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MEDIA

Dating columnist reveals how ‘Sex and the City’ ruined her life

By [Doree Lewak](#)

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Julia Allison
Petra Ford

“Sex and the City” premiered on HBO 20 years ago this week, imprinting on a generation of women a love of fantastic fashion and dreams of their own Mr. Big. Among them was Julia Allison, who moved to New York in the early 2000s to live the Carrie Bradshaw lifestyle. She became a dating columnist, a party fixture and one of the first internet celebrities — thanks to Gawker, the site that loved to hate on her. But her pursuits sent her, ultimately, down a path of unhappiness and unfulfillment. Looking back on how the show’s ideals negatively impacted her life, Allison, now 37, tells Doree Lewak: “If I could go back and do it all over again, I wouldn’t.”

Ten years ago, on May 27, 2008, I was on top of the world.

I was riding in an Escalade en route to the “Sex and the City” movie premiere in Midtown with a Bravo camera crew in tow. When the SUV door opened, I stepped onto the pink carpet in my Allison Parris dress and Chanel bag. I felt like a star. I felt beautiful. I felt proud. I was rubbing shoulders with celebs and the goddess herself: Carrie Bradshaw, aka Sarah Jessica Parker.

Since moving to New York City four years earlier, I’d established myself with my own dating column and graced the cover of Wired magazine. I was a public figure who was regularly photographed alongside such famous faces as Henry Kissinger and Richard Branson. I went to all the glam parties, was fodder for gossip sites, had signed a deal with Bravo for a reality show, and dated more than my fair share of Mr. Bigs. I had been profiled in the New York Times, and New York magazine called me “the most famous young journalist in the city.”

I was considered by many to be Carrie Bradshaw 2.0. And I was happy to be given that identity for a while, but it was all a lie. At the premiere, I also felt like a fraud, insecure and embarrassed — like I didn’t belong.

I grew up a nerd in Chicago, more likely to duck into the library than talk to other kids at recess. At 12, I thought I would never be kissed. (Boy, did I make up for that later.)

I was a rising high school senior when “Sex and the City” debuted in 1998, and I was instantly enthralled. I wanted to be like Carrie and her friends: I wanted to be glamorous and beautiful and dress well and have lots of dates. I realized I didn’t have to be a geek anymore. I could reinvent myself.

The show was my road map. Of all the die-hard fans I knew, I was the most influenced by “SATC.” At Georgetown University, where I

enrolled in 1999, I started to wear dresses and learned how to do my makeup and curl my hair. The newfound male attention I received felt exhilarating.

I even started a dating column for my college paper called "Sex on the Hilltop," which was modeled after Carrie's column in the fictional New York Star.

When the last episode of "Sex and the City" aired in February 2004, I hosted a viewing party for 200 guests. It was my swan song as well: Eight months later, I would move to New York, where, armed with my "Sex and the City" DVDs, my transformation really began.

Based on what I knew from "SATC," I expected the city to sweep me off my feet. I envisioned nonstop brunching and shopping.

It had such an outsize influence on me that — even with a very expensive degree in government — I said to myself: "I'm obviously going to be a columnist." It seemed so reasonable and attainable. I emailed the editor of amNewYork — the free daily paper — no fewer than 16 times in six months, begging for a column, even offering to do it for free.



Julia Allison (center) attends the "Sex and the City" movie premiere in New York.
Patrick McMullan

When that paper finally hired me, I made \$50 per weekly column. I later moved to Time Out New York, where I made \$750 a week — a huge improvement, but still not enough to buy Manolos and barely enough to afford the \$2,500 rent for my 400-square-foot apartment in Hell's Kitchen.

I lived on food bought for me on dates and the occasional bodega tuna sandwich. For clothes, it was wrap dresses from Diane von Furstenberg sample sales combined with loans from designers who took pity on me — like Betsey Johnson, whom I'd interviewed at Fashion Week. Different men I dated gave me YSL shoes and status purses, just like Big did for Carrie on "SATC." (In 2006, when I landed a six-figure editor-at-large gig at Star magazine, I finally felt more at ease with my finances.)

I also subscribed to Carrie's ethos when it came to men. There was no such thing as a bad date — only a good date or a good brunch story. In my writing, I gave my boyfriends nicknames (one was "Prom King") just like Carrie and her friends did.

