

## READING SEX AND THE CITY: A SITE OF NEGOTIATION FOR NON-WESTERN WOMEN

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### Abstract

This paper is devoted to an exploration of the reception of American television series “Sex and the City” by non-Western female fans. It aims to explain the appeal of Sex and the City to women audiences from non-Western societies and to make an analysis of the discourses involved in the ways they receive and negotiate this imported media text into their culture and forms of everyday life they are embedded in. This analysis incorporates some broad discourses involved in the reception and consumption processes of Sex and the City by local women audiences: cultural and ideological contexts, processes of economic liberalization and globalization, macro-structures of gender hierarchies, perception of the Western culture and modernity. The paper examines the extent to which these discursive contexts influence the audiences’ compliance with or resistance to Sex and the City, the bold constructions of femininity in the show in particular. The paper seeks to understand how non-Western women audience members “use” Sex and the City as an imported media text and investigate the feelings of pleasure in their consuming of the show. It provides insights into what this phenomenally groundbreaking program means to its numerous non-Western female fans avidly watching it, putting emphasis on their reactions to the bold depictions of women in the show and the culturally specific experience of non-Western female fans, compared to how the series is watched and discussed in the West. To gain insight into the discourses about women in other parts of the world rather than U.S or Europe, as Sex and the City viewers, this paper employs a range of qualitative methods including internet based forum and message board participant observation, directly contacting the posters of the forums through email, textual analysis, analysis of newspaper coverage and discourse analysis to address these broad questions.

**Keywords:** Sex and The City, Reception Studies, Non-Western Women, Discourse Analysis, Constructions of Femininity.

### MAIN TEXT

This paper explores the reception of American television series Sex and the City by non-Western female fans. It investigates the appeal and the feelings of pleasure of consuming SATC to women audiences from non-Western societies, by putting emphasis on their reactions to the bold depictions of women in the show, and analyses the broad discourses involved in the ways they receive and negotiate this imported media text into their culture and forms of everyday life they are embedded in. These discourses involved in the reception and consumption processes of SATC by local women audiences which are analyzed in this reception study are the cultural and ideological contexts, processes of economic liberalization and globalization, macro-structures of gender hierarchies, perception of the Western culture and modernity. In order to gain insight into the discourses about women in other parts of the world rather than U.S or Europe as SATC viewers, this paper employs a range of data gathering methods including internet based forum and message board participant analysis, directly contacting the participants of the forums through email and analysis of newspaper coverage. Although I have reached responses from countries like India, China, Saudi Arabia, Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Malaysia and Turkey, the findings and my discursive analysis regarding the gathered data can not be expected to reflect the whole non-Western world. It should also be noted that, even though non-Western countries may share some patterns in common, each of them has their own unique and specific cultural, historical, social processes and dynamics, which were not possible to cover all within this research.

The television series Sex and the City became an international hit from its 1998 debut on HBO throughout its final episode in 2004 and still remains popular through re-runs and DVD sales and rentals. (“News and Awards”) The show is primarily based on Candace Bushnell’s 1997 book by the same title, a collection of

articles from the weekly sex advice and lifestyle column that Bushnell wrote in the New York Observer. Bushnell based the column on the adventures of her New York socialite friends, including herself, and their “searches for true love...or at least someone to go home with at the end of the night” (Bushnell). SATC, with its careful generic balance of comedy and drama, followed the lives of four single New York women, in their thirties, through their pursuit of love, companionship, and a good time. Carrie Bradshaw writes a newspaper column about sex and relationships in New York City. With three of her closest friends Samantha Jones, a publicist who is more interested in casual relationships rather than long term ones; Miranda Hobbes, a cynic lawyer tired of being single and Charlotte McDougal, an art gallery curator who is the most sexually conservative of the group, and hasn't yet lost her faith in finding true love. Successful in their careers, they are financially able to enjoy many of the material benefits that the city has to offer – including high-fashion clothing, nice apartments, cab rides, dinners at the hippest eateries, performing arts events. No show used conversations about female sexuality with the explicitness of SATC, which used a type of dialogue similar to that heard in reality television. (Arthurs 83) It was a groundbreaking program in terms of representations of women as being able to do what men had done for years, enjoying their sexual freedoms and simply have sex for fun. The story of SATC is on one level about sexual identities, but as we see, even the sexual practices of the characters constitute a discourse about consumption. SATC advertised all the latest fashions, trends by depicting women purchasing Chanel, Gucci, Manolo Blahnik, Dolce & Gabbana, and Ralph Lauren, at the same time it advertised the hottest restaurants, coffee shops, night clubs, and “in” spots in New York City since these places are usually the meeting points for the characters in the show. In addition to the promotion of a particular type of playful lifestyle for consumption by women around the globe, the show in fact became a promotion for New York City itself, which increased the fascination with the New York lifestyle and contributed to the universal appeal of the show.

