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ABSTRACT

The Lifetime Television Network has established itself within the cable industry as the only network that explicitly gendercasts its programming. Lifetime specifically markets itself as "Television for Women"; however, what that means exactly is not clear. On the one hand, Lifetime does not want to be noted as the "feminist network." Yet, former President and CEO, Douglas McCormick claims that Lifetime is "more responsive to women's interests" because it "[tries] to portray women in ways that move us all forward to a greater sense of enlightenment and understanding." A discourse analysis is used to examine the major themes in Lifetime's made-for-cable movies--success, psyche, sexuality, and standardized beauty. The analysis reveals that Lifetime portrays white, upper/middle class, young/middle aged, heterosexual, physically beautiful, strong-willed, emotionally charged, sexual objects and procreators in its original movies. While Lifetime's movies do address some women's issues, they concurrently contain and undermine feminism by consistently reasserting that women cannot "have it all." Contains 22 references; an appendix lists 19 movie titles and premier dates. (Author/RS)

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Lifetime's Limited Feminism: Defining and Deconstructing Television for Women

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Lifetime's Limited Feminism: Defining and Deconstructing
Television for Women

Abstract

The Lifetime Television Network has established itself within the cable industry as the only network that explicitly gendercasts its programming. Lifetime specifically markets itself as "Television for Women"; however, what that means exactly is not clear. On the one hand, Lifetime does not want to be noted as the "feminist network" (Hammer, 1991, p. 81). Yet, former President and CEO, Douglas McCormick claims that Lifetime is "more responsive to women's interests" because it "[tries] to portray women in ways that move us all forward to a greater sense of enlightenment and understanding."

A discourse analysis is used to examine the major themes in Lifetime's made-for-cable movies--success, psyche, sexuality, and standardized beauty. The analysis reveals that Lifetime portrays white, upper/middle class, young/middle aged, heterosexual, physically beautiful, strong-willed, emotionally charged, sexual objects and procreators in its original movies. The paper concludes that while Lifetime's movies do address some women's issues, they concurrently contain and undermine feminism by consistently reasserting that women cannot "have it all."

Lifetime's Limited Feminism:

Defining and Deconstructing Television for Women

The Lifetime Television Network gendercasts, targeting female viewers as identified by its slogan "Television for Women." Because of television's pervasive nature and ability to inform its audience, it is important to ask how Lifetime identifies and reinforces its definition of women. Stereotypes have long been challenged and this research examines whether the network bases its programming philosophy on traditional stereotypes of women, contemporary ideas of womanhood, or a range of alternatives catering to the myriad of women in American society.

Feminist literary critic, Elaine Showalter (1977) provides the basis for understanding what Lifetime means when it promotes "television for women." Specifically, Showalter's (1977) work delineates a variety of "women's literature." I argue that her 'feminine' and 'feminist' stages of literature are applicable to television and are most obvious in the Lifetime Television Network.

Applying Showalter's research, this study is an analysis of Lifetime's original films, since presumably, the network has the

most authorial control over their self-produced programming. Original movies were selected because Lifetime produces them and, therefore, the organization has the most authorial voice and can more closely adhere to their organization's philosophical programming goals. With this in mind, this analysis critically examines the themes, characters, and narrative outcomes contained in Lifetime's Original Movies. The texts selected consist of nineteen videotaped movies (see Appendix) acquired from the time that Lifetime began advertising as "Television for Women" (September 1994) to the end of the 1996-1997 television season (May 1997). The total number of movies that aired during this time period is 25 because Lifetime did not produce original movies in September, October, November, and December of 1994 and January, February, April, and May of 1995.¹ It was not until June 1995 that Lifetime began consistently airing their original movies once a month.

