

# Chicago Tribune

## WomanNews

### RELATING

## Mr. Big as metaphor for all the bad boys

By Rebecca Theim  
*Special to the Tribune*

He's such a remote figure, he doesn't even have a first name.

A 43-year-old twice-divorced Wall Street businessman, he married a vapid socialite 17 years his junior just months after breaking up with his girlfriend of two years. Five months into that marriage, he was at the door of the ex-girlfriend, begging her to take him back.

Since HBO's "Sex and the City" debuted in 1998, Mr. Big, portrayed by former "Law & Order" star Chris Noth, has emerged as a metaphor for the travails of modern romance. Even contented couples who haven't been in the dating world in years know he's the simultaneously charming and remote, arrogant and witty, on-again, off-again love interest of the show's protagonist, newspaper columnist Carrie Bradshaw. An Internet search returns scores of sites devoted entirely to him.

Four years after the show's debut, Noth is still listed as a "guest star" in its credits, and most episodes in the past two seasons were absent him. But his reappearance in Sunday's season finale underscores his appeal as Carrie's romantic foil.

What do Carrie – and the show's millions of female fans – see in Mr. Big? Why, after four-and-a-half years of his romantic ambivalence and obfuscation, are women still fascinated by a man with a three-letter adjective for a name?

"He has a big wallet, a big job and big prestige. He's going to save us from ourselves," said Gilda Carle, a relationship pundit and author of "Don't Bet on the Prince! How to Have the Man You Want by Betting On Yourself" (Golden Books, \$12.95). "We attract not who we want, but who we are. Carrie's most definitely a commitment-phobe, so, of course, she attracts a male version of herself."

Dr. Carole Lieberman, a Beverly Hills, Calif., psychiatrist, TV show script consultant and co-author of 1997's "Bad Boys: Why We Love Them, How to Live With Them and When to Leave Them," said the allure is more complex.

### Classic 'Big-isms'

Carrie Bradshaw on Mr. Big:

*"He was like the flesh and blood equivalent of a DKNY dress--you know it's not your style, but it's right there, so you try it on anyway."*

*"We're so over, we need a new word for 'over.' "*

*"Big wasn't a crush. He was a crash."*

"Mr. Big represents the father Carrie was never able to capture in her childhood," said Lieberman, who was unaware that Carrie recently revealed that her father deserted her and her mother when Carrie was 5. "She tries again and again to capture Mr. Big, the mysterious, elusive man from her past.

"Of the 'bad boys' who are in many women's pasts, there's usually one guy a woman continues to hope will reform and come back to be the perfect Prince Charming. Mr. Big represents that guy."

Lesley Smith, film and TV critic for PopMatters, an e-zine based in Chicago, attributes Mr. Big's popularity in part to Noth.

"But a bigger factor may be that a lot of people have these 'not-quite-friends, not-quite-lovers' relationships," she said. "We're constantly told that a committed relationship means happiness and bliss, but the reality is that commitment also involves loss, which the show addresses."

Kathy Mattson, a communications consultant who lives in Old Town, said Mr. Big's appeal is about unfinished business.

"Carrie has shared, off and on, much of her 30s with him," said Mattson, a longtime show devotee who co-hosted a 2001 season premiere party for female friends. "He's never been available enough for her to really expect him to ask her to marry him. There's obviously some deep need for her to resolve this relationship."

While declining to confirm that Mr. Big will return to the show next season, an HBO spokeswoman commented that "like in the past, Mr. Big could easily continue to be in and out of Carrie's life."

Leaving viewers up in the air too--fittingly.