SATC has attracted frantic attention from countless women in international arena, beyond the borders of U.S and Europe, and became a widely debated cultural phenomenon. HBO claims a viewership of 4 million in 19 Asian countries of SATC. (“News and Awards”) Although the show is wildly popular with young, English speaking, working women in Western metropolitan centers, during my research I realized that SATC is apparently loved by a wide array of females: conservative women, Muslim women, progressive women, professional women, college women, single women, married women, etc. with non-Western origins. My findings revealed that the show provides an escapist value for most non-Western female audiences by being entertained by the refreshing representation of the lives of contemporary women, their alluring lifestyle, with aspects of the show that can be consumed such as the costumes as a fashion spectacle, Sunday brunches, skating in Central Park, expensive cocktails and yellow cabs. “They are all single, fashion-forward, sophisticated, successful, New York women, spending their money, having glorious times with their friends. They are everything that I am not. But perhaps this is what makes the show attractive and makes me keep re-watching it. You know it's fictional, but you can still live your fantasy by watching it,” a Turkish woman, who watched every single episode at least more than twice, remarked (“Digiturk Forum”). Another woman who works as a brand manager in Thailand stated that SATC “shows a lifestyle of rulebreakers. It is not necessarily the lifestyle of Thai women, but the show is certainly setting trends in Thailand” (“Asian Women Open Purses for “Sex and The City”) The comments of the informants point out that the act of watching the show draws women away from their present surroundings, take them into a glamorous Manhattan life and provide them with the opportunity to indulge in pleasure and positive feelings in general. It seems reasonable to argue SATC was not only a popular show but one that seemed to inspire sympathetic identification for the non-Western women who emulate this fantasy world, by providing an appealing model of a cosmopolitan lifestyle with all the materialism and pleasures of New York. These findings are reminiscent of Radhika Parameswaran's audience reception study; *Resuscitating Feminist Audience Studies: Revisiting the Politics of Representation and Resistance* (317-333) in which she observed “the Middle-class urban Indian women's fascination and admiration for Western material culture, who mostly prefer to read romance fiction that described contemporary culture in the United States, United Kingdom, and other metropolitan tourist locations” (317-333). The selling of lifestyles and clothes was a major factor in the success of the show in major non-Western metropolitan centers, by considerably influencing the women's purchases. In Taiwan, a 33-year-old communications consultant said SATC gives her friends an excuse to chat about their own relationships with men --subjects they are usually too shy, to bring up on their own. She said she closely watches the fashion tastes of Carrie whom she calls a “real New Yorker” which is a term suggestive of a modern and global female subject. (““Sex and The City” Smash Among Asian Women”) Furthermore, according to 2point6billion.com website, the series “has been devoured by Asian women who all secretly desire to be like Carrie Bradshaw and her entourage. Living vicariously, single in a cosmopolitan city, Manolo heeled and smart-talking, the girls are envied by Asian women who have watched the episodes endlessly

and see a glimmer of themselves in at least one character. ("Sex and the Asian City") The reconciliation of these points suggests that the heroines' qualities reflect the contemporary times and suggest being "cosmopolitan women" to the females in the globalizing cities of the non-Western region.