I went out with a prince: Lorenzo Borghese from "The Bachelor." I even dated the British ex-boyfriend of "Sex and the City" creator Candace Bushnell — the original Carrie. He was one of a few men who comprised the composite character Mr. Big.

In 2008, my two best girlfriends and I had just filmed a Bravo pilot for a show called "It Girls" (it wasn't picked up). We were all invited by a 40-something billionaire to his Miami mansion; he even sent his private jet for us. It was just him, the three of us and his butler and chef. I don't

think this man was used to being told no, and he started chasing me around his mansion. I finally had to lock myself in the bathroom. The worst part: He sent us back on JetBlue.

Between 2004 and 2011, I filmed nine TV pilots — many of which were reality shows, and all of which were a derivation of some kind of "SATC" role for me. I was always the Carrie. In one pilot, I hosted for Animal Planet; the premise was that your dog would choose whom you'd go out with.

There were humbling moments. I can't lie: I was devastated when [Gawker tore me apart on a regular basis](#). They wrote about me as much as they wrote about Paris Hilton, but I had none of Paris' resources to defend myself. Their core complaint about me was that I was a quote-unquote "fame whore." They called me "one of the most hated people on the internet." They gave me infamy — and I didn't want it. It was just ugly.

I needed a break.

In 2010, I moved to California, bouncing back and forth between the West Coast and New York for a couple of years.

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Then, in 2011, one of my pilots was finally picked up by Bravo. The whole concept of "Miss Advised" was "real-life Carrie Bradshaw." It was about three single women in three different cities, and I was the dating columnist for Elle in Los Angeles. It was "SATC" meets journalism. Producers sent me to a mind architect, a love coach and a witch in the pursuit of love.

But it came too late: In my heart, I was finished trying to be Carrie. When the show wasn't renewed for a second season, I was relieved. The experience made me really look at myself: I was trying so hard to be liked that it was coming across as inauthentic and bitchy. Also, it was miserable to have cameras around all the time.

26 ways 'Sex and the City' left its mark

Finally, I cut my ties to New York and moved to San Francisco full-time in 2013. I tried being a tech columnist and writing a personal-growth book called "Experiments in Happiness." Finally, I decided to go private for a while. I stopped blogging and writing. I rarely post on Instagram.

These days I work as a change activist, mounting summits for world leaders and serving as an adviser to startups and entrepreneurs looking to better the planet. I'm finally living a life of integrity, and I'm attuned to my values. I never heard about values on "Sex and the City."

I dated a woman for a while, a beautiful entrepreneur who was also jilted by New York — that's definitely not something you saw Carrie do. But dating is not front and center in my life anymore, although it was all I talked about in my 20s. That's pretty one-dimensional.

Last year, I ended a two-year relationship with a man who ultimately couldn't commit and wanted to be polyamorous. Again, "SATC" and the "lessons" it taught me is the culprit. The show wasn't a rubric on how to find a lifelong partnership. If I was more grounded and had honestly assessed whether this man was a good partner for me, I don't think we ever would have dated.

The cast of "Miss Advised": Julia Allison, Emily Morse, Amy Laurent
Michael Rosenthal/Bravo

Crushed and needing to regroup, I took a sabbatical and lived in Bali for eight months on a healing journey. I was also celibate during my time there.

I do wonder what my life would have looked like if "Sex and the City" had never come across my consciousness. Perhaps I'd be married with children now? Who knows, but I can say for sure that, as clever and aesthetically pleasing as the show was — and, as much as I agree with its value of female friendships — it showed too much consumerism and fear of intimacy disguised as empowerment.

It's like candy: In the moment it feels good to eat it, but afterward, you feel sick. Whom you're dating, what you're wearing, or how good you look at that premiere — none of that s—t matters unless you genuinely love yourself. Solid relationships are what really matter.

Truth be told, I wish I had never heard of "SATC." I'm sure there are worse role models but, for me, it did permanent and measurable damage to my psyche that I'm still cleaning up.

Sure, I could have been a dating columnist for the rest of my life but, honestly, I gave really bad dating advice — and so did Carrie Bradshaw.

I want to be a different role model from the one I got. Two months ago, I started seeing someone I never would have dated 10 years earlier. Back then, I wasn't looking to get married or seek a lifelong partner, and that was a mistake. This man is a very reasonable choice, and I'm at a place in my life where reasonable is very sexy.

I've put away the pink party dress. The designer shoes and bags are in storage. Now, I feel like genuine me — I'm no longer a Carrie Bradshaw knockoff.



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