Television for Women

The Lifetime Television Network offers a worthy site for this investigation as Lifetime executives explain; it is a cable network that programs with the female viewer in mind. While Lifetime does not want to be noted as the "feminist network" (Hammer, 1991, p. 81), former President and CEO, Douglas McCormick claims that Lifetime is "more responsive to women's

interests" (Hall, 1994, p. F15) than other television networks. Even though Lifetime claims not to be a feminist network, it still maintains some feminist and feminine implications by claiming to be more responsive to women. Additionally, McCormick states that Lifetime "[tries] to portray women in ways that move us all forward to a greater sense of enlightenment and understanding" (Krantz, 1993, p. 158).

Regardless of how successful this self-proclaimed fulfillment for female viewers has been, Lifetime's commercial success is evident after having its fair share of struggle. In reviewing the organization's press releases, it is evident that Lifetime overcame economic instabilities, increased its advertising revenues, boosted its ratings, earned a variety of professional awards, and, as a result, expanded its market value. Among the myriad cable networks, Lifetime ranks 11th, serving 66 million subscribers, according to the National Cable Television Association (1999). Currently, the network "ranks number one in women 18-49 for Total Day" and in "women 18+ and working women in primetime" (Lifetime Online, 1999). Thus, the network out delivers all other basic cable networks in these demographics, continually altering its programming and remaining successful. Seemingly more secure in its place in basic cable, Lifetime is an excellent example of a new cable network finding a niche in the ever expanding cable industry.

Methodological Approach

A discourse analysis was well-suited for the purposes of this study because, as John Fiske (1987b) argues, "to understand both the production of programs and the production of meanings from them, we need to understand the workings of discourse" (p. 14). Discourse is the communicative elements (i.e. the themes, characters, and narrative outcomes) that are used in understanding a topic (here, womanhood and femininity) and the attitudes toward that topic. Society naturalizes discourse, to work ideologically, giving particular meanings to the topics within a text. The Lifetime Original Movies then, are viewed by audiences to not only make sense of the network and its programming, but also to make sense of their social experiences (Fiske, 1987b).

The term "discourse" has been used in speech communication (see Deming and Jenkins, 1991) as well as cultural studies (see Fiske, 1991). From a cultural studies perspective, as this current research follows, discourse is drawn from Michel Foucault (1970, 1972). "Discourse is a fundamental cultural code whose structure uniformly controls perceptual schemas, language, and what counts for knowledge in that culture" (Vande Berg & Wenner, 1991, p. 36). Thus, for television texts it is the televisual codes including, but not limited to, themes,

characters, and narrative outcomes that explain the social relations, power structure, and cultural identities.

Characters

Similar to D'Acci, Dow, and Fiske, this research examines characters since it is through them that the themes and narrative outcomes are enacted. The concept of character is derived from Fiske (1987a; 1987b). He explains that a character is constituted by repetition, transformations, and oppositional relations with other characters, and concludes that a discursive reading strategy of characters represent social positions and values embodied by those characters (Fiske, 1987a). Thus, the emergent patterns within characters, as presented by the Lifetime Television Network, reveal particular social positions and values that partially define television for women.

Themes

In addition to characters, this discourse analysis examines the themes contained within the movies under investigation. In her analysis of literature, Showalter (1989) finds that "when we look at women writers collectively we can see an imaginative continuum, the recurrence of certain patterns, themes, problems, and images" (p. 1107). Although not all the movies under investigation were written by women, I argue that particular reoccurring themes emerge in television. Further, as John Cawelti disputes, "the analysis of ideologies and/or archetypes

is close to what critics used to call the analysis of themes and is a necessary aspect of any full exploration of individual works and genres" (1985, p. 376).

