidelity pays a very high price for her daring. In the case of Rebecca, who gives the title name to the 1938 novel by Daphne du Maurier and its film version directed by Alfred Hitchcock in 1940, her infidelities are miraculously transmuted into cancer and accidental death during an argument with her husband.

In the case of *Sex and the City*, Samantha –the man-eater– is made to endure a breast cancer, which Santaulària calls “càncer-castigo” (2005: 154). Another example is Lexi Featherstone, a party-girl who is already forty and remains single. She is depicted as being totally out of place wherever she goes and ends up falling, accidentally, off a balcony during one of these parties. It is in this very moment that Carrie “realizes

that, in New York, if you are single at a particular age, the only way to go is downwards” (Santaulària 2005: 154).

As a whole, as I have stated throughout the dissertation, even though the series contains interesting progressive messages, it does not dare to go too far and ends up promoting traditional notions of femininity and equating female success to women’s capacity to find a partner.

3. The Afterlife of *Sex and the City*: A Move Forward or a Step Back?

3.1. *Sex and the City*’s Daughters: A Selection.

The success of *Sex and the City* led to the production of other series which also focus on the vicissitudes of women and/or groups of female friends, such as *Lipstick Jungle* (NBC 2008-2009), *Pretty Little Liars* (ABC 2010-) or *Private Practice* (ABC 2007-2013). Mention should also be made to the fact that there were other series before which also dealt with women’s issues and highlighted female friendship, such as *The Golden Girls* (Touchstone, 1985-1992). Yet, after *Sex and the City* the genre truly proliferated. Henceforth, I will analyze some of these series in order to determine how they have responded to the challenges which started with *Sex and the City* and to find out whether they go beyond its limitations or still stick to the notion that romance is women’s major objective in life.

As established, there are many series that were born out of the success of *Sex and the City*. Nevertheless, by reason of the scope of this dissertation, I will only focus on some of them and will use extracts from chosen episodes in order to support my ideas. The selected series are: *Cashmere Mafia* (ABC 2008), *Gossip Girl* (The CW 2007-2012) and *Hart of Dixie* (The CW 2012-). My purpose is to analyze their discourse and the procedure will involve dealing with each of the series separately. To my mind, this method is much more convenient than discussing them as a whole, for it will enable a more in-depth analysis.

3.2. *Cashmere Mafia*.

3.2.1. Technical Information.

Cashmere Mafia is an American television comedy which was on the air from 6th January to 20th February 2008 on ABC. The show was created by Kevin Wade and produced by Sony Pictures Television together with Darren Star –the same executive producer of *Sex and the City*–, Gail Katz, Jeff Rake and Michael Pressman. *Cashmere Mafia* consists of 7 episodes –although 13 episodes were approved, the Writers’ Strike which took place between 2007 and 2008 made it impossible. Eventually, ABC decided not to renew for a second season. The series was used to replace *Dancing with the Stars* (ABC 2005-) during the off-season and was aired on Wednesdays at 9:00 pm after *Supernanny* (ABC 2004-2012). *Cashmere Mafia* had high ratings while it ran, although critics found several similarities between the show and *Lipstick Jungle*, produced by Candace Bushnell. Therefore, both series indirectly competed and its producers Darren Star and Candace Bushnell, who worked together on *Sex and the City*, put an end to their professional relationship. Despite following the pattern of *Sex and the City*, *Cashmere Mafia* tried to make a difference by addressing current female issues such as how to handle family life and a career at the same time.

3.2.2. What the Series Is about.

Cashmere Mafia presents the life of four successful business women who struggle with finding a balance between their professional and personal life in a glamorous New York City. Mia (Lucy Liu) works as a publicist for the Barnstead Media Group. Zoe (Frances O’Connor) directs the fusions of Gorham Sutter. Juliet (Miranda Otto) is the public relations of the Hotel and Resorts chain Santon Hall, and Bonnie (Caitlin Dowd) is the marketing director of the cosmetics line Lily Parrish.

The series asks the question that has bothered many women since the emergence of feminism: can we have it all? Can a woman have a career and at the same time experience motherhood and create a happy family? The girls have been friends since business school and, following the example of *Sex and the City*, they meet regularly to counsel and support each other. Thus, *Cashmere Mafia* strongly resembles *Sex and the City*. The

women are powerful, intelligent, sexy and ambitious and have fulfilling jobs. They all adore fashion and have a high-standard of living. Nevertheless, following the pattern of Chick Lit, they also struggle with men, cunning workmates or the chaos of making sense of their lives. Yet, in spite of the adversities, they can overcome what life sets for them because they have each other, The Cashmere Mafia Club. In a nutshell, *Cashmere Mafia* is another celebration of female friendship.

3.2.3. The Discourse in *Cashmere Mafia*.

The series has several progressive elements which break with the traditional aspects celebrated in other shows which also deal with women. For instance, *Cashmere Mafia* encourages the idea that marriage does not equal happiness through Juliet's character. In the Pilot Juliet discovers that her husband Davis (Peter Hermann) has been cheating on her with another woman who turns out to be one of her old rivals, Cilla Gray (Noelle Beck). The couple undergoes therapy and Juliet abandons the idea of cheating on her husband in order to get even and decides to forgive him, for as she says to her friends, she "need[s] to do what's right for [her] marriage" ('Pilot' 1.1).

In episode 1.4 'The Deciders', Davis tries to fix the situation by giving Juliet an astounding Aston Martin and by promising that he will put an end to his affair. Afterwards, Davis tells Juliet that he would love to take her to expensive restaurants and appear in one of Mia's magazines as an example of the powerful New York couple. Yet, when Juliet was beginning to move on, a series of incidents take place, which make her reconsider whether her husband is being unfaithful to her again. Juliet struggles with her dream of being the featured Power Couple and her knowing her marriage is a mere façade. Nevertheless, she will find the strength to move forward and ask for a divorce, as in latter episodes Juliet finds out she was on the right track and David was seeing Cilla again. David claims having visited her just for economic reasons and reveals that he is bankrupt. He lets slip that he has taken money from their personal savings and Juliet realizes that the Aston Martin was just for show and to make people believe he was not having a hard time. Thus, it was not intended as a romantic gift.

Eventually, Juliet serves Davis a just desert. She wonders whether had Davis not been struggling with money, he would have told her about Cilla Gray or not. The answer is more than obvious. While in the photo session for Power Couple, Davis moves naturally, as if nothing was wrong with them, but Juliet has made up her mind and does not want to put up with the situation anymore:

Juliet: I'm just tired from all the posing we've been doing.

Davis: Well, just sit, we can take a few ...

Juliet: Of course, we've been posing for years and it never bothered me.

Davis: Please, just get in the car.

Juliet: Davis, the bags behind you aren't props. I filled them with your clothes this afternoon.

Davis: Why?

Juliet: To take with you to the hotel where you'll be staying, once you drive away from *here*. (1.4)

The important point to note is that the series poses the question of whether women should keep on believing that marriages are the only source of their happiness. The episode reminded me of Charlotte from *Sex and the City*. She was also featured in a magazine selling marriage as all women's panacea. Nonetheless, it was just posing, for she knew her dream was falling apart. Thus, the series reveals that marriage does not guarantee happiness and promotes the idea that women need to walk away from unfulfilling domestic arrangements.

The treatment of female sexuality is another progressive element in the show. Sexuality is treated openly and humorously by portraying Caitlin's personal rediscovery of her sexual orientation. She feels attracted to a woman named Alicia, who she meets doing business. In episode 1.2 'Conference Call', the girls want to find Caitlin a date and she finally comes clean:

Caitlin: I'm good.

Zoe: What? What do you mean "You're good?" You're never "good."

Caitlin: Thanks a lot. I am ... have a date.

All: Really?

Mia: You've been holding out on us.

Caitlin: With a woman.

Mia: You've really been holding out on us.

Juliet says with disbelief, "You're gay now?"

Caitlin: Excuse me, can the possible lesbian answer that question? I don't know if I'm gay or I'm straight. I don't want to join a union yet or anything.

Mia: You know what? She's hip. It's the thing to do. It's like when everyone was pregnant, ya know. Lesbians are the new babies.

Caitlin: I met someone I like. It happens to be a woman. That's all I got. Just please, be supportive. And don't act like this never happened to any of you.

Mia: Well, I went to Wellesley. It's practically part of the curriculum.

Zoe: I made out with Jenny McGruber at summer camp. She was really good at lanyard. I had some amazing plastic jewelry that summer.

Juliet: I was trying to process one lesbian — now I have *three*. (1.2)

At the end of the day, the girls realize that it is not about finding the right man anymore, but the right person.

To my mind, it is a really progressive idea, as a part of our society is still reluctant to contemplate the reality of homosexuality, bisexuality, etc.

Another example of the show's progressive messages is the portrayal of professional women who are successful. They take their job seriously and defend it as one of the major sources of their fulfilment. They are ambitious and industrious, and would do whatever it takes to in order to succeed professionally. In episode 1.6 'Yours, Mine and Hers', Mia tells Caitlin that "Mia Mason does not do sick days" and that "[she] went to work when [she] had double pneumonia attached to a rolling IV drip".

Last, but not least, the celebration of female friendship is one of the most important themes of the series, as it is for *Sex and the City*. *Cashmere Mafia* follows the structure of the former: at the end of each episode the women gather together and have some food or take drinks while they make sense of their ups and downs and support each other. Thus, female friendship is strongly encouraged throughout the episodes.

The series is also very good at exposing society's prejudices against women and the sexism that still pervades our world, which are the object of condemnation in the series. The series, for example, shows that some men cannot stand their partner's success. The series shows that some men feel intimidated by powerful career women. This is the case of Mia's fiancé, Jack, who breaks their engagement after Mia gets the promotion for the position he was also opting for. The couple splits up and walks in different directions. It is not until Jack gets a new important job –a job which he thinks is as good as Mia's– that he is prepared to go back to her:

Mia: Are you here now because you got a good job?

Jack: No.

Mia: Well, 'cause that's what it sounds like. You see me on some level, and if you're not on that level or above, then you can't be with me.

Jack: You're reading too much into *it*. (1.6)

Finally, Mia tells Jack that she cannot be with a person who has not evolved and cannot cope with her being as successful as he may be and gives him the ring back. Jack's feelings are translated into a magazine cover that he designed before leaving the company. It consists of a man who is about to be eaten by a woman.

Mia: Why is there a man about to be eaten by a woman on the cover of my magazine?

Todd: It's the zeitgeist. Female execs are taking over. Movie studios, Silicon Valley, maybe our next president, God help us. The whole paradigm is flipped. Men are holding on for dear life. They want help.

Mia: I'm sure they do. And I get that controversy sells, but honestly? Corporate women are faceless cannibals? Who thinks like that?

Todd: Men.

Mia: Really? So this is how you see me? Am I eating you alive?

Todd: No, although other men *might*. ('Dangerous Liaisons' 1.3)

In the same fashion, the series shows that there are prejudices against working mothers, who are not given the same opportunities for advancement as men. Zoe has a sexist colleague at work, Clayton. In episode 1.6 both Zoe and Clayton must work together for an important business. Clayton does not take her seriously and tells her she does not have the time needed for such a job because she is a mother. Later on, after the deal with the big fish takes place because of her work and effort, she does not get the promotion, Clayton does. Thus, she decides to quit her job since she refuses to be superseded by somebody who does not deserve his promotion, which he gets only because he is a man.

In spite of the show's progressive elements, some of the messages included are overtly conservative, for example the idea that if women keep focused on their work and do not have much time for their family, somebody could take it away. Professional women are threatened by housewives whose only aspiration is to cook for their husband and do the housework. In episode 1.2, an attractive stay-at-home mother threatens to

destroy Zoe's family. She flirts with Eric (Julian Ovenden) –Zoe's husband– by promising that she could give him something Zoe would never be able to due to her busy job. Even their children reclaim their mother's attention and feel they are spending more hours with Victoria –the rival woman– than with Zoe. As a way of illustration, while spending the afternoon at Victoria's, the kids prepare a gift for their mother. When Zoe opens the box it turns out to be a teddy bear which says: "I can't talk now, I'm on a conference call" (1.2), which Zoe continuously repeats during the episode. Therefore, Zoe almost loses her husband and family at the expense of her career.

Cashmere Mafia also presents a conservative family, Mia's parents, who think they know best what is good for their daughter in terms of finding a good suitor. In episode 1.4, after discovering that Mia has broken off her engagement with Jack, her parents arrange a blind date with a brain surgeon who, like Mia, is Asian. Her right to choose is suppressed and she ends up going to the date not to upset her parents.

To conclude, it is my view that the series still provides an unrealistic portrayal of women though it encompasses a broader spectrum of women than *Sex & the City* since it includes a lesbian and an Asian woman. Furthermore, the series falls into some conservative notions but is, all in all, a show that advances a feminist discourse that encourages female independence, professionalism and friendship.

3.3. *Gossip Girl*.

3.3.1. Technical Information.

Gossip Girl is an American television show based on the best-selling series of thirteen young-adult novels by Cecily von Ziegesar. Nevertheless, the television series is only influenced by the first book and follows a different storyline and plot throughout the seasons. The show was created by Josh Schwartz and Stephanie Savage, both from *The O.C.* (FOX, 2003-2007) and premiered on The CW Television Network on 19th September 2007. The series ran on The CW for six seasons until 17th December 2012 and has a total of 121 episodes. It was devised in order to fill the gap left when *Veronica Mars* (UPN 2004-2007), a series intended for young audiences featuring a teenage detective, was cancelled. The network was working to attract young

viewers and was striving to create a niche for itself as a channel for teenagers, and *Gossip Girl* turned to be ‘The Show’ they were looking for. Filmed in New York, *Gossip Girl* focuses on the privileged lives of a group of students from the Upper East Side of Manhattan. *Gossip Girl* is aimed at a female target audience, specifically from an age range between 18 to 34, according to Dawn Ostroff, former CW Entertainment Chief. In consequence, the series contains a great amount of sex, drugs, fashion and text-messaging in order to attract a new digital generation who look for bold content. The show’s astounding reception is in part due to its casting, which stars young and attractive characters such as Blake Lively (Serena van der Woodsen), Leighton Meester (Blair Waldorf), Penn Badgley (Dan Humphrey), Ed Westwick (Chuck Bass) and Chace Crawford (Nate Archibald), among others. Furthermore, *Gossip Girl* uses cameos of celebrities, which becomes an instant hook for young audiences. All in all, the success of *Gossip Girl* has been translated into multiple adaptations worldwide –featuring different actors– and 18 Teen Choice Awards, as well as a huge network of followers from different parts of the world.

3.3.2. What the Series Is about.

As mentioned above, *Gossip Girl* portrays the lives of a group of young, privileged teenagers who are part of the social elite of the Upper East Side of Manhattan. The show is narrated by an omniscient character ‘Gossip Girl’, whose identity is kept in the dark until the last episode. Gossip Girl owns a blog where she publishes the protagonists’ dirtiest secrets. At a first glance, *Gossip Girl* may be regarded as a superfluous teen show with no other interest apart from presenting good-looking and wealthy characters. Yet, when scratching its surface, the series uncovers serious and thought-provoking issues such as betrayal, vanity, greed, lies, family complications, scheming, toxic relationships, addictions, etc. Still, it is my view that the show is ultimately a call to romantic love and to the notion that true love will save us all. Resultantly, at the end of the day, *Gossip Girl*’s answer to cure the protagonists’ flaws, as I will develop later, is to find a partner to calm down one’s demons and to make the best of ourselves.

Serena van der Woodsen and Blair Waldorf –the two main characters of the series– are portrayed as female rivals from the very beginning and will compete throughout the series. Serena, the It Girl of the show, is known to have had a complicated past. Her mother, Lily van der Woodsen (Kelly Rutherford), has already married three times and has not taken much control over her daughter and younger son, Eric van der Woodsen (Connor Paolo). Therefore, Serena is sent to a boarding school in New England to overcome her addictions. In the Pilot, Serena returns to New York to find out that she is not welcome by her group of friends and that she will have to gain back her position in the social ladder of the Upper East Side. She does not even find support in her ‘best’ friend Blair, who actually has benefited from her friend’s absence, as she has become the Queen Bee in high-school during Serena’s stay away from town. Moreover, Blair is suspicious of a possible sexual affair between Serena and her boyfriend Nate Archibald. Serena will struggle with love relationships until eventually finding The One, Dan Humphrey, whom she dates on and off during the series. Dan is also known as ‘Lonely Boy’. He is a good writer and poet and believes in hard-work, though he finds it more difficult than others to achieve success, for he comes from a humble background. The character of Dan will struggle throughout the seasons in order to find his place in said social elite and be respected by his group of friends.

Blair is the most glamorous girl of the Upper East Side of Manhattan. Her mother is the well-known fashion designer Eleanor Waldorf, for whom she will work in later episodes of the series. In spite of her Queen Bee status and popularity, Blair always feels in the shade of Serena, which provokes in her deep envy and desire for competition. The other two main characters of the series are Nate Archibald and Chuck Bass, both Blair’s lovers. Nate’s father is a business magnate coming from a wealthy family, The Vanderbilts. Nate is a lacrosse player and is thought to be the golden boy of the St. Jude’s elite School of New York. Chuck is the son of billionaire Bart Bass, owner of the New York Palace Hotel. He has had all the luxuries somebody could dream of, at the expense of parental affection. This spurs him to become the ‘Bad Boy’ of the series during the first seasons. Eventually, Chuck will become the most evolved character as he will undergo many changes in order to gain Blair’s love.

3.3.3. The Discourse in *Gossip Girl*.

The series focuses mostly on female relationships, but unlike *Sex and the City* or *Cashmere Mafia*, does not promote, no to say celebrate, female friendship, so it is a quite conservative show that departs from the progressive politics of previous shows while retaining and emphasizing their conservative elements. In *Gossip Girl*, other women are regarded as rivals. Females will plot and scheme with the goal of destroying other women and letting them down just for personal satisfaction. The most obvious example is given through the relationship between Serena and Blair. Their friendship is a stormy and complex one, since, from Season One, they make it crystal clear that they will have no consideration when it comes to getting to the top position of the social pyramid of the Upper East Side of Manhattan. Although they have been best friends since childhood, their relationship experiences continuous ups and downs. Their constant duels and rivalry are one of the series' plotlines and Serena and Blair will envy each other and fight over popularity, college or boys until they are married happily ever after.

In episode 1.2 'The Wild Brunch', Blair has just discovered that Serena slept with her boyfriend Nate when she was about to forgive her for having disappeared from New York without warning. This episode opens a new battle and will be the source in later episodes of Blair's revenge, as is established in the following exchange between the two characters:

Serena van der Woodsen: Look, Blair I'm really trying to make an effort here. I thought everything was good between us.

Blair Waldorf: It was - before I found out you had sex with my boyfriend.

[pause]

Serena van der Woodsen: How'd you find out?

Blair Waldorf: Nate told me. At least he felt he owed me to tell the truth.

Serena van der Woodsen: I don't know what to say.

Blair Waldorf: Don't bother saying anything. I wouldn't believe you anyway.

Serena van der Woodsen: Blair...

Blair Waldorf: You know, I always knew you were a whore. I never took you for a liar too.

Serena van der Woodsen: Blair how can I fix this?

Blair Waldorf: You don't Serena. You just stay away. From me, my boyfriend, and my friends. You're done *here*. (1.2)

Blair cultivates feelings of jealousy and betrayal and plots for revenge. She feels all her friends admire Serena more than her –even her mother seems to prefer Serena when she chooses her to be the new face of her fashion line in episode 1.4 ‘Bad News Blair’. Therefore, Blair serves Serena the coldest dish possible: she steals Dan –the love of Serena’s life– from her. What is more, Blair and Dan share their first kiss on Valentine’s Day, which leaves Serena utterly devastated. Blair tries to soften the situation by saying that Dan and she share many interests and that this is exactly what brought them together. Yet, Serena accuses Blair of just wanting Dan because he was hers. In Season 5, tables turn and Serena feels she is in a secondary position. She does not care much about her popularity, but what she cannot stand is seeing Blair and Dan together. In episode 5.24 ‘The Return of the Ring’ Serena gives Gossip Girl access to Blair’s personal diary and all her closely-guarded secrets become public. This causes much distress between them and culminates with Serena secretly sleeping with Dan.

The series presents countless examples of female rivalry. Yet, due to the scope of my dissertation, I cannot cover all of them. Generally speaking, blackmailing, sabotage, humiliation, spreading scandalous rumours or bullying other female rivals without thinking of the consequences would be the thing to do in order to impress others and climb up the social ladder of the Upper East Side. Blair does not only scheme against Serena; it looks as if she had established a Queen Bee dictatorship. For instance, no one is allowed to sit on a higher step than her and she will impose the way her subjects –Penelope, Hazel, Nelly, Isabel, etc.– must dress. Nevertheless, any girl would love to be part of the Mean Girls Team, which in my opinion is a rather conservative message to promote among a teen audience who may be easily influenced. In episode 2.4 ‘The Ex Files’, Blair and her crew interview several girls to determine whether they can be recruited into their popular circle. Thus, it comes as no surprise that in episode 1.6 ‘The Handmaiden’s Tale’, Dan describes Blair as “basically everything [he] hate[s] about the Upper East Side distilled into one 95-pound, doe-eyed, bon mot tossing, label-whoring package of girly evil”. Furthermore, the hierarchies of Constance Billiard –their high school– have dire consequences. Jenny’s character –Dan’s younger sister– eventually leaves town because she cannot cope with all the pressure she is under. Jenny performs risky and even illegal acts in order to fit in

Blair's group, as is shown in episode 1.14 'The Blair Bitch Project'. Her father is very worried about the strange behaviour of his daughter and the recent drop in her marks, and so Dan, who is aware of Blair's malevolence, will not hesitate to encourage Jenny to depart.

Rivalry and betrayal are not only to be found among young characters, as grown-up females act in the same fashion. As a way of illustration, in episode 2.8 'Prêt-à-Poor-J' we can see Jenny being exploited manufacturing dresses for Eleanor Waldorf while gaining no recognition for her work. On the contrary, Eleanor steals her designs and keeps all the merits for herself. We also get a glimpse of competition and dirty tricks among women in Serena's mother's group of friends. Therefore, what the teenage girls do, they have learned from their mothers.

The next point I want to introduce is the series' depiction of professional women. As far as I am concerned, the show seems to go a step back in the representation of women who are successful in their jobs, who do not seem to be portrayed as role models the younger generation should aspire to emulate. On the one hand, females belonging to a former generation than the main characters of the series possess enviable jobs. However, younger female characters seem more interested in romance, fashion, social events and plotting than in their professional careers. On the other hand, the male protagonists are depicted as having reached all their expectations at the end of the last season, which, in my opinion, is a very conservative message since the series celebrates men's status as breadwinners. Dan becomes a successful writer, Chuck is the director of his hotel and Nate runs his own newspaper. Furthermore, women in *Gossip Girl* gain their position due to connections and favouritism. For instance, Blair takes the lead of her mother in Waldorf Designs and becomes a fashion designer straight away, without having to deal with competitors or blaze her own trail. In the case of Serena, she gets her former jobs as a publicist and personal assistant because her bosses are infatuated by her and she becomes a columnist at *The New York Spectator* because of her close relationship with Nate. The girls are judged by their looks rather than their skills and when they are given an opportunity to show their self-value they always ruin it on the strength of favouring their love affairs. This is the case of Serena, who, when finally given a position where she can prove her natural talent, she spoils the opportunity in order to save her

relationship with Dan. In fact, the series does not promote the idea among young women that hard-work and perseverance are needed to succeed in today's society.

Finally, after having presented the characters living in a constant roller-coaster of emotions and being flawed, *Gossip Girl* presents them with an alternative to overcome their tempestuous past: true love and marriage. Romance is what ultimately stabilizes their lives and helps them leave addictions and scheming behind. In this respect, it is interesting to focus on the final episode of the sixth and last season of the series in order to substantiate my claim.

At the beginning of episode 6.10 'New York, I Love You XOXO', the audience is given the most-awaited wedding –Blair and Chuck's. The couple loathed each other during Season One but developed a relationship of support and understanding which made them fall madly in love with each other. Yet, their relationship seemed impossible for a number of reasons. They try to convince themselves they are not meant to be together and their pride will become one of the strongest obstacles to their bond. Still, no matter how hard they try, they always feel in need of each other and being apart is what hurts them the most. In episode 5.24 Blair confesses her deep love to Chuck: "I love you. I'm in love with you. I have tried to kill it, to run away from it, but I can't. And I don't want to anymore". Blair and Chuck thought they had to become better people in order to be capable of loving someone. Yet, they eventually realize that it is actually love that will change them to good, which is the idea that the show eagerly promotes. Take this passage as an example:

Blair: The worst thing you've ever done, the darkest thought you've ever had, I will stand by you through anything.

Chuck: And why would you do that?

Blair: Because I love *you*. ('O Brother, Where Art Thou?' 2.13)

In episode 2.25 'The Goodbye Gossip Girl' Blair begs Chuck not to run from her anymore. She claims she loves him so much it is consuming her and wants to know that all the lies, the gossip and harming each other have been for something. To meet the audience's expectations, Blair's dreams in black and white, where she impersonated Audrey Hepburn and fell in the arms of Chuck, finally become real, as at the end of the final

episode, we are presented with a flash-forward where the couple have finally found peace together. Five years have gone by since the last events and Chuck Bass is presented as a new man. He is the patriarchal head of the family, and takes care of Blair and their son Henry. According to Chuck, he will always feel in debt with Blair for having saved his dark soul: she is the “lightest thing that ever came into [his] life” (‘Rhodes to Perdition’ 5.9).

The last episode is coming to an end. Music is on and Serena is ready to walk down the aisle –‘You’ve Got the Love’ by Florence + The Machine is the soundtrack, which could not be more appropriate to portray the sugary ending the series was aiming at. She is wearing a beautiful dress and everything is perfectly decorated for such a special occasion. All the characters remain seated, full of joy, and are presented all paired –even the most hopeless such as Chuck’s evil uncle Bart Bass and the treacherous ‘frenemy’ Georgina Sparks– sitting next to their companion and showing signs of affection to each other. Serena and Dan finally get married, surrounded by family and closest friends after having the longest on-and-off relationship of the show. Despite their coming from different worlds and everyone’s opposition to their love and all the misunderstandings which kept them apart for much of the show, they always knew they were each other’s soul mate. Dan fell in love with Serena the first time he saw her, when he was 15, and Serena repeats throughout the series that Dan is the love of her life and is the only one who calms her wild spirit and gives her a sense of fulfilment. In episode 5.13 ‘G.G’ Serena tells Dan: “I love you Dan Humphrey. Always have, always will”. She knew just right from the beginning that they “were forever” (‘Much 'I Do' About Nothing’ 1.18) and that Dan was the cure to all her nightmares.

All things considered, nothing can detract from the central fact that *Gossip Girl* is an example of a new trend of shows aimed at a young female audience which fall into traditional notions of femininity and do not advance a feminist discourse. Therefore, the series promotes conservative messages regarding sisterhood and professionalism and presents marriage as the only source of salvation from the path of perdition. The spectrum of women presented in *Gossip Girl* is not representative as most of the characters belong to an elite society, although we encounter other characters from a middle or low class during the show. Nevertheless, I am afraid

the failure to celebrate sisterhood is a pattern which also takes place in our society and is present in many teenage shows –American but also Spanish– where female friends are seen as rivals rather than sisters. It is important to note that even though Serena and Blair recover their friendship eventually, it is only after they are happily married with the men they have competed for. Thus, evidence suggests that society is experimenting a ‘backlash’ against the advances of feminism, as Susan Faludi (1991) claims in her work *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* and what the media does is to portray this raw reality.

3.4. *Hart of Dixie.*

3.4.1. Technical Information.

Hart of Dixie is an American comedy television series from Bonanza Production Inc., in collaboration with CBS, Warner Bros Television and Fake Empire. The show counts on household names for production such as Leila Gerstein (*Gossip Girl*) and Josh Schwartz (*Gossip Girl*, *The O.C.*) and Stephanie Savage, Len Goldstein and Jason Ensler who are also known for their work on *Gossip Girl*. *Hart of Dixie* premiered on The CW on 26th September 2011 and is still running. At the moment, three complete seasons are available –a total of 66 episodes– and the team has signed for a fourth season. *Hart of Dixie* airs just after *Gossip Girl*, a marketing strategy which encourages the audience to remain tuned to the channel for the whole evening. Generally speaking, the series has had a good reception and was nominated for the People’s Choice Award in 2012 for Favourite New TV Drama and the Astra Award for Favourite Program (International Drama) in 2013. It eventually won the ASCAP Award in 2012 for Top Television Series.

3.4.2. What the Series Is about.

Dr. Zoe Hart (Rachel Bilson) has always dreamed of following in her father’s footsteps and becoming a highly-qualified cardio-thoracic surgeon. Nevertheless, despite having graduated top of her class from college, she is not offered a fellowship because of her lack of bedside manners. She is recommended to spend a whole year as a general practitioner (GP) and, maybe then, she will get it. Eventually, she accepts a job offer from Dr. Harley Wilkes (Nicholas Pryor), which means working together at his small practice in Bluebell, Alabama

—a position she had turned down on several occasions. Unluckily, when Zoe gets to Blue Bell, she finds out that Dr. Wilkes has passed away, although he left her half of the practice. Zoe will find herself out of place, after leaving her natural environment —New York City— for the South of the United States, where the rules and codes of behaviour are totally different from hers. Besides, she finds out her biological father is not Dr. Hart, but Wilkes. If that was not enough, she has to compete with the other doctor in town, Dr. Breeland (Tim Matheson), who owns the other part of the practice and is not at all enthusiastic about sharing neither the practice nor his patients with an outsider, who comes from the city, has just graduated and, to make things worse, is a woman, or as he says in episode 1.3 ‘Gumbo & Glory’, “an arrogant New York newbie”. Another important narrative arc is Zoe’s personal relationship with the attractive lawyer George Tucker (Scott Porter), whose fiancée is Dr. Breeland’s daughter. Lemon (Jaime King) —from *Lemonade*—, is Zoe’s foil and embodies the archetype of the Southern Belle. Zoe finds comfort in her friendship with Lavon Hayes (Cress Williams), Blue Bell’s mayor, and his neighbour Wade Kinsella (Wilson Bethel).

3.4.3. The Discourse in *Hart of Dixie*.

There are elements in the series which are pretty advanced concerning the representation of women. Nevertheless, as is also the case of *Cashmere Mafia*, there are still some conservative messages which promote sexist and patriarchal ideals. As a way of illustration, we may observe how the protagonist is portrayed. Dr. Zoe Hart is well-educated, intelligent, ambitious and easy on the eye. Still, as most television programs do, she is presented with flaws which are a result of her career success. She is not good at establishing personal relationships, especially with men, for she claims she has dedicated her own youth to her studies. As a case in point, in episode 1.6 ‘The Undead & the Unsaid’ she prepares flashcards with possible topics of conversation and questions to slip in during uncomfortable silences when she goes on a date. Zoe is aware of her situation and claims she is “nearly 30 years old and [she] ha[s] never been in a real relationship” (1.6). She eventually concludes that “something is just wrong with [her]” (1.6). Thus, once more, the poisonous ideas that a single professional woman is an anomaly and it is her fault to remain in such an outrageous status are also present in the show.

Zoe does not even know how prepare breakfast and is relentlessly presented as clumsy, always putting her foot in it –as do other post-feminist women such as Bridget Jones or Ally McBeal. All in all, Zoe is accused of not having the values which really matter in the South –the ones the Belles promote– and, therefore, society makes her believe this is the sole reason why she does not get either the respect of her patients or the fellowship. Also, despite being a good professional, work is not always easy. Apart from having constant fights with Dr. Breeland –who will eventually accept her for there is no doubt she is a good doctor– she has to constantly strive against her beliefs. She had always thought that approval would come due to her professional skills, but she realises she will not have her space in town until she learns the community’s customs and evolves as a person. Consequently, she has to embrace old values, which seem to be the most important in the countryside, such as getting involved with patients, caring for their personal life or being empathic, as well as being part of the community and participating in town events. That is all new for her, for in New York living in community meant not bothering others. These ideas are presented in the following exchange:

Zoe: I wanted to follow my father’s footsteps, but if I don’t start bringing patients in, I’m gonna lose the practice Harley had for 45 years.

Lavon: Well lucky for you, you have me to give you counsel. You ready for it? Here it is. The key to success in Blue Bell: show people you are one of them. Harley always did.

Zoe: I ate grits. What more could a woman give?

Lavon: Join me on my float on the parade tomorrow ... You show up on Lavon Hayes’ side, people will see you wanna fit in. They will forgive you anything if they see you are trying to fit in.

Zoe: Really? ... I guess I could do one parade.

Lavon: Get fitted for your Al Bammer costume.

Zoe: What? A costume? The people are gonna be impressed by my medical skills, not by my parading around in some ridiculous *outfit*. (‘Parades and Pariahs’ 1.2)

Zoe will eventually give up and try her best to be liked. In episode 1.3 she will even participate in the town cook-off to demonstrate she belongs in Blue Bell. In a nutshell, these two episodes portray a call to old, traditional values.

Into the bargain, she does not have the supportive female friends found in *Sex and the City* or *Cashmere Mafia*. Even though there are some examples of solidarity between women in the show, one of the series' most significant narrative arcs is rivalry and tension among women. Zoe finds support in Rose, whom she sees as a younger sister and also has a good relationship with Addy, the nurse working in the practice. Still, they are the only females she trusts. Zoe is also presented as a moral woman throughout the first season, helping other women at the expense of her own benefits. For instance, in episode 1.2 she helps Dr. Breeland's niece to cover for a degenerating illness. She cannot participate in the parade, and is afraid of Lemon telling her off. Consequently, Zoe sabotages the parade—one of the town's most important events which could have made her become a little more popular and gain new patients. Mrs. H., the former nurse in the practice tells Zoe: "what you did today, sacrificing yourself to be a part of this town to treat a patient? That was amazing and that was Harley to the core" (1.2). Yet, when considering all the events, female friendship is not celebrated in the show.

To give one of the most evident examples, Lemon wants to destroy Zoe just because she knows that George, her fiancé, has a crush on her. Lemon wants to "bring down Zoe Hart once and for all" ('Snowflakes & Soulmates' 1.15) no matter what it takes. Once more, female tension is generated by a man. In episode 1.3 Lemon asks Anna Beth to investigate Zoe so that they can find out something to tear her down, as Zoe is "a walking menace" (1.3). Other examples of female rivalry can be found in episode 1.9 'The Pirate & the Practice' where Zoe undergoes a sort of rite of initiation in order to become one of the Belles. She finds out that the women in her family were all Belles and thinks that maybe, if she follows their steps, she will feel she belongs somewhere. Naturally, Lemon and her crew do not want her to get in, so they make her go through a series of trials—each one worse than the last—to make her quit. Eventually, when one of her best friends from New York visits and Zoe thinks she will have a friend—even if it is for a short period of time—she ends up sleeping with the guy Zoe was occasionally dating. Even when Zoe feels she has truly connected with someone, Anna Beth, and is charmed by the idea of having a girlfriend after so long, Anna Beth disappoints her by not wanting others to know they are friends. Firstly, because she has to keep up her mean girl

appearance to be accepted by Lemon and the other women in town, and, secondly, because she thinks her friendship with Zoe would make her unpopular:

Anna Beth: Well the thing is, now that I am to become a highly esteemed member of the community, it's probably not the best time to be seen with you.

Zoe: Well, let me get this straight. I help you achieve the greatest success of your life and you break up with me?

Anna Beth: I wish more than anything that I could be both Memory Matron and your friend. Because you are cool and smart and funny, but this is a small town and Memory Matron, well, that's a dream come true for *me*. ('Hairdos & Holidays' 1.10)

When it comes to the relationship with men, *Hart of Dixie* also presents conservative messages. When Zoe comes to Blue Bell for the first time, she has the attitude of the single woman from the city, as is shown in episode 1.6 'The Undead and the Unsaid' when she claims "[she's] gonna take [herself] on a date, as an independent, self-reliant woman". However, it looks as if the countryside had made her cease celebrating her singlehood and is led to believe that she can only find happiness in romance. This idea is repeated throughout the series. For instance, in episode 1.13 'Sweetie Pies and Sweetie Palms' the Sweet Pie event takes place – which is like Saint Valentine's for people in Blue Bell– and the ones who do not have a partner are distained by other people in town. During the event, Zoe finds that everyone around her is settling down and "getting serious" (1.13) except for her. Even her mother pushes her to find a partner. She sends her a letter with a cut from the newspaper announcing one of her college friends' engagement. The important point to note here is that *Hart of Dixie* constantly sends messages that imply that women will not feel complete until they find their soul mate and that it is not a good idea to remain a spinster. Therefore, Zoe feels devastated because she cannot be with George, and tries to fill this gap dating other men. In episode 1.6 Zoe is pictured sad on the sofa, without having slept all night thinking of George. She is covered with a blanket and watching *Casablanca* (Michael Curtiz, 1942) and tells Lavon: "why is it that the ones we want are always the ones we can't have?", to which Lavon answers "I don't know. All I know is that we can't give up. Love is worth fighting for" (1.6).

Thereby, singlehood is not an option in the show. In episode 1.8 'Homecoming & Coming Home' Lemon is showing the dress she bought for the rehearsal of her wedding. Knowing that Zoe is watching, she tells her:

Lemon: Oh, I'm so sorry. This must be a torture for you...me talking about my wedding ... Listen, I just wanna let you know that it does not make you any less of a woman that you yourself have no wedding plans or a boyfriend or even the prospect of one. Because that little doctoring job you have can keep you busy for years to come. And we have a great tradition of dignified spinsters *here*. (1.8)

It is more than clear that the only prospect of advancement for women in Blue Bell is getting married and creating a family. Nonetheless, the show slips between lines that marriage is not always perfect. For instance, George and Lemon seem the perfect couple from the outside, but they are not happy with each other. They go on together to keep up appearances, for Lemon has had an affair with another man and George is in love with Zoe. Yet, the explanation of the show to their failure is that they are not with the right person and not that marriage may not always have a happy ending as, "with the right person, it does just flow" (1.6). Another situation that backs up the idea of the soul mate is when Zoe says:

I told George I was staying and he looked like he was going to throw up. No, no. It's a good thing. He was upset because he still has feelings for me. I just know that in romantic comedies there's always someone marrying someone that they shouldn't while everyone is waiting for the one they truly love to show up at the church and say: 'I object'. That is exactly what I am going to *do*. ('The Big Day' 1.22)

Finally, I want to highlight that the series also depicts the concept of 'retreatism' coined by Diane Negra (2009) in *What a Girl Wants?: Fantasizing the Reclamation of Self in Postfeminism*, which supports the patriarchal ideal that the natural environment of women is the domestic. The city, on the other, which was once thought to be the optimal setting for the development of the post-modern woman (examples may be found in series such as *Sex and the City*, *Cashmere Mafia*, *Gossip Girl* or *Lipstick Jungle*, and even in literature such as in Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900)), is rejected for the sake of the countryside and moving backwards to old traditional roles. Zoe ends up realising that the city is not for her, as other women do in many romantic comedies such as *New in Town* (Jonas Elmer, 2009) or *Sweet Home Alabama* (Andy

Tennant, 2002), and embraces life in Blue Bell. In the city she can become a good surgeon, but the *real* feminine values –empathy, caring, love, marriage, family– she will not find them there:

Zoe: I'm staying.

Dr. Hart: are you sure?

Zoe: I might be a better surgeon somewhere else, but I'll be a better person in Blue Bell.

Dr Hart: Well, as a surgeon I have to tell you it is career suicide.

Zoe: I know.

Dr. Hart: But as your father...I'm proud of *you*. ('Disaster Drills & Departures' 1.21)

Thus, Zoe turns her fellowship down and decides to remain in Blue Bell rather than pursue a surgery career in New York, which had always been her dream.

All things considered, nothing can detract from the fact that even though *Hart of Dixie* depicts some progressive messages such as the representation of a woman who is professionally successful, the show also has a conservative subtext. It is my view that, at the end of the day, what matters most is her love relationship with George rather than her career. If we look at her name, she is called *Hart* which sounds like *heart*, although spelled differently, it gives us a clue to the producers' agenda. Thus, even though Zoe finds her job rewarding, there are certain moments where she is depicted as hopeless because she does not have a soul mate which completes her.

To some extent, it is true to say that there are elements in the show that obviously follow the legacy of *Sex and the City*, as regards to the representation of an intelligent, career-oriented woman. Nevertheless, there are more conservative messages than progressive ones, and the series does not truly advance the cause of feminism for several reasons. Despite the fact that Zoe could be considered a good female role model and this portrayal takes great part of the story, more importance is given to romance, which again interferes with her career, for she does not take the fellowship to New York to remain close to George. Apart from that, Zoe always needs the help of men to sort out her problems, even to change a light bulb, which is very sexist. Similarly, she gets the practice in Blue Bell from her biological father, and is offered the fellowship because

of her step-father. To make it more evident, there is a moment when she wants to change her last name and Dr. Hart recommends her not to; for as long as she is called Hart, she will find a job at any operating theatre. Once again, a woman must be a bit butterfingere in order to be likeable and not to become a threat to men. As for female friendship, the series depicts women relentlessly fighting over men. And, ultimately, when Zoe struggles because she feels she cannot be a good doctor while enjoying life, the show's answer is to choose the countryside and abandon the city and the professional opportunities the city has to offer.

4. Conclusions.

After having conducted my analysis of *Sex and the City* and considered *Cashmere Mafia*, *Gossip Girl* and *Hart of Dixie* in order to determine the influence that the former has had on subsequent series, it is my view that the most progressive of the three is *Cashmere Mafia*. Even though the series still provides an unrealistic portrayal of women and falls into some conservative notions, such as the depiction of professional women who are so absorbed by their jobs that overlook family and domestic concerns, *Cashmere Mafia* is a show that advances a feminist discourse and presents career women who are successful while celebrating female friendship.

As for *Gossip Girl* and *Hart of Dixie*, they have more pernicious messages. On the one hand, *Gossip Girl* provides traditional presentations of femininity and promotes conservative messages regarding sisterhood and professionalism. As far as I am concerned, it is the most conservative of the three, for it suggests that women's happiness is only accomplished through romance. Furthermore, the spectrum of women presented in *Gossip Girl* is even less representative than in *Cashmere Mafia*, as the show only presents members of an elite society. On the other hand, *Hart of Dixie* follows the pattern of *Sex and the City* by featuring a successful, smart, professional woman. Nevertheless, as I have stated in my analysis, it develops more conservative messages than progressive ones and, once again, romance is positioned as the most important concern for women. As Negra states, "over and over again the postfeminist subject is represented as having lost herself but then (re)achieving stability through romance, de-aging, a makeover, by giving up paid work, or by 'coming home'" (2009: 5), which is exactly what happens to the protagonist of *Hart of Dixie*, who finds in Blue Bell a source of self-redefinition through the adoption of traditional values, so she indeed 'comes home' literally and metaphorically. Consequently, the show encompasses sexist and patriarchal values, and like *Gossip Girl*, the series does not promote sisterhood, but the opposite.

Therefore, evidence suggests that the series that focus on groups of professional females such as *Sex and the City* or *Cashmere Mafia* have a more progressive agenda even though they still have drawbacks as the spectrum of women is not representative and romance still plays a major role and incessantly interferes with

the professional life of the protagonists. Instead, the shows aimed at teenagers are more insidious in their conservatism because they fail to promote professionalism and female friendship, as is clearly portrayed in *Gossip Girl*. Finally, there are other shows like *Hart of Dixie* which, following the example of series like *Men in Trees* or films such as *New in Town* or *Sweet Home Alabama*, support values that we relate to domesticity and romance and which are presented as preferable alternatives to professionalism.

All in all, I believe that, even though there are shows that present positive role models of professional females, they are not to be found within the genre of Chick Lit. Television is rife with super spies –*Alias* (ABC 2001-2006) and *Covert Affairs* (USA Network 2010-)–, detectives –*Castle* (ABC 2009-), *Bones* (FOX 2005-), *The Closer* (TNT 2005-), *Rizzoli & Isles* (TNT 2010-)–, vampire slayers –*Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (The WB 1997-2001, UPN 2001-2003)–, and even female presidents –*Commander in Chief* (ABC 2005-2006)–, but when it comes to Chick Lit, the genre is still constrained by its origins in romance. Chick Lit defines itself as a genre for and about women and, consequently, it is my view that it should include the essence of what women want. Nevertheless, a close analysis of the texts brings to the surface that the best alternative for women to find happiness is through romance, neglecting or downplaying other sources of personal fulfilment such as professional expectations and, more specifically, their right to choose career advancement over love. According to Negra, in the 1990s and 2000s “chick flicks [a term which makes reference to filmic examples of Chick Lit] spoke from and to a neoconservative cultural context that –among other things– prioritized ‘housewife chick’, the spectacle of an affluent wedding, the allure of luxury commodities, and achievement of a sumptuous domesticity, the disappointments of the world of paid work, and the rewards of motherhood while identifying the spectre of singlehood as a fate to be avoided at all cost” (2009: 8). The series I have studied do not present work negatively, but still prioritise love and romance and teach women to be wary of the ills of spinsterhood. All things considered, I believe that television provides appealing images of professional women. Yet, at any rate, the examples which I have analysed seem to suggest that women are still judged by their ability to find a partner, and only when finding our soul mate will we eventually feel complete and become the best version of ourselves.

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