

A feminist revolution?

By Candace Braun

EDITOR IN CHIEF

Some blame Carrie Bradshaw's initial penchant for short-term flings in *Sex and the City*. Some credit the gyrating hips of Carmen Electra in her *Striptease Aerobics* series. Some argue that Madonna started it all, and the decades of her followers have made American culture so steeped in sexuality.

Regardless which celebrity contributed most, a number of books have emerged that explore the trickle-down effect that increasingly mainstream sexual expression has had on society. While more TV shows, movies and magazine articles feature women of all ages finding empowerment through sexual openness, some students find that femininity takes many forms.

The new pornographers

The books in question — *Pornified*, *Female Chauvinist Pigs* and *Prude* — all reveal a sex-saturated society. In *Female Chauvinist Pigs*, author Ariel Levy spends three days shadowing a *Girls Gone Wild* film crew during spring break, discovering that in most cases, all it takes to get college-aged women to bare all is the promise of a free hat touting the show's logo.

After filming various "scenes" for *GGW*, 19-year-old Debbie Cope told Levy: "People watch the videos and think the girls in them are real slutty, but I'm a virgin ... The only way I could see someone not doing this is if they were planning a career in politics."

This mentality, oft-repeated during the course of Levy's research, led the author to coin the term "female chauvinist pigs" — referring to women who "pursue casual sex as if it were a sport" and, who she argues, are "making sex objects out of other women — and of themselves."

Similarly, *Pornified* and *Prude* explore the effects of the media's glamorization of sex on society and what it means to be a woman growing up in the midst of it. All

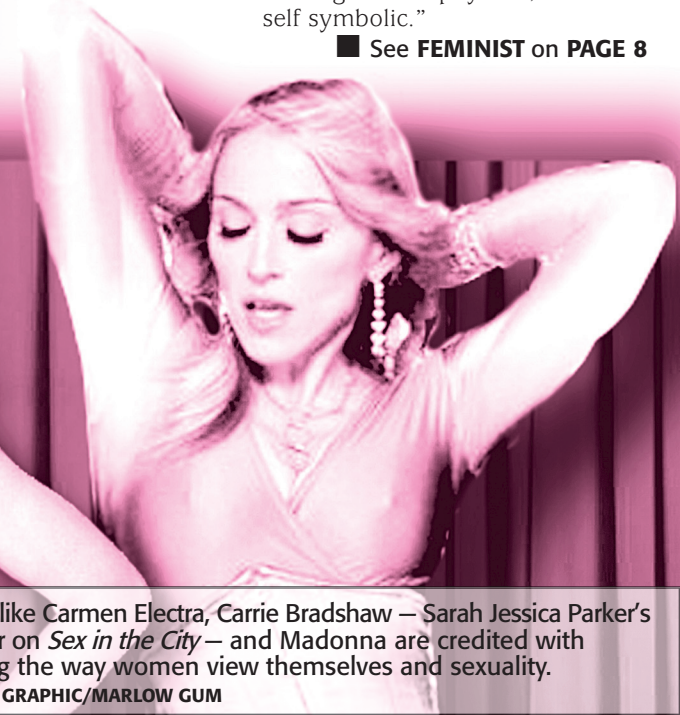
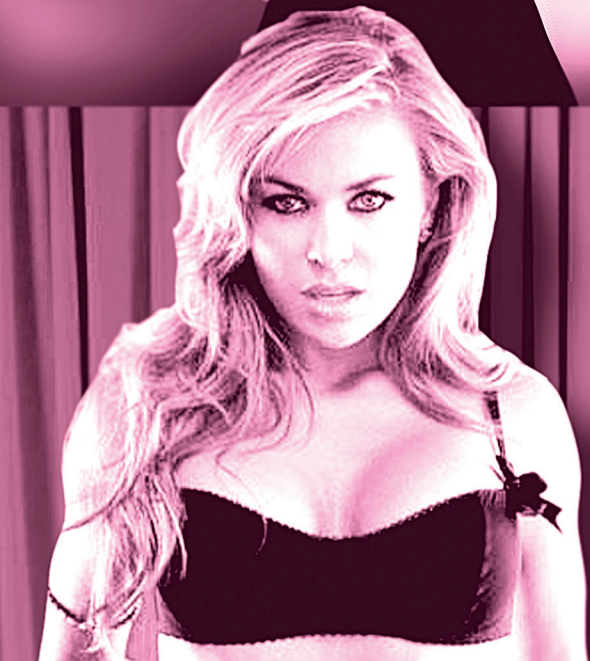
three books also rally for a change in perspective, one that may already be more common than the books suggest.