A theme is defined as "a general claim, or doctrine, whether implicit or asserted" (Abrams, 1988, p. 111). Further, it is explained as "the central or controlling generalization" (Abrams, 1988, p. 63) of a story. More specifically, David Perkins argues,

to name a theme is to make a partial statement of what the work is about. A theme may be a very general concept, a nexus of several concepts, a myth, an archetypal pattern, a mythological or historical figure, a social ideology, a literary type, a motif, a topos, an image or a symbol. (p. 110)

In essence, a "theme is one of a class of concepts that can be used to interconnect or synthesize works" (Brinker, 1993, p. 23). Harry Levin argues that "themes...can never be avoided; they must be incidentally mentioned--must indeed be continually evoked--in any discussion of any writer, whenever his [or her] writing is described or paraphrased or critically evaluated" (1993, p. 192). Therefore, a thematic discursive analysis of Lifetime's Original Movies is equally appropriate.

Narrative Outcomes

This discursive analysis not only examines characters and themes, but narrative outcomes as well. The outcomes are important to investigate since they present the viewers with a

sense of finality. The narrative outcome is the producers' last opportunity to alter the movies' characters and themes. The movies' endings leave audiences with a sense of closure regarding other discursive elements presented in Lifetime's Original Movies (Piccirillo, 1986).

Emergent patterns of characters, themes, and narrative outcomes reveal Lifetime's ideological position and programming philosophy. The network's ideology of women serves as a basis for discussion from a feminist perspective. Specifically, while the classification and explanation of four major themes exposes Lifetime's ideological position towards women, the evaluation of these findings is the ultimate goal of criticism, and therefore, an interpretation of the discourses found in the texts is offered.

Success, Psyches, Sexuality,
and Standardized Beauty

Four major themes illustrate the Lifetime Television Network's conceptualization of women and how it serves its audience. The themes in the films help define the network's image of women (viewers as well as characters) and its programming strategy capitalizing on this demographic. These themes are (1) the nature of women's success, (2) the nature of women's psyche as depicted by their ability to reason (3) the

exploration of women's sexuality, and, (4) contemporary notions of women's standardized beauty.

Within these dominant themes, Lifetime's Original Movies also present subthemes that further illustrate problems in women's lives and define women's culture according to the network. That is, while a theme is defined as a very general concept of what the film is about, a subtheme is a more specific concept. Thus, the themes serve as unifying devices for these films and the subthemes serve to understand how those themes are presented. For example, in the Lifetime movies, the subthemes of success are depicted as problems of raising a family, problems of following a career path, and the issues of attempting to do both. These subthemes are displayed by characters who must make decisions, and the outcomes resulting from these decisions which provide a richer understanding of Lifetime's ideology. The major theme of the psyche contains subthemes of women being taken seriously and women accepting their psychic abilities, enabling them to "see" into the future.

Combined, these dominant themes and subthemes reflect the network's understanding of women's television. Ultimately, because of the network's high concentration of female viewers, the movies naturalize notions of what it means to be a woman. That is, it may be assumed that the network's authorial voice allows viewers to see how the ideal women "should" behave. Even

far-fetched stories, such as romances, science fiction, and fairy tales provide opportunities for audiences to relate metaphorically. Lifetime's movies, themes, and subthemes "relate directly to social values that are fundamental links between the story and the culture" (Sillars, 1991, p. 158). Thus, each of these major themes provides insight towards Lifetime's construction of women's culture.

The Theme of Success: Family and Career

The most common theme exemplified in Lifetime's Original Movies is success. In fact, in almost one half (9 of the 19 movies), success is the major theme. The theme of success contains fundamental problems of personal and professional success through the characters' attempts to balance obligations to their families with obligations to their careers. An understanding of how success is achieved and portrayed by the characters begins to establish Lifetime's concept of television for women.

Although every main character in Lifetime's Original Movies obtain some level of success, this analysis examines the juxtaposition between personal and professional success. By doing so, nine movies are specifically about how the lead character defines her self-worth and hence, how Lifetime defines femininity. Five of the nine movies depicting the theme of success portray professional career-minded female characters who

learn that their families should take precedence over their work (Ebbie, A Different Kind of Christmas, The Abduction, Closer and Closer and Shame II: The Secret). Thus, in attempts to define success, these characters discover that their careers are not as important as originally believed. Instead, they opt to turn their interests away from their careers and focus more on their families.

