False message from Sex And The City

Margaret Clayton

WHAT DOES *Sex And The City* say about women? That we're obsessed with shoes, handbags, gossiping and sex?

Well, at times. But not always.

For 10 years it was one of the most popular programmes on TV, portraying the lives and loves of four women living in New York City — all engaged in the eternal search for the perfect relationship. The film is already a huge box office success.

Froth

It's glib to say it's no more than a bit of glamorous soap opera froth, because women did care about Carrie, Samantha, Charlotte and Miranda.

But I wasn't one of them.

Empowering women is great. But surely it's about more than finding the perfect sexual partner or the dress that makes you look five pounds slimmer?

So while girls in the office would gather to debate Carrie's latest bizarre footwear or Samantha's "try-sexual" habits (she'll try anything once) I didn't get too het-up about it.

Sex And The City is clever chick-lit. It celebrates female friendship. It makes us understand what it's like to be a single woman in desperate search of a man who'll love you rather than just want to go to bed with you.

But what I hate are the endless discussions about sex.

When women get together the subject does get talked about. Listen to any female group on a night out or at a coffee morning and there's more than a fair chance men and sex will get a mention.

But these four girls didn't know where to stop. I'm not prudish, but there's such a thing as too much information.

Have you ever come home from a girly get-together and wished there were things you hadn't heard? Your best friend's husband — did you really need to hear what he gets up to? How will you face him when you meet him in the supermarket?

And did you say anything you regret?

Bonding

Female bonding is fantastic. We need other women to help us through so many situations. When we're struggling with jobs, children, difficult colleagues, cellulite and the way men think/act/feel and don't listen, there's nothing more helpful than another woman who's been there before, knows what you're going through and can give you a bit of understanding sympathy, advice or even a hug.

It begins in our early teenage years. My best friend was the girl who understood why I hated PE and would join me in dodging netball or anything involving a hockey stick. She accompanied me on endless Saturday night forays to student dances. We looked out for each other if things got out of hand or we'd had one Babycham too many.

■ It's important to have close friendships, like the *Sex And The City* girls.

She walked down the aisle behind me on my wedding day. Held my first baby in her arms at his christening and didn't object when he threw up over her designer dress.

She got the career and posh flat in London, I got the children, but for more than 40 years she has seen me through so many situations with the benefit of her caustic dry wit and sound common sense.

When both our mothers died we cried and laughed with each other, remembering the words of wisdom these women gave us when we left home. Respect yourself. Men are different and don't forget it. Put some money by for a rainy day.

No, it wasn't the most sophisticated moral advice with which to face the world, but Coatbridge in the '70s wasn't exactly Sex in New York City.

The shared experiences of female friendship are worth their weight in gold, there's no question of that. My life, and I suspect the lives of many women, would be much diminished if we didn't have our girlfriends to listen to us, laugh with us and console us when things go wrong.

Another woman knows the angst you feel when your teenage daughter rebels, your in-laws come to stay for a month, you've gone into your overdraft buying something you don't need but desperately want.

Women see each other through bringing up children, broken hearts, divorce, mid-life crisis and the menopause.

Laughter

And all the fun, laughter and everyday events that make up the fabric of our lives. The stuff that's much more important than sex.

What goes on between the sheets should stay there. Sex matters to the two people concerned. Men who talk in specifics and women who blab cheapen what it's about.

So while *Sex And The City* may be frothy and fun, its message of "girl power" is a false one.

No pair of Jimmy Choos, Prada bag or Mr Big will make you happy forever. And sex is for two people, not gossiping girlfriends.

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New strain of MRSA found in UK

By Mike Duffy

A DANGEROUS form of MRSA commonly found in European pigs has infected three patients in Scottish hospitals.

It's the first time the strain of the drug-resistant superbug has been found in the UK.

On the Continent it has caused serious heart, bone, blood and skin diseases as well as pneumonia.

The first pig-to-human transfer of MRSA was reported in the Netherlands in 2004 when a six-month-old girl, whose parents farmed the animals, was admitted to hospital.

Infection

The infection has also been discovered in Denmark, Belgium and Germany.

Dr Giles Edwards, director of the Scottish MRSA Reference Laboratory, confirmed three cases had been recorded in hospitals in the central belt last year.

The infections were isolated incidents and Dr Edwards refused to say in which hospitals they were detected.

It's not known how the patients caught the dangerous bacterium but it's believed all three made a full recovery.

"This strain exists elsewhere in Europe, especially in the Netherlands," he explained. "The general assumption is that in Europe it has been passed on from pigs to farmers and vets.

"But in the cases found in Scotland we haven't found any close association between the human infections and pigs.

"The reason we picked up on this strain is because it does seem to be causing a big problem elsewhere in the world."

Increased use of antibiotics in farm animals is believed to have caused the rise of the MRSA strain, known as ST398.

Richard Young, of leading environmental charity the Soil Association, said they had issued warnings about the threat of MRSA from European pigs reaching the UK.

He added that the public should be alert to the threat of this new strain.

"This development is really worrying," he warned. "It shows the British Government has been burying its head in the sand on this issue since it first arose in the Netherlands in 2004."

Tony Field, of patient support group MRSA Support, also expressed concern. He said, "We are just not clued up in the ways of infection prevention.

"If actions were taken, new strains wouldn't arise. MRSA can't do harm unless it gets under the skin. But the UK's stance is reactive instead of proactive."

Mark Dosher, co-founder of the Bella Moss Foundation, a charity which urges more research into how MRSA is transferred between animals and humans, added, "It goes to show how little we know about how bacteria like MRSA adapt to different environments.

"On the whole, MRSA found in the community is far more virulent than the strains found in hospitals.

"But we would speculate that if strains get into hospitals and keep some of their virulent traits then we're in trouble.

"It's not an immediate catastrophe but we shouldn't be complacent."

Health secretary Nicola Sturgeon said the Scottish Government had committed £54 million to fund a national MRSA screening programme.

"Tackling healthcare associated infection successfully is a top priority for the Scottish Government," she added.