"Women have had their sexuality imposed on them — they're supposed to act a certain way, be a certain person — and breaking free of that and being whoever they want to be can be very empowering, whether they choose to be sexually out there or not," said Jessica Savage, graduate student and Student Health Services peer educator. "I think that mentality (discussed in the books) is kind of extreme, and that most students don't fall into that category."

Psychology professor Jamie Goldenberg researched the motivations behind people's sexual attitudes, and feels that a fear of death can compel people to seek meaning in their sexual behaviors.

"Essentially they're taking something that's very physical in nature, making it symbolic and turning it into a source to derive self-esteem and value for oneself," she said. "Whether it's based in chastity or sexual prowess, they both seem to be about making the physical, sexual self symbolic."

■ See FEMINIST on PAGE 8



Women like Carmen Electra, Carrie Bradshaw — Sarah Jessica Parker's character on *Sex in the City* — and Madonna are credited with changing the way women view themselves and sexuality.

MONTAGE GRAPHIC/MARLOW GUM

FEMINIST

Continued from PAGE 7

Goldenberg said that people's knowledge of their own mortality may cause them to pursue certain behaviors, such as acting overtly sexual, because of a deeper meaning they associate with the act.

"Mainstream media pushes sexual prowess on the part of women, and there's also kind of a conservative movement toward being born-again virgins," she said. "However, the sexual prowess perspective is not about an animal desire; it's about control and power."

While some women become empowered by revealing more of their bodies to the world, others share the same feeling by doing the exact opposite.

A modest proposal

As associate director of Baptist Collegiate Ministries, a campus organization, Rachel Smith leads women's groups that explore coming of age in a sexual society. In these groups, members discuss leading a "modest" lifestyle — which, Smith said, doesn't involve never wearing makeup, donning a muumuu or completely

neglecting one's appearance.

"I think when people hear 'modest' they think homely, and that's not it at all," she said. "Personally, I have criteria to dressing modestly: Does it fit me? Does it show cleavage? Does it show skin between the pants and shirt? More importantly, though, there's an attitude to being modest: It's the way you present yourself to the world."

Clothing choices aside, advocates of dressing modestly feel that by not drawing attention to themselves in the form of exposed skin, dating becomes simplified because men are interested in their personalities, not their bodies.

"About five years ago I was really into trying to impress guys and I'd think, 'Oh, I'm attractive, that guy looked at me today,' and now that I dress modestly and live my life in a different way, I'm so much happier," junior psychology major Ashleigh Plunkett said. "Yeah, I was a trendy girl, and guys would check me out, but I wasn't happy. I lived my life trying to please others, and now I don't need somebody else to tell me I'm beautiful."

For members of the wom-

en's group, embracing their femininity in a modest way builds confidence and helps them come to terms with who they are.

"Sexuality empowers a woman when she realizes who she is, and how valued she is," Smith said. "She doesn't have to flaunt what she has or follow society's term of sexuality to be empowered. It's a true empowerment, not just something on the surface."

These women don't just have to ignore the sexual norms when they're portrayed in movies or on TV — evidence of the trends discussed in *Pornified*, *Prude* and *Female Chauvinist Pigs* exists in Tampa.

Sex sells (to both sexes)

10 years ago, day shift manager Sherry Winters scarcely ever saw women entering Mons Venus, the strip club where she works. Flash forward to the past two or three years, and Winters finds herself unfazed by phone calls asking if women can hold their bachelorette parties there.

"The first couple times it was really surprising," Winters said. "I'd say, 'you do know all of the strippers are female, right?' They didn't care — they just wanted to have fun and hang out ... Not too many women come in during the day when I work, but it's not unusual anymore to see women come in at night."

Underscoring the trend, the Honey Pot burlesque club opened in Ybor City on Dec. 14, and striptease group fitness classes can be found at many local gyms, from Joe Redner's Xtreme Total Health & Fitness to chain gyms like Bally Total Fitness. While some students find these activities degrading, others see it as a form of expression.

"Striptease aerobics? That's hot," freshman theater major Samantha DeBruhl said. "If you feel ok with it, then what does it matter what other people think? Why do people get their hair cut? Why do people go to salons? To feel good

about themselves."

Reluctant feminists

Getting students to discuss their views on sexuality came easy, though one question made everyone pause a while longer than the rest: when it came to whether they identified their views as those of a feminist.

Some, like Savage, the peer educator, grew up thinking feminism was a dirty word, only to embrace it during their college years; others weighed their responses before answering yes or no.

"When I think of feminism, I think of having one's own choice," women's studies graduate student Tunisia Riley said. "I think that if you choose to be sexually active in one way, or you choose not to, that's your truth and that's your choice. I do feel there's an essence of feminism to that, because you're not allowing someone outside of yourself to control what your sexual activity is going to be."

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