These five films serve as examples where women's professional success came at the expense of their private, personal lives. These main characters who experienced career advancement neglected or abandoned their families. Ultimately, however, these Lifetime women learned that their careers are not everything, and their families and friends should take precedence. In addition, for Lifetime Original Movie protagonists, the quest for professional success is invalidated when they abandon their families.

Lifetime not only depicts the subtheme of success as professional women who learn that their success is ultimately defined by their personal happiness, but three Lifetime Original Movies depict the subtheme of lead female characters who partially abandon family obligations to pursue professional careers (When the Vows Break, Little Girls in Pretty Boxes, and The Silence of Adultery). Although the quest for professional success holds great importance for the characters, it is

depicted negatively since the characters are portrayed abandoning their families. Consequently one divorce results (When the Vows Break) and two reconciliations occur (The Silence of Adultery and Little Girls in Pretty Boxes), imposing great hardships on their families.

For Lifetime characters, traditional marriage is seen as positive and divorce as negative in that the woman who divorces suffers repercussions. Specifically, Barbara (When the Vows Break) is left to face a hostile legal system and a sexist judge when she seeks alimony. Not only does Barbara face the legal repercussions, but when she attempts another intimate relationship, her boyfriend dies, thus, she is seemingly punished twice. This example demonstrates that women have to "pay the consequences" of leaving their husbands in search of professional success.

Not only are women punished for seeking a career, but the two characters who reconciled with their spouses represent those who abandoned their families, realized their mistake, and returned. Similarly, Rachael (The Silence of Adultery) seeks recognition and validation as a successful professional; however, after engaging in an affair, she realizes the effect the affair has on her children and reunites with her husband. All is forgiven.

In terms of the major theme of success, Lifetime supports the idea that women should devote themselves to family. In the cases when women turn their focus away from their families and toward career interests they are punished. Regardless of the form of punishment, which ranges from humiliation, to facing a sexist, male judge, to jeopardizing their children's health, negative consequences are depicted.

While the Lifetime Network explores the theme of success in nine of the nineteen Original Movies under investigation, other discursive elements further define the network's concept of television for women. These elements include the narrative outcomes and the characters' careers, lifestyles, and sexual orientations.

For the women who lead professionally successful careers, family life is presented as utopian. The characters glamorize the lives of women who place their families first. Even though these families do not necessarily contain a father figure or children (Ebbie, Closer and Closer), the lead female character witnesses the love and support family members provide each other. Thus, even though the utopian families seen in Lifetime are not always traditional (containing a father, mother, and children) they represent a "better" life than the life led by professional women.

In addition to defining success as a return to family institutions, it is important to examine the professions that women turned their focus from in order to fulfill their traditional roles as mothers and wives. Specifically, the women who established themselves professionally did so in upper middle and upper class occupations ranging from educator (The Abduction) to politician (A Different Kind of Christmas) to CEO (Ebbie). The ideal woman as demonstrated in Lifetime Original Movies is partially defined by her success; however this success is limited by the contentedness found in her private life (i.e. home, family, friends). In fact, family life is so important to Lifetime characters that they turn away from high paying professional occupations in order to preserve families. The family lives depicted in these movies are construed as utopian, until the female figure disrupts it. When she returns to the home, however, normalcy is restored.

Women are depicted in a variety of ways; however, it is the ideal woman in Lifetime that receives the reward of happiness. This representation is juxtaposed with the possibility of unhappiness as evidenced by the character's sense of guilt, threat of death, and other demonized portrayals. Viewers are witness to the characters' "correct" and "incorrect" choices and Lifetime's ideology is apparent in its depiction of who gets

rewarded for what choices. The characters' redemption reveal the values transcended from the Lifetime Television Network.

