



Nixon, Cynthia (b. 1966)

by Linda Rapp

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Cynthia Nixon in a publicity photograph for HBO's *Sex and the City*. Image courtesy HBO. Copyright © HBO.

Award-winning actress Cynthia Nixon has had success in theater, film, and television. She recently acknowledged publicly that she is bisexual and in a loving relationship with a woman. In addition, she has become a strong advocate for marriage equality.

A native New Yorker, born April 9, 1966, Cynthia Nixon partook of the city's theatrical offerings from her earliest years. Her mother, who had also been an actress, began taking her to Shakespeare in the Park when she was three.

Nixon began her acting career as a young teen, appearing in Ronald F. Maxwell's film *Little Darlings* in 1980. In the same year she had her first role on the Broadway stage in a revival of Philip Barry's *Philadelphia Story*. She earned a Theatre World Award for her work.

Nixon continued to act in film, performing in Bob Brooks's *Tattoo* (1981) and Sidney Lumet's *Prince of the City* (1981), as well as in several television movies.

New York Times reporter Leslie Bennetts described Nixon, then a ninth-grader at Hunter College High School, as "a formidably self-possessed and articulate young woman whose manner is thoroughly adult."

For her part, the young Nixon saw acting as "challenging . . . and part of the educational process." She welcomed the opportunity to "meet so many different people," but she drew the line at leaving Hunter College High School and instead being tutored on the movie sets because, she said, "I think the most important thing is to go to a good school with good people and grow up normally."

Nixon demonstrated her commitment to both education and acting by enrolling as an English major at Barnard College while keeping up a demanding schedule of theater performances. In 1984, her freshman year, she worked at an exhausting pace, appearing in simultaneous productions of Tom Stoppard's *The Real Thing* and David Rabe's *Hurlyburly* on Broadway. (Actors Equity subsequently adopted a rule preventing actors from undertaking the grueling schedule of being in two shows at the same time.) She also had a role in Milos Forman's acclaimed film *Amadeus* (1984).

Nixon appeared in Marshall Brickman's film *The Manhattan Project* (1986) and in more television projects before graduating from Barnard in 1988. She returned to Broadway the following year in Wendy Wasserstein's *The Heidi Chronicles*.

Throughout the 1990s Nixon found steady work on the screen, appearing in numerous television shows and in made-for-television movies. Her big-screen roles demonstrated her versatility as an actress. Her cinematic credits include Barry Sonnenfeld's comedy *Addams Family Values* (1993) as well as Alan J. Pakula's mystery thriller *The Pelican Brief* (1993) and Jerry Zaks's comedy-drama *Marvin's Room* (1996).

Live theater remained Nixon's great professional love, and she was back on Broadway in 1993 in Tony

Kushner's *Angels in America: Millennium Approaches* and *Angels in America: Perestroika*. She was also a member of the original cast of the 1995 production of Jean Cocteau's *Indiscretions* (translated by Jeremy Sams), for which she was nominated for a Tony Award as Best Featured Actress in a Play.

Nixon is probably best known for her role as Miranda Hobbes, a high-powered lawyer on the extremely popular series *Sex and the City* (1998-2004). The first season of the show was loosely adapted from Candace Bushnell's book of the same name (1996), a collection of her *New York Observer* columns. In subsequent years the writers created new adventures and dilemmas for four female friends (played by Nixon, Sarah Jessica Parker, Kristin Davis, and Kim Cattrall) in their thirties or forties, all of them (hetero)sexually active, affluent, and always fashionable.

Sex and the City quickly became a hit for HBO. Nixon was an important contributor to the program's success, earning three Golden Globe Award nominations and three Emmy Award nominations. She won an Emmy for Best Supporting Actress in a Comedy Series in 2004. She and the other three principal actresses also received the 2002 Screen Actors Guild Award for Outstanding Performance by an Ensemble in a Comedy Series.

Sex and the City featured a recurring gay character, Stanford Blatch (played by Willie Garson), a talent agent, who was initially insecure but who in the last years of the series found love with a Broadway dancer.

Although there were sometimes storylines for the Blatch character, and the sophisticated principal characters were predictably accepting of homosexuality, the focus of the show was the love and sex lives of the four heterosexual lead characters. Nevertheless, Dennis Hensley of *The Advocate* wrote that "the saucy sitcom has a gay sensibility all its own" and that the show had "finally given gay urban men a regular series to call their own" despite the fact that the lead characters hewed to heterosexual norms.

Executive producer Michael Patrick King stated that he had never intentionally inserted a gay voice into the show. "I really don't feel that I'm a gay man who's channeling a gay voice into women," he said. Nevertheless, the experience of the female *Sex and the City* characters resonated deeply with some gay men and drew the series many fans among them.

Nixon's character was the only one to bear a child and therefore to face the difficulties of being a single working mother, an experience that made her significantly different from the other members of the group of friends as they all continued to search for romantic fulfillment.

Nixon well understood the challenges of combining a career with parenthood. She has two children from her union with Danny Mozes, a photographer. The couple parted amicably in 2003 after a fifteen-year relationship.

Nixon has long been deeply concerned about the welfare of children and has a special interest in improving public education. She sends her own children to New York public schools and is a long-time and vocal advocate for adequate funding not only for a basic curriculum but also for valuable programs such as music education and practical necessities like sufficient staffing in lunchrooms. Her dedication led her to become involved with the non-profit Alliance for Quality Education (AQE).

Through her membership in the group, Nixon met AQE's New York City director, Christine Marinoni. The two women fell in love. Marinoni gave birth to the couple's son in 2011.

Marinoni was one of the proprietors of a lesbian-owned café in Brooklyn before becoming an activist for public schools, first with the Parent Organizing Consortium and then with AQE.

Although Nixon prefers not to have her personal life discussed in the press, she did acknowledge her lesbian relationship publicly, saying that she had "nothing to hide" and was "very happy" with her new love. Once their relationship became known, Nixon was besieged by photographers and journalists lurking outside her home. British journalists were camped out on the lawn of Marinoni's parents' house. Fortunately, the furor was of short duration.

After the conclusion of the run of *Sex and the City*, Nixon undertook several film projects. She starred as Eleanor Roosevelt in Joseph Sargent's *Warm Springs* (2005), a television movie made for HBO. Reviewer Matthew Gilbert praised her performance, writing, "She brings an effectively tentative voice to Eleanor, as well as a manner that manages to be both mousy and steely."

Nixon starred in two feature films, Alex Steyermark's *One Last Thing* and Mark Levin's *Little Manhattan*, in 2005. The latter was shot in New York, which is where Nixon now chooses to work as well as live since both of her children are in school there and she does not want to leave them for the time required to shoot a film.

Nixon returned to Broadway in 2006 in David Lindsay-Abaire's drama *Rabbit Hole*, playing a woman grieving the death of her four-year-old son. Critic David Rooney wrote of her skillful portrayal of the character, "Creating a field of anxiety around her, Nixon's controlled, naturalistic work is faultless here--empathetic even in her most brittle moments, pain coursing quietly through her every expression and acid quips slyly revealing the spirit being suffocated by grief."

Her peers in the theater were equally impressed, and Nixon won the Tony Award for Best Actress in a Play in June 2006. At the awards ceremony, she celebrated her victory by sharing a kiss with Marinoni.

In October 2006, Nixon opened in New York in a revival of Jay Presson Allen's adaptation of Muriel Spark's novel *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. In a decidedly mixed review of the production, Ben Brantley remarked that the actress is a "master of emotional transparency," adding that "Her great gift is for discovering extraordinary depth and detail in ordinary lives."

Nixon has recently turned marriage-equality activist. In May 2009, she appeared with New York Governor David Paterson at a rally for marriage-equality. At the rally, she announced her engagement to Marinoni, remarking, "We could go to Canada, and we could go to Connecticut, and we could even go to Iowa, but we don't want to," she said. "We want to get married right here in New York City, where we live, where our kids live."

Nixon emphasized the importance of marriage by pointing out that even though Marinoni is a stay-at-home mother to Nixon's children from her marriage to Mozes, "if I dropped dead tomorrow, she would have absolutely no legal claim to them."

On October 11, 2009, Nixon spoke in favor of marriage equality at the National March for Equality in Washington, D. C.

In March 2010, she was honored by the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) with the Vito Russo Award for her activism on behalf of marriage equality.

Also in 2010, Andrew Cuomo was elected governor of New York by a large margin. He pledged to make marriage equality a priority of his administration.

Nixon became a familiar face in the campaign to build support in New York for marriage equality. She appeared in videos and in the halls of the state legislature, tirelessly lobbying legislators.

Finally, on June 24, 2011, Nixon celebrated when the marriage equality bill was brought to the senate floor and approved by a tally of 33 in favor to 29 opposed, and it was signed into law by Governor Cuomo.

Nixon and Marinoni wed in New York on May 27, 2012.

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