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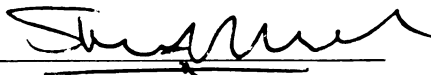
Woman's Channel, but Man's World:  
How the Advertising on Lifetime Television  
Perpetuates Inequality

presented by

Lorraine Marie Kaplan

has been accepted towards fulfillment  
of the requirements for

Master of Arts degree in Communication

  
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WOMAN'S CHANNEL, BUT MAN'S WORLD: HOW THE ADVERTISING ON  
LIFETIME TELEVISION PERPETUATES GENDER INEQUALITY

By

Lorraine Marie Kaplan

A THESIS

Submitted to  
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## ABSTRACT

### WOMAN'S CHANNEL, BUT MAN'S WORLD: HOW THE ADVERTISING ON LIFETIME TELEVISION PERPETUATES GENDER INEQUALITY

By

Lorraine Marie Kaplan

This thesis empirically tests whether Lifetime, a cable network, depicts women in its advertisements consistent with its stated goal of portraying women positively in its programming. Commercials aired from "L.A. Law" during primetime programming for a one-week period were studied to determine whether women as portrayed represent women as they exist in Lifetime's target audience of educated, career-oriented women. The traditional versus modern roles assigned to women in the advertisements were also studied.

It was found that the advertisements did not depict women accurately. It was also found that the network failed in practice to achieve its programming goal in the way women are portrayed in advertisements, rarely depicting women in working roles and when so depicted, never portraying them in supervisory positions. These results suggest that unless Lifetime reconciles its advertising practice with its stated goal, the network will never fully achieve advertising effectiveness among its viewers.

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1992

## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis in memory of my brother, Chuck, who always believed in me and told me that I could accomplish anything if I set my mind to it.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Dr. Steven A. McCornack for all of his guidance and inspiration in regard to this thesis. I would also like to thank Mary H. Barczak for the long hours she put in doing research and coding, as well as for her continual moral support. Most of all, however, I would like to thank my parents for granting me the opportunity to further my education, and my fiancé, Brian S. Arbetter, for his unending patience and love.



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## INTRODUCTION

The United States enjoys the greatest number of cable entertainment channels than any other nation in the world. By the end of the decade, it is estimated that up to 65 percent of U.S. television households will be receiving some type of cable television service (Sparkes, 1985, p.15). Why, in a world of free network television, are viewers increasingly willing to pay for, and advertisers increasingly willing to buy time on, cable? The answer is simple: cable provides specialized programming to specific viewers and a targeted audience to product advertisers.

Specialized programming is both interest and demographically defined. Interest-defined programming includes channels such as Cable News Network (CNN) for around the clock news, Home Box Office (HBO) for non-stop movie entertainment and the Weather Channel for continuous weather updates. Demographically-defined programming, on the other hand, includes cable channels such as Black Entertainment Television (BET) aimed at African Americans and Lifetime Television (aimed at educated, career-oriented women). These channels were created to fulfill the viewing preferences of demographically-defined audiences.

Given that cable channels reach millions of specific viewers with defined interests, the attraction for advertisers is great. Not only can marketers pinpoint their audience, they can guarantee that their viewers will be reached. As such, the commercial messages that are conveyed have significance because of the strong potential impact of this advertising on targeted viewers (Hollins, 1984, p. 113).

This thesis focuses on Lifetime--a cable channel for women only--and the female sex-role portrayals it depicts in its advertising, as well as the possible consequences these portrayals have on Lifetime's viewing audience. Specifically, this thesis compares how women are portrayed in Lifetime's

programming with how they are portrayed in advertisements on the network. This is accomplished by discussing selected literature about women's role portrayals in advertising, examining perceived images of women's role portrayals in Lifetime's advertising and, finally, contrasting the research findings of this thesis with the "claims" that Lifetime promotes. Suggestions for further research are also provided.