The Theme of the Psyche:

Emotion, Reason, and Psychic Abilities

Another dominant theme found in Lifetime's Original Movies under investigation is that of the psyche. Three of the films under study depict this theme explicitly (Dancing in the Dark, Color Me Perfect and The Haunting of Lisa), supported by the subthemes of emotion/reason and psychic abilities. In defining women, two films reject the dichotomous gender stereotype that women are emotional and men are rational. While that stereotype is rejected, Lifetime supports the stereotype of "women's intuition" in one of the films. As such, the network defines women as beings whom obtain both emotional and rational abilities, while having special intuitive powers.

For example, Dancing in the Dark, Color Me Perfect initially presents emotional women, displaying tantrums, lying, and behaving childlike. While some men in these movies perceive women stereotypically, other men make the women become logical and reasonable in order to understand them, thus displaying that women can be logical, but this needs to be taught to the women by men. Even though these films reinforce a very narrow meaning of reason and emotion, the network's presentation of reason and emotion serves to define and support the major theme of women's

psyche, further understanding the network's ideological position of the ideal woman.

While women in these movies are encouraged to be more logical, psychic women, on the other hand, are encouraged to embrace their abilities. This contradiction complicates Lifetime's definition of women. First, the emotional stereotype of women is discounted; however, the intuitive stereotype of women is encouraged. According to Lifetime, if a woman is emotional, she will not be taken seriously. However, if a woman is psychic, she is taken seriously. This ultimately suggests that emotion is superfluous but intuition is beneficial, such as solving a murder case, catching the killer, and saving lives.

Like the major theme of success, Lifetime's programming philosophy is evident in the major theme of women's psyches. While a variety of perspectives are shown, the ideal woman is rewarded for being rational, intelligent, and embracing her intuition. Time and again, viewers are privy to witness the (possible) consequences of women who are overly emotional or who discount their intuition.

The Theme of Sexuality:

Harassment and Reproduction

A third major theme present in the Lifetime Television Network's Original Movies is female sexuality, which is limited to heterosexuality and explored by two subthemes: (1) sexual

harassment and (2) reproductive rights. Even though all of the Lifetime Original Movies contain some elements of women's sexuality, including having an affair (The Silence of Adultery), engaging in heterosexual relationships (including Ebbie, A Different Kind of Christmas, and The Haunting of Lisa), and nearly being raped (Dancing in the Dark), the network explicitly acknowledges the major theme of women's sexuality in five of its movies under investigation (Hostile Advances: The Kerry Ellison Story, Prison of Secrets, Her Desperate Choice, Their Second Chance, and When Innocence is Lost).

Like Hostile Advances, Prison of Secrets shows viewers that women can win their fights against sexual harassment; however, they must pay a price for their victories. Some viewers may ask whether this protest is worth the consequences. For although the main character in Hostile Advances did not experience physical harm, as did the main character in Prison of Secrets, she did suffer mental harm which is just as detrimental as physical harm. These films illustrate that women must suffer prior in order to overcome women's injustices. Other women (colleagues and inmates) continually allow these injustices even though emotional or physical harm is endured.

Even to protect her daughter, the main character (Jody Murdock in Her Desperate Choice) suffers the consequence of standing up to the system. Similar to the two other films

depicting the dominant theme of sexuality, viewers are again left to ponder whether the consequences are worth the proactive/protective actions. Some main characters are not vindicated or even validated for their actions to overcome injustices. This thematic discursive analysis reveals that Lifetime partially depicts women as (sex) victims who have the strength and courage to fight for their rights, although the fight itself is questionable.

While sexual harassment is one way of presenting the theme of sexuality, the Lifetime Television Network also presents women's rights of reproduction as a subtheme. According to Lifetime, because women have the ability to reproduce, they further have the choice to accept motherhood, or give a child up for adoption--abortion is not an option. These reproductive rights are explored in two Original Movies (Their Second Chance and When Innocence is Lost). Specifically, pregnant women are faced with the decision of abortion, adoption, or motherhood. While one character chooses motherhood, another opts for adoption. The woman who opted for adoption is positively rewarded since the child (30 years later), forgives her biological mother, relieving her of all guilt. Further, the biological mother is rewarded for her decision, for if she aborted the baby, she would have never been reunited with the

child's biological father. Both films portray the support of the traditional family.

In sum to the dominant theme of women's sexuality, the ideal Lifetime woman can overcome sexual aggression through determination and perseverance. Even though women are objectified, they contain the inner strength to fight and win against the sexist society. These qualities help further define Lifetime's understanding of womanhood. However, according to Lifetime, these qualities are rare since only the lead characters fight the injustice while other female characters are unsupportive. This illustrates the strong will and independent nature of the ideal women in Lifetime movies. Not only are women defined by their reactions to sexual harassment, but by their reproductive choices as well. Based upon this analysis, Lifetime's construction of women, then, are those who are utilized as attractive objects "worthy" for procreation.

The Theme of Standardized Beauty:

Age and Weight

The fourth and final major theme identified in Lifetime's Original Movies is standardized beauty. Even though the major theme of beauty and the subtheme of weight, is only blatantly presented in one film (Devil's Food), all of the films under investigation subtly present this theme. For example, all the main female characters in Lifetime's Original Movies under

investigation are attractive. The actresses that play them include Kate Jackson, Susan Lucci, Kim Delaney, Cheryl Ladd, Lindsay Wagner, Markie Post, and Faith Ford. They are not overweight, nor do they have blemished skin. Even Ericka, in When Innocence is Lost, does not show signs of excess weight, which is often the case after giving birth. Barbara, in When the Vow Breaks, flagrantly discloses her attempts to maintain standardized beauty when she tells her husband that she wore her hair and kept her weight down just to please him.

Even though women are generally not obsessed with their looks in most of Lifetime's Original Movies, it remains a dominant theme throughout each film. Each of the female characters are played by beautiful actresses, according to contemporary standards. Thus, women are defined in Lifetime's Original Movies by their outward appearance, even though the message supported is that women should accept themselves. Femininity is partially defined as thin, flawless, attractive women who ought not concern themselves with their appearance. The contradiction here, however, is that they do not need to concern themselves because they already conform to today's standards of beauty. Further, these women, with the exception of one (Sophie and the Moonhanger), are white. Thus, femininity is also defined from a Caucasian perspective.

Conclusion

The Lifetime Television Network programming philosophy is articulated in its Original Movies. In essence, Lifetime's promotional slogan reports that the network presents television for women, but what that means has not been clear. The major themes of women's success and psyches combined with the major themes of sexuality and standardized beauty, clearly present Lifetime's ideological position of the ideal woman. While other, much less substantive, depictions of women in Lifetime's Original Movies provide insight to the network's concept of the ideal woman, it is these four dominant themes, accompanied with their subthemes, that most obviously support the network's overall message about femininity and what comprises television for women.

Like all themes, success contains various subthemes further defining Lifetime's meaning of femininity. These subthemes include family success and career success. Even though Lifetime presents these two subthemes, femininity is defined by the women who hold the traditional role of caregiver, i.e., mother and wife. This is demonstrated repeatedly by career-oriented women who return to these traditional roles after learning that their careers do not account for their "place" in life.

Lifetime's ideal women are middle and upper class women (city councilperson, CEO, attorney). This neglects the views of

blue collar women altogether. Nevertheless, it reasons that if a woman is willing to give up some of her CEO responsibilities to give more time to her friends and family, the satisfaction must be extremely rewarding. What is ignored here are the blue collar female workers who must work to minimally support themselves. Viewers from a lower socio-economic class may desire to spend more time with their friends and family, but their finances do not allow for it.

It must be noted that Lifetime women did not give up their careers altogether, but rather, vowed to redirect their focus away from their jobs and more to their families. The repercussions of this altered interest is not apparent nor demonstrated in Lifetime's Original Movies. Viewers are privy to see what happens when women neglect their families for their careers, but do not see the consequences of these women who neglect some of their career responsibilities for their families.

In addition to career-oriented women whose interests shift to their family duties rather than their career obligations, the women who do leave their homes in search of a career or identity are punished for their actions and usually return to their home focus. Again, this demonstrates Lifetime's support of the traditionally domestic role of the feminine as a natural one.

Finally, the dominant theme of success and the emphasis on femininity, defining it as caregiver, presents family life as utopian. In two of the movies that demonstrate this major theme, babies are expected (Ebbie, Shame II). In two others, even though the parents are divorced, the mothers' fiancées get along splendidly with her children (A Different Kind of Christmas, The Abduction). Even the woman who has an affair and returns to her family is forgiven (The Silence of Adultery). These examples neglect the problems and complications evident in everyday life; thus, the family life, as depicted in Lifetime, is glamorized.

The major theme of the psyche is also present in Lifetime's Original Movies, further defining the network's concept of femininity. This theme rejects the traditional stereotype that women are emotional and men are rational. While Lifetime presents this stereotype of women early in the film (Dancing in the Dark), it is overturned later when women's abilities to be rational are forcefully demonstrated.

Regardless of this stereotype being vanquished, the stereotype of women remaining subordinate to men remains. In the films containing the major theme of women's psyches, the women are defined and constructed by men. Women are held powerless to men's control until the male characters allow the female characters to demonstrate their (MENTal) abilities. Once the

women prove what they have learned from their male counterparts and how much they are now similar to these men, women are granted freedom.

In addition to women's abilities to reason, women are portrayed as being psychic as well. This feminine characteristic is embraced by the network as evidenced in the films. Ultimately, women's psyches are valued as having utility. Emotions, as demonstrated in these films as childlike outbursts, have no utility since men cannot relate to them, nor understand the characters. Psychic abilities, on the other hand, can serve the purpose of catching killers, and thus are useful.

The major theme of women's sexuality and its subthemes also contribute to Lifetime's construction of women. Because these women are sexually harassed, they are presented as sexual objects of desire. Nevertheless, these women ultimately fight the odds against the male dominated establishment and win. These victories come at the consequences of not being taken seriously and social ostracism. Therefore, Lifetime women are defined as independent, strong-willed people who contain the strength and courage to stand up for their rights and the rights of others. These women are willing to suffer the consequences in order to achieve justice.

Not only are women defined as sex objects who fight the system victoriously, but within this major theme of sexuality, women are also defined as procreators. This definition, however, is represented in a traditional way. For example, in two of these movies when women face the decision of abortion, adoption, or motherhood, one opted for adoption (Their Second Chance) and the other opted for motherhood (When Innocence is Lost). Abortion is not an acceptable option in Lifetime Original Movies. Even when adoption was chosen (Their Second Chance), the character was rewarded by her daughter returning to her 30 years later and reuniting her with the father. This demonstrates a traditional family and, like the theme of success, glorifies family life.

In addition, Lifetime's concept of women's sexuality is strictly heterosexual marriage. It does not account for sexual liberation or alternate sexual orientations, such as lesbianism. Again, this presents a traditional and sexually conservative construction of women.

Finally, the ideal woman is also defined by the network's portrayal of the dominant theme of standardized beauty as evident in its movies. The subthemes of standardized beauty are partially depicted as women attempt to defy their age and struggle with issues of weight in order to maintain attractiveness as defined by contemporary American standards.

This notion of standardized beauty comes from a white, young and middle age perspective. The youngest central character in these movies is 18-years-old (Ericka in When Innocence is Lost) and the oldest character is about 50 (Barbara in When the Vows Break).

Even the character obsessed with her weight managed to maintain elements of standardized beauty (Sally in Devil's Food). To demonstrate the importance of standardized beauty, it is noted that Sally revealed her ideal weight at 104 pounds, even though this weight is quite unrealistic for a woman of her stature (about 5'6" tall), played by Suzanne Somers. This weight, in fact, is unhealthy for most women over 5'2".

Altogether, in terms of the characters' sexuality and physicality, Lifetime defines femininity as white, young and middle aged, heterosexual, physically beautiful, strong willed, sexual objects and procreators. Occupationally, socially, and mentally, these women are middle and upper class, strong willed, emotionally charged, rationally capable women. These Lifetime women, who successfully challenge and fight injustices, obtain the abilities to have white collar careers, but they are really much happier when they focus on their "natural," domestic roles as caregivers, nurturing spouses and children. The Lifetime Television Network naturalizes these themes as important and

real in women's lives and thereby defines the ideal woman as one who possess these qualities.

Discussion

After defining and deconstructing television for women, it is important to evaluate and discuss these findings. The Lifetime Television Network, does indeed, offer "Television for Women"; however, the type of women it caters to is limited. Further, the depictions of women in their original movies are also limited. Through its consistently repetitive portrayal of women, the network naturalizes its concept of the ideal woman. This naturalized image, as defined by Lifetime, is a primarily stereotyped one and not a feminist's definition of women.

Lifetime repeatedly presents the argument that women cannot have it all. In the case of the major theme of success, for example, some characters chose to partially give up their personal success to achieve professional success; while in other narratives the opposite was shown. That is, the characters chose to partially give up their professional success to enhance their personal success. While both portrayals were depicted, the characters who maintained their families as first priority were rewarded. This, again, perpetuates the idea that "women belong in the home with their families." Understanding how Lifetime depicts the ideal woman, one may ask if Lifetime is a feminist network.

Sonya Foss, Karen Foss, and Robert Trapp (1991) suggest that "anyone who attempts to integrate women's voices is adopting a feminist stance" (p. 274). Even though Lifetime does not want the nomenclature of the "feminist network" (Hammer, 1991) or "the Betty Crocker channel" (Burgi, 1989), executives claim that the network is "more responsive to women's interests" (Hall, 1994, p. F15) is "an oasis for women on the dial" (Robichaux, 1993, p. 81), and "reflects a positive image of women" (Hammer, 1991, p. 81). Therefore, according to Foss, Foss, and Trapp the network is feminist.

Liberal feminist, indeed, easily speaks to mainstream contemporary issues. That Lifetime initially seemingly sustains liberal feminist ideologies is evident in three ways. First, the fact that the network airs programming "responsive to women's needs" is a feminist concept. Second, the fact that Lifetime's Original Movies contain feminine topics, including featuring female protagonists, is a liberal feminist approach towards programming. Third, the illustrations of women facing difficult dilemmas and overcoming them within the patriarchal system is a feminist stance. However, it is the way in which the female protagonists overcome their confrontations that depart from a feminist perspective. Therefore, Lifetime presents a very limited version of liberal feminism, actually co-opted by the patriarchy for capitalist means.

APPENDIX

<u>Lifetime Original Movie</u>	<u>Premiere Date</u>	
<u>Shame II: The Secret</u>	June	1995
<u>Dancing in the Dark</u>	July	1995
<u>Silence of Adultery</u>	August	1995
<u>When The Vows Break</u>	November	1995
<u>Ebbie</u>	December	1995
<u>Sophie and the Moonhanger</u>	January	1996
<u>Closer and Closer</u>	February	1996
<u>The Haunting of Lisa</u>	April	1996
<u>Hostile Advances: The Kerry Ellison Story</u>	May	1996
<u>Chasing the Dragon</u>	June	1996
<u>The Abduction</u>	July	1996
<u>Devil's Food</u>	September	1996
<u>Her Desperate Choice</u>	October	1996
<u>Color Me Perfect</u>	November	1996
<u>A Different Kind of Christmas</u>	December	1996
<u>Little Girls in Pretty Boxes</u>	January	1997
<u>Their Second Chance</u>	February	1997
<u>Prison of Secrets</u>	March	1997
<u>When Innocence is Lost</u>	April	1997

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