At this point, it is relevant to incorporate some broad discourses involved in the reception and consumption processes of SATC by local women audiences, such as processes of economic liberalization, urbanization and globalization. Non-Western women's viewing SATC whose Western cultural discourses and practices offer representations of contemporary western lifestyle, reflect the way in which the non-Western world is being changed by economic and demographic shifts and global influences such as the wide dissemination through the reach of global media. "Young female shoppers have become a natural part of the industrialized world and now their counterparts in developing countries are catching up by earning and spending" (Gotthelf). As more women are joining the work force in developing countries, they started to embrace the shopping activity as a fun and lifestyle which is also projected by imported series such as SATC in the globalizing world. The Sunday Times underscores that women from non-Western regions are getting married and having kids considerably later than ever before, like their counterparts in developed world, based on the UN's World Fertility Report (Hymowitz). Another demographic shift; urbanization which is rapidly seen in developing countries, contribute to possibility of more varied metropolitan lifestyles' and aspirations' being flourished, where women spend their earnings on themselves. "When these trends combine; delayed marriage, higher education, labor participation, urbanization and a global media, an international lifestyle is born" (Hymowitz), which means new spaces of leisure and consumption, for young women outside the U.S. and Europe: trendy cafes and bars, fancy boutiques, malls, handbags, shoes, and search for a man. Cities like New York are transformed into young women's pleasurable fantasy world by the dissemination of hugely popular TV shows such as SATC, through the reach of global media. For this reason, it would not be wrong to generalize this trend particularly in the globalizing cities of the non-Western world that are undergoing rapid changes.

Although the informants do not totally identify with/recognize themselves in Miranda or Samantha or they do not see situations in the show that necessarily mirror their lives, they can relate to the characters' concerns with work, friendship and relationships as a mode of negotiating and exploring their own ones. A Shanghai woman in her thirties told to Shanghai Star newspaper that "I was surprised to find that Carrie and I shared so many problems as career women in big cities" ("Sex and the Asian City"). Another 23-year-old young woman from New Delhi, India stated that "the show is about enjoying a bit of relief from the stifling attitudes of the parents and traditions, and maybe relating to a little bit of what you see, with all the glamour" and "watching it is like reading a glossy women magazine which puts things out of your mind" ("Fan Forum Sex and The City"). Besides its entertainment value, viewers' interpretive creativity offers evidence of subversive resistance in their everyday lives towards the structures of dominance in their cultures that are more obviously and directly patriarchal than the West. The show's popularity can be seen as an evidence of an escape from social and cultural structures of the non-Western context in general which supports the denial and sublimation of female identity within the patriarchal understanding of South Asian, Middle and Far Eastern gender and familial roles. These findings have much in common with the Indian women reading romance in Parameswaran's study, who insisted that these stories allowed them to escape from the stressful and restrictive norms of middle-class feminine respectability and indigenous patriarchy (317-333). Thus, it seems reasonable to argue that, the main characters of SATC are --to a considerable extend-- desirable embodiments of anti-patriarchal, urban women who had no obligations to family, relatives or community and do not have to worry about social boundaries. Even though my informants were mostly working women and middle-upper class young professionals in non-Western metropolitan centers, who watch the show on pay-for-use cable networks, they made clear that they were not totally free from structural constraints. When asked to specify what they feel relieved from while watching the show, the writer who brought chick-lit to Arabia, Rajaa Alsanea questioned the nation's prevailing morality, which provide some insights into the young Saudi Arabian women's frustration: "Young women I know want to be modern, hip, stylish and fall in love, the same as women everywhere. We have access to television, programs like SATC and the internet and we do want some of the things that western women have" ("Sex and the Saudi Girl"). It was also highly interesting to observe the conversations of Turkish female SATC fans on the internet forums of the network that aired SATC in Turkey. During their discussions, the fans who regard themselves as open-minded, educated middle-upper class working people, transposed the characters of the show to Turkey: "Our characters would be wearing turban and probably be like this: Ayse: gossip, Fatma: virgin, Emine: crazy about scarves" ("Digiturk Forum"). All of them made clear that, they would definitely not watch anything like this. Their sarcastic transpositions and negative responses to such an imaginary show is suggestive of their

negative attitude towards the issue of covering which is a gesture denounced by secularists as a symbol of Islamic revival. In this respect, the viewers of the show represent a new non-Western demographic – women trying to break away from existing hegemonic social structures that seek to control women, and struggling with the problems independence and freedom can bring. And it can be claimed that the relationship between SATC and all the questions these women have about how they fit into their culture is what sold the show and what made them feel excited about watching it.

The lifestyle depicted in the show may even be controversial by some Western standards. SATC, as a medium for social analysis, was too challenging to cultural conventions and traditions about what constitutes appropriate sexual desires and behaviors for women, particularly in non-Western regions from Middle East to the Far East. “Although many Indian women claim they live life on their own terms, 30-to-40 year-old, successful, smart, sexy equivalents in India live a different reality. Mumbai and Shanghai may be like Manhattan when it comes to the real estate index, but look at the relationship index, and what goes on the show is like a mirage to the majority of the women. We live in a country where the national pastime is to get married” writes Namita Devidayal (“Sex and the Indian City”). As it is put in this article, the degree of subjugation and suppression of women is higher in these areas of the world. Sex, therefore the representations of women openly displaying their sexuality in the show is a signifier of challenge to these more conservative cultures. Data I gathered from my respondents reveal that the status of women is bounded by certain tradition, which is still alive in their societies even for the region’s elite young professionals who are single with spare cash to spend.

As a social text of popular culture encoded with dominant ideologies of sexuality and consumption, my findings reveal that SATC works on multiple levels – simultaneously as a site of identification and reproduction and as a site of resistance for women from non-Western societies. I argue that SATC provides women with a symbolic site to negotiate real life tensions between traditional, local socio-cultural values and contemporary, global lifestyles in non-Western contexts, particularly in the globalizing cities of the region that are undergoing rapid changes, in terms of the model of female subjectivity it presented. In this viewing position, differences between the cultures of the location of the show’s consumption and that of the production location become most apparent. SATC acts as site of resistance for them to dominant and even repressive patriarchal ideologies through the representation of the four main contemporary women who enjoy living. It validated the life choices for single women who can choose the men to be with, and who consume glamorous lifestyles, food, and fashion items freely. However, as it challenged the cultural norms and traditions, SATC at the same time worked as a site of reproduction where the dominant ideology of a patriarchal family lifestyle was portrayed as the overreaching goal of each of the characters. In fact throughout the series, sentiments about love, pursuit of it and finding the ‘right’ man is the binding major theme and we see it even builds up towards the end of the series. It turned out to be a modern-day fairy tale with Carrie happily giving up her career for a man and the rest of the women who were primarily selfish and uncompromising early in the series, start getting their priorities in order and select the lifestyle of settling down with one partner in the later episodes. Although on the surface it seems that SATC works as a site of resistance for structures of power in sexual practices through the characters’ discourse of their sex in the city, in fact at the same time it reinforces the social norms it critiques by placing such a heavy influence on finding the right guy to settle down with and marry, the fulfillment in the most conventional of terms. We see the characters do not give up telling each other the old patriarchal fairy tales longing to be swept away by prince charming. Despite their professional independence, ego-centricism and hedonism, the women were still unhappy and discontent without some form of a fulfilling male relationship. We see the affirmation of this same attitude in the non-Western fans’ comments as well. A Chinese woman thinks SATC made a big impact in China, but its audience is nothing at all like Carrie and her friends as she says; “they think it’s kind of cool to become a kept woman. They don’t feel ashamed of being dependent to a man” (“HBO Internet Message Boards”). Another respondent commented that “as Thai families become more nuclear-based, everybody becomes more independent. Nevertheless, I’d say a very small percentage of my friends who are the fans of the show want to stay alone including me” (“Marriage vs. Singlehood”). With these insights in mind, it could be argued that viewing habits of the female fans of SATC from non-Western settings contribute to the belief that women should still opt for men over career. No matter how strong a woman is, deep down, they still associate their happiness and fulfillment with domestic roles rather than career advancement. Therefore, a deeper understanding of these comments reveals that these women run the risk of internalizing and reproducing their own oppression. The fact that the practice of their watching the show which is promoted by opposition to structures of power, reveals a kind of conformity to them at the same time. It suggests a re-location of the women back inside the terms of traditional gender hierarchies and existing

hegemonic social structures that they resisted in the first place, which is paradoxical, just like the show itself. This makes clear the contradictory qualities of the resistance of local women audiences’.

As mentioned earlier, the non-Western female fans of the show glorify and emulate this single woman narrative which is highlighted by her right to choose the man to be with, to consume items such as food and fashion items, glamorous lifestyle, and the pleasure she receives from those acts of consumption. At the surface it may seem that for women from developing countries and non-Western regions SATC means that modern women should also enjoy liberated sexual relationships, my research revealed the opposite. Their responses reveal that they do not accept the explicit sexual discourse and the glamorization of casual sex. Although the women have resistant perspective towards the male dominant local traditions and cultural conventions that are restrictive on them, they do not identify with explicit sexual discourse of the show. “I like the show but I think it’ll be hard for Hong Kong Chinese to accept the characters’ lifestyles, with so many boyfriends and one-night stands,” said a Hong Kong public relations agent (“Fan Forum Sex and The City”). The comments made it clear that they were not celebrating the liberated female sexuality and “empowerment” coming along with it, the discourses which form the core values in the show, unlike the majority of female fans from U.S, Canada or Europe. The freedom and access to this type of liberated sexuality is often viewed negatively by them – seen as something that is only achieved through the loss of traditional cultural practices and values. The non-Western woman audience of the show seem to be uncomfortable with the characters’ blunt discussions in depth about sexual techniques, conversations of their broad range of sexual experiences with shrill vulgarity and outrageous physical detail on the show, and would rather prefer the dialogues suited their cultural sensibilities. A young Indian woman who said she even watches the endless re-runs of the show added that “It is the raw vocabulary that disturbs me. The dialogues about such issues could be written in a more subtle and creative language” (“FanPop Sex and The City”). This kind of “real” dialogue possibly offending these women may be exemplified by a conversation like the one, between Carrie and Samantha that takes place in the bathroom of Miranda’s apartment in the Season Six episode “One,” during which Samantha is complaining to Carrie about the appearance of grey pubic hairs with the comment, “No one wants to fuck grandma’s pussy” (Bushnell). The non-Western women’s unacceptance of the harsh language of mating of the show reveals their sensitiveness about female sexuality which should be sacred and private according to them. In a way, the preservation of certain cultural norm of their societies is important for them.

Although my informants aspire the characters in many ways that have been discussed earlier, they see the very same women as ‘flawed’ role models at the same time. Even the most loyal viewers mentioned their discomfort with the explicit sexual discourse in the show, as it is put in these quotations by two Asian fans: “I cannot believe the extreme forms of making sex seem trivial and humorous” and “It’s fun to watch these women’s lives, but I can’t think of myself sleeping with more men than I can remember, have no children and end up alone” (“FanPop Sex and The City”). Non-Western women could somehow more easily identify with the glittering metropolitan life portrayed in SATC, seeing it as something tangible, just the kind of urban life that could be theirs in the near future. What they do not identify with the women character’s entitlement to sexual pleasure, their casual, consequence-free sex lives and denied the raunchy exploits of the heroines. A Turkish fan expressed her misidentification with Samantha’s “indulgence in emotion-free sex” and interest in the show as “it did not make me want to be with more men, it made me want to buy more clothes” (“Digiturk Forum”). While most of the Western counterparts find Samantha really confident and mostly their favorite characters of the show, and asserted that there is nothing wrong with an adult woman wanting to have some fun in discussion boards, she was more of pervert and sex addict than confident or pretty according to the comments of non-Western women. Another Turkish fan remarked that “the others at least tried relationships, Sam just wanted to have sex,” (“Digiturk Forum”) as if labeling her sexually promiscuous and perverse. Most of the other informants showed their annoyance especially with the rapidly changing multiple sexual partners and relationships of Samantha, describing her sexually promiscuous as well. A rare fan of Samantha from Japan remarked that “I have huge similarity with Samantha because I also work in a luxury lifestyle sector and I love her confident attitude”, but changes her attitude when it comes to Samantha’s sexuality, remarking that “I wouldn’t say I can identify with her bedroom exploits and numerous sexual encounters though” (“Topix Sex and The City Forum”). Frequently offended by Samantha’s lustful views on sex, women seem to be relating themselves more to Charlotte’s search for a prince and appreciating her relatively less open ways about her sexuality. This may also be an indicator of their underlying thoughts that love and settling down with a man is the route for the female fulfillment rather than getting involved with daily relationships. This is evident in one of the comments from South Korea: “I totally related to Charlotte’s belief in true love, a man who is intelligent and successful, with traditional values” (“TBS Sex and The City Forum”).

The responses from my informants reveal that one of SATC's crucial textual elements; the casual sex has raised eyebrows even among the loyal female fans of the show in the non-Western societies in which cultural attitudes and beliefs toward sex, in many cases are not similar to the sexually liberal and aggressive attitudes of the SATC women. SATC was a totally imported series which many locals could not relate to in terms of characters' daringly active sex lives, the way they openly talk about sex and men, although they can relate to and are willing to internalize some other aspects of the show which have been discussed earlier. It could also be claimed that they attend to their native values, beliefs and cultural practices --at least to the ones that are significant for them— and do not let them to become completely like those of the diffusing culture of Western societies, even though Western media productions contain messages that “encode” and perhaps even assert the superiority of Western beliefs and values. They do not identify with and distance themselves from the Western women who lust for sex, apparently associating them with a degraded moral value from their cultural standpoint. By doing that at the same time they distance their moral fabric of culture from the Western values as well. A young Arab woman who studied in U.S for her university degree, and a loyal fan of show said “I don't think Arab women will ever let go of this ‘good girl syndrome.’ We're educated, we're more ambitious, but I'd never want to see an Arab woman splayed on the floor of a club with her legs wide open like women on SATC. No, we don't want to be answerable to men, but we don't want to lose our sense of morality either” (“Arab Women Stretch Limits”). These comments offer a look at the experiences of the women who spend their entire lives negotiating Middle East's strict cultural and religious code and show us that even if they do not wish to live in a strictly male-defined world, they neither associate themselves with these type of open behavior, rapidly changing multiple sexual partners etc., nor see these as signs of modernity. It is apparent from this comment that, she values the idea of female modesty and dignity and does not think that sexual exploration is a key to happiness. Apart from feeling the pressure to conform to traditional or culturally accepted sexual practices, these women do not want to internalize this type of liberated sexuality. In that respect, it could also be argued that they internalize and re-instate the suppressive approach to sexuality and the patriarchal norms. So if women in Southeast Asia, Middle East, Far East watch SATC, it would be wrong to assume that they interpret the lives of these four New Yorker contemporary women and the diffusing culture comes with the show as better in every single aspect than their own. My audience response research suggests that non-Western female audiences do not simply accept the values offered by these programs as a substitute for their own. Instead, non-Western viewers critique these programs for their lack of “appropriate” behavior from their cultural standpoint, and use them to support the arguments that they already have about the inferiority of Western societies. A young Turkish woman discussing in the forum with the other posters, pointed out that “even if we are open-minded, educated working people... the show's sexual content is beyond obscene for our country, but the reason that this explicit content and language do not disturb us so much is because those women are foreigners anyway.” Her views were further affirmed by another female poster remarking that “Foreign women kiss or play around on streets, this kind of behavior is natural for them anyway, even if we are open minded people, I don't think none of us would do this kind of stuff” (“Digiturk Forum”). Turkey might be a secular country, but it seems as if the notion of a sexually active woman is a taboo as it is in other Muslim countries or non-Western regions. Therefore female sexual pleasure and promiscuity are attributed to Western women heroines of the show who do whatever they please. An American woman living in Seoul, Korea asserted that; “Some of my Korean girlfriends, who watches SATC avidly, for example, will have sex with their boyfriends (perfectly normal and natural), but they will lie to everyone about it for fear of being judged...Western women here are basically just assumed to be whores because of our more liberal attitudes regarding sex. It is interesting how in my English classes, I've had a startling increase in the number of female students who take the name "Carrie," but a marked drop in women willing to take the name, "Samantha," because of what this name now represent” (“Ask A Korean”). The comments point out to a general pattern among non-Western female fans, that even they come from a secular background, referring themselves having a westernized approach, they do not wish to stand out as individuals and talk openly about sex or fancying men by running the risk of losing their “proper” tag. Instead they play down their sexuality which is consistent with their acceptance to play the game according to the rules of the society.

The informants' responses are revealing in terms of another discourse involved in the reception and consumption processes of SATC by local women audiences. By continually distancing themselves from heroines of the show who lusts for sex in their comments, seeing them as “foreign” femme fatales who prey upon the urban men, these women apparently associate them with a degraded moral value from their cultural standpoint. This is even accompanied by the assertion of the superiority of their moral beliefs and values. This points out to an “othered” Western female subject and non-Western's discursive construction of the West. The term Western signifies an immoral image in their societies and Samantha, as being sexually

promiscuous, is emblematic of how many women live in New York. Of course, as a single media text, SATC can not be regarded as the sole reason for initiating these discursive constructions about the West. Rather it reactivates and reconstructs the "othered" impressions of the Western culture, which already local women had in mind due to the constant exposure to Western media. These findings have a lot in common with the Parameswaran's reception research in which she reveals the Indian women readers' production of cultural difference and their Occidental descriptions of Western culture as "homogenous, immoral, and inferior" (317-333). In this respect, these othering practices of the Western culture may be read as a "strategic defense of emotional justification" as it is put by Parameswaran; "by transposing promiscuous sexuality onto Western women's bodies, and explaining their affinity and loyalty to their own culture which is superior to "foreign" women, to enjoy watching the show and respond to charges that these sexually explicit narratives would corrupt their minds" (317-333). This strategic defense, however, might be said to re-instate the suppressive and controlling forms to sexuality and re-locate women back inside the terms of traditional gender hierarchies and existing hegemonic social structures that they resisted in the first place.

While the discourse representing women as having sexual desires and actively pursuing them, expresses a freedom or choice is not necessarily transposable into the world of local women audiences', their responses indicate that this power can be signified in their world through consumer choices and lifestyle products. The majority of my respondents reveal their admiration to fashion items on the show and could relate themselves to the commodity culture of the show rather than the promiscuous sexuality of women that has been associated with western lifestyle ideology. In her book, *Postmodernism and Popular Culture*, Angela McRobbie shows how shopping may grant women a space for independent self-expression (135-145). In the comments, non-Western women underscore their positioning within modern social practices through the clothes and shoes they wear, the brands they use. So, although the practices of casual sex or pursuit of sexual pleasure cannot take place in their real world in the precise way as it is in SATC, the discourse of independent cosmopolitan woman can still be lived through consumption, lifestyle and dresses. Instead of liberal sexuality to challenge the social order they live in, they indulge in consumption of commodities in order to establish a particular identity and lifestyle. It could be argued that, fashion and consumption offer a site to young women to locate their struggle against ossified patriarchal structures and an alternative route to independent force and personal choice. The leisure consumerism and fashion can be considered as a source of pleasure and power to non-Western SATC female viewers that is potentially resistant to male control.

As an imported media text from West, SATC projects the cultural global identity to the Middle Eastern, Southeast and Far East Asian metropolises which are being transformed into global cities of the future. In the light of the preceding comments and responses, it could be argued that SATC is a symbolic site at the intersection of gender identities and cultural transformations which may be explored within the broader discourse of modernity. As a matter of fact, the comments of the non-Western female viewers of the show make clear that what these women are expressing are the contemporary anxieties about modernity. This understanding of the modern woman depicted in SATC, from their cultural viewpoints, reflects the tensions within ideas of the modern, the national, and the new urban lifestyle during globalization process. They do not view the heroines of the show as wholly desirable symbols of modernity; instead while symbolizing the glitter and desirability of the cosmopolitan lifestyle, these modern women also represent some fears associated with modernity, between traditional expectations and modern. Thus, the comments previously mentioned reveal some of the tensions surrounding ideas of modernity such as seeing sexualized urban woman as a dangerous force, which is capable of breaking socially conservative discourses, the order and control of society at large. In relation to this, it can be claimed that the discourses that SATC are now sending around the world regarding gender relations, female sexuality, free choice, consumerism, etc. are being taken up by local audiences, but with some negotiations. While they comply with the idea of pursuit of 'love' in the show, which is probably indicative of freely chosen marriage and social improvement for them, the women do not wish to dwell on issue of direct and aggressive sexuality like the heroines of the show. While continually distancing themselves from those liberal sexual behavior of the heroines of the show, they are conflating their identity with the western consumer culture and products they consume, which may be functioning as signifiers of choice and freedom for them. For this reason, it can be argued that, non-Western modernity is not merely a given based on Western models; rather it has to be understood as a discourse subjected to the constant negotiation between the local and the global. As formerly discussed, these new lifestyles that SATC presents often clash with traditional, conservative beliefs held by society and introduce negotiations among local women related to the self, relationships, gender, sexuality, the family and career. The comments of respondents are in fact, the evidence of negotiation of globalization and modernity,

through which imported American media texts are 'localized', interpreted and given meaning in local cultural contexts, and the understanding that modern and enjoying woman should not have to come at the expense of everything traditional. SATC offers these women an opportunity for exploring new possibilities for questioning, searching and reconstructing their self-identities in their societies. While the non-Western female fans of the show are negotiating the paradigm of the modern woman, in fact, they are negotiating to find their own hybrid modernity and self-identity.

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