### Overview of Lifetime

Viewers of Lifetime Television represent the highest concentration of educated working women of any basic cable network in the United States. With its "typical" consumer--an 18 to 49-year-old woman with a \$38,000 household income--Lifetime claims not only to have an audience (53 million homes) attractive to advertisers who target female consumers, but to theoretically provide these advertisers with the most direct means of achieving their goals (Rimer, 1991, p.9).

Launched on February 1, 1984, Lifetime is the product of a merger between two cable stations, Daytime and Cable Health Network (CHN). Daytime, which was operated by Hearst/ABC Video Services, consisted of weekday alternative programming for women, including self-help, relationship and contemporary female-oriented shows. CHN operated as a 24-hour service, offering programs on personal and family health and fitness, science and medicine. The network also pioneered regularly scheduled professional programming for doctors and the health community.

Following Daytime's basic topic format, Lifetime Television operates on a 24-hour, six-day-a-week schedule. Mondays through Saturdays Lifetime features daily programming on parenting, health, fitness, food and fashion with shows like "Attitudes," "What Every Baby Knows," "The Frugal Gourmet," "It Figures" and "The Jane Wallace Show." During primetime, Lifetime features shows such as "The Days and Nights of Molly Dodd," "Moonlighting," "L.A. Law," "Spencer:

For Hire" and feature films. Throughout the year, Lifetime also presents original specials and documentaries that address issues of concern to contemporary women.<sup>1</sup>

On Sundays, the cable channels that normally carry Lifetime instead telecast Lifetime Medical Television (LMT). Modeled after the old CHN basic topic format, LMT specializes in programming for doctors and other medical professionals. An ideal vehicle for pharmaceutical companies to sell directly to those who prescribe their products, LMT runs series like "Family Practice Update" and "Infectious Disease '91." It also runs news coverage on current medical trends and techniques, as well as periodic specials pertaining to subjects relevant to the health services community (Werts, 1991, p. 21).<sup>2</sup>

With the exception of Sundays, Lifetime's "bottom line" is having shows women want to watch. According to Pat Fili, senior vice president of programming and production at Lifetime, airing series like "The Days and Nights of Molly Dodd" (starring Blair Brown as a Manhattan single) put Lifetime on the programming map. Fili noted that "Molly Dodd" drew first-time viewers to Lifetime and, not incidentally, clearly expressed the channel's philosophy of them. The show had a woman--but not necessarily a traditional one--in a key role. It spoke in an intelligent tone of voice directly to women, but not in a way that excluded men (Werts, 1991, p.19).

"The network chooses its primetime series for their universal appeal," Fili noted. "As we go into the evening hours, women tend to watch TV with their families and husbands. We want programming that appeals to women, but is something that doesn't turn off men" (King, 1990, p.3). Even though Lifetime's promotions of "L.A. Law" reruns are intended to appeal to women, the network chose to run that series in prime time precisely because both women and men like the show. "You can't have a show on at that time that's male-unfriendly," Fili noted (Rimer, 1991, pp.9-10).

Still, Lifetime calls itself "the women's network," and its aggressive pursuit of that image has been a big part of its success. Thomas F. Burchill, Lifetime Television president and CEO, agrees. He noted that Lifetime has grown along with other cable networks that aim at particular viewers. "There is a higher level of audience satisfaction for these networks, whether it's kids tuning into Nickelodeon, or classic movie fans to TNT or women to Lifetime" (Rimer, 1991, p. 10). He added that the business plan calls for Lifetime to have an identity with a loyal audience of women and young professionals. "We want to stand out," Burchill claimed. "We want there to be a singleminded benefit, which is when you come to Lifetime, you'll know what you're going to get" ("Lifetime Sets," 1985, p.11). That is, according to Fili, "to reflect the viewpoint of the network and be respectful of women" (Werts, 1991, p. 20).

Fili noted that a good example of the channel's goals was reflected when the show "America's Diet Club" (now called "Image Workshop") was quickly dumped because women reacted negatively to the traditional connotation of dieting to adapt oneself to society's thin ideal. "Lifetime shows are designed to inspire women to take charge of all aspects of their lives," Fili argued. "Whether that relates to problem-solving in fiction movies or such real-life concerns as food or child care or social issues" (Werts, 1991, p. 20).

### Lifetime's Advertising

Image aside, no network can survive without advertising dollars. According to Burchill, Lifetime provides advertisers with a predictable demographic profile because of its position as the top cable network for reaching a female audience. "It's a safety net to advertisers," Burchill stated. "We view it as the right niche and the right segment to reach, specifically upscale working women" (Walley, 1988, p.22). Evidently, advertisers agree. Research company Paul

Kagan Associates reported that Lifetime's gross revenues would rise an estimated 20 percent to \$128.5 million in 1991 from 1990 ("Carving Out," 1991, p.44).

"If you want to reach women, Lifetime is one of the hottest things on TV," noted David Verklin, vice president and media director for Hal Riney & Partners in San Francisco. "Statistics show that 60 percent of women 18-49 are now working. This means that the network claim to women is really the stay-at-home mother" (Walley, 1988, p.27). As a result, Verklin claimed that advertising on cable stations, particularly Lifetime, are fast becoming as attractive to buy as the three networks.

In fact, advertisers find that, in terms of programming, cable is like regular television. Cable carries major-league sports, and stations such as Lifetime and the USA Network are buying more attractive movie packages before the networks can show the films. "Out of the \$650 million we spend on national television, about \$60 million goes to cable, or 20 percent," stated Joseph Ostrow, executive vice president and worldwide media director at Foote, Cone & Belding in New York. "Cable shows absolutely no signs of diminishing," Ostrow added, "and the networks continue to raise their prices, even though their audiences are declining" (Fabrikant, 1990, p.17).

Burchill claimed cosmetics companies like Cosmair and Revlon have increased their advertising on the Lifetime network, while car makers such as General Motors have become Lifetime clients for the first time. Other advertisers, according to Burchill, include Beech-Nut Nutrition Corp., International Playtex, Kitchen-aid and Nestle Food Corporation. "We're doing well now," Burchill noted, "because products advertised for women tend to be the more staple products [such as] household items and food" ("Carving Out," 1991, p.44). "They have positioned themselves as the female network," claimed Peter Spengler, vice president for marketing services at the Bristol-Myers Squibb Company, which advertises for Lifetime. "And it worked" (Rimer, 1991, p.9).

This brief overview of Lifetime suggests several revealing observations--Lifetime deliberately pursues an agenda of depicting positive female imagery in its programming and possesses a large market share in the cable industry. Given both its audience of educated, female professionals and inordinate rate of growth it can also be observed that Lifetime has a substantial impact on women. As such, it is important to study how Lifetime, a clearly powerful force, depicts women throughout viewing hours (not only in its programming, but in its advertising). In order to posit this study within an accurate framework of sex roles in advertising, however, an extensive review of the relevant literature must first be discussed.

#### Literature Review

The following literature neatly divides by subject, rather than by chronology. The initial grouping consists of studies pertaining to female sex-role portrayals in advertising. Specifically, these researchers examine whether women are most often cast within the home or working world, how they are portrayed within those settings and if women's roles have changed over time. Touching behaviors exhibited between men and women are also discussed.

The next grouping of articles demonstrates how modern versus traditional role portrayals of women in advertising influence female viewer preferences and communication effectiveness. In particular, the recognition of sex-role stereotypes by female viewers oriented toward women's liberation is examined, followed by a discussion of which type of portrayal enhances the effectiveness of the advertisement, women's opinions about sex-role stereotypes and the potentially damaging side effects of some advertising campaigns.

The following grouping is comprised of articles which examine the backlash of female sex-role portrayals in



advertising on women. Specifically, the negative effects of stereotyped portrayals on women's self-concepts and achievement aspirations is discussed, as well as how these portrayals are hurting women physically through beauty myth imagery. A discussion about the backlash against women in television and the media is also given.

The final grouping of articles pertains to recommendations for marketers about female sex-role portrayals in advertisements. In particular, given women's changing role in society and increasing entry into the work force, recommendations about how to portray women realistically (rather than false and stereotyped) are discussed. Sociological reasons for presenting accurate sex-role portrayals are also given, followed by recommendations for relating female role preferences to product-user characteristics.

### Female Sex-Role Portrayals in Advertising

During the 1970s, criticisms leveled by feminists sparked a number of studies which led researchers to examine sex roles in U.S. advertising. Perhaps the earliest and most well known of these studies was conducted by Courtney and Lockeretz (1971). They examined print advertisements from seven magazines (e.g. Life, Look, Newsweek, The New Yorker, Saturday Review, Time and U.S. New & World Report) directed toward both male and female readers to see if sexual stereotypes could be identified while comparing male and female occupational and nonworking roles.

According to Courtney and Lockeretz, print advertisements very rarely show women in working roles. Of their studied advertisements, less than one-tenth of the women (9 percent) were shown in working roles, whereas almost half of the men (45 percent) were shown in working roles. Moreover, when women were shown alone or with other women, 90

percent were in nonworking roles. Of these, 70 percent were in a non-active "decorative" role.

Male-female interaction was also examined. Courtney and Lockeretz claimed 40 percent of the advertisements showed men only, 26 percent showed women only and 34 percent showed the two sexes together. Consequently, men were more than twice as likely to be shown interacting with members of their own sex. In contrast, women seldom appeared in working roles, and if they did, were portrayed as subservient to men.

Courtney and Lockeretz concluded that a number of stereotypes can be observed, including a woman's place is in the home; women do not make important decisions or do important things; women are dependent and need men's protection; and men regard women primarily as sexual objects, and are not interested in women as people. Courtney and Lockeretz argued that feminists are at least partially justified in saying that advertisements do not present a full view of the variety of roles women actually play in American society. They warned advertisers as a group to be alert to the growing desire of many women to be portrayed accurately.

A follow-up study by Wagner and Banos (1973) that appeared only two years later reported that the percentage of advertisements portraying women in a working role had more than doubled. Wagner and Banos claimed that during the 20-month period following the Courtney-Lockeretz study (1971), the percentage of women in general magazine advertisements shown in working roles increased from 9 to 21 percent.<sup>3</sup> While there were also increases in the percentage of female workers shown in professional, sales, middle-level business, semi-professional and in other white collar occupations, women shown in working situations were less likely to be depicted in the role of entertainers or participants in professional sports than during the earlier period.

In spite of the improvement in the ratio of working women depicted in advertisements, a larger proportion of nonworking women in advertisements were shown in a

decorative, non-active role than in a family or recreational situation. Wagner and Banos claimed that when further comparisons were made with the Courtney and Lockeretz data, no significant changes were observed. Nevertheless, Wagner and Banos indicated that there had been a substantial improvement in emphasizing women's expanding role as a working member of society in a relatively short period of time.

A study conducted by Schneider (1979) also found considerable evidence of improvement in the role portrayals of women in television commercials. Among the variables studied between 1971 and 1976., Schneider claimed that there was no instance in which the difference in role portrayals between male and female characters was significantly larger. Instead, female characters were either close to actual roles or moving toward actual roles more rapidly than male characters. Schneider also noted that not only have the marketing and advertising professions begun to develop a sensitivity toward the large, influential market segment of female consumers, but the changing roles of women have become at least partially incorporated into the value system of American society.

As for the sex-role portrayals of women in other countries, Gilly (1988) analyzed and compared content analysis findings for U.S., Australian and Mexican television advertisements. Perhaps the most important finding of this study was that Australian commercials exhibited no significant differences between male and female characters in the type of product they advertised or the setting in which they were portrayed. In addition, no significant differences were found between men and women concerning their employment status or occupation as well as their roles as spokespersons, or whether they were the recipients or providers of help.

Gilly found more differences in the portrayal of the sexes in U.S. and Mexican ads. Specifically, women were more likely to appear in men's products than vice versa and men

were more likely than women to be portrayed as employed. Men were also portrayed more often as product authorities and women as product users. According to Gilly, the television commercials from all three countries reflected common stereotypes of male-female roles. Male voices were much more likely than female voices to be used in voice-overs, women were portrayed as young more often than men, and men were more likely to be portrayed in independent roles whereas women were portrayed in roles relative to others.

Gilly's findings suggest a link between culture and marketing appeals, at least those pertaining to sex roles in advertising. This linkage is not a perfect one, though, and there appears to be a time lag in advertisers' responses to changing sex roles. Gilly suggests that marketers considering advertising their products in other countries should be aware of the norms in terms of how the sexes are portrayed and how those sex role portrayals are changing.

Sullivan and O'Connor (1988) studied how women's role portrayals in magazine advertising changed over a twenty five year period from 1958 through 1983. Sullivan and O'Connor's results indicated that current advertisements in some ways more accurately reflect the true diversity of women's social and occupational roles than did those of earlier time periods. Sullivan and O'Connor restated and contrasted the list of stereotypes generated by Courtney and Lockeretz (1971) with their own findings as follows:

"A woman's place is in the home." Strictly speaking, Sullivan and O'Connor stated this is false. Instead, they claimed that there has been an increased propensity to depict women as employed. Sullivan and O'Connor noted that advertisements in 1983 were more than twice as likely to portray women as employed as advertisements in 1970, which were only slightly down from the 1958 figure. In fact, of the 77 percent of women shown in nonworking roles in 1983, fewer were depicted in a family setting than previously.

"Women do not make important decisions or do important things." Again, Sullivan and O'Connor claimed that the evidence did not agree with this conclusion. Rather, there was an increase in women shown in working roles such as business executives, professionals, salespersons and mid-level managers.

"Women are dependent and need men's protection." Sullivan and O'Connor stated that the 1983 results contradicted this stereotype by depicting an image of independence for women. While most advertisements did contain men, they were not overseeing the activities of women. Rather, the sexes tended to be portrayed as equals sharing lifestyles. The women depicted were also involved in a broad array of activities.

"Men regard women primarily as sex objects; they are not interested in women as people." Sullivan and O'Connor noted that clearly there has clearly been a resurgence of women being portrayed in decorative roles. They claimed that the problem has been mitigated, though, because this kind of advertising is used most often to promote products used by women (e.g. cosmetics, health and beauty aids).

Ferrante, Haynes, and Kingsley (1988) studied whether the manner in which women are portrayed in television advertisements has undergone significant change during the past 15 years. In terms of roles, women were most often portrayed as wife and mother, but also increasingly shown in business and non-stereotypical (or "limbo" settings). Men, on the other hand, were more frequently portrayed as husband and father, and in business settings. Men also dominated the role of voice-over announcer and on-camera spokesperson (explained by a belief that the male voice is more authoritative than the female voice and hence a better seller). Ferrante et al. concluded that although some changes have been made, advertisers' portrayal of society is not necessarily an accurate reflection of the composition of society.

Belknap and Leonard (1991) corroborate the assertion that media advertisements appear to be slow in changing the traditional roles of women.<sup>4</sup> Their study, based on Erving Goffman's categorization of gender displays, specifically illustrated that the incidence of relative size was somewhat rare, but when it did exist, stereotypical patterns surfaced (e.g., the male was always taller). In terms of feminine touch, Belknap and Leonard claimed that the modal category of response was "caressing" followed by "self-touching" for females, whereas "grasping" was the mode for males. Close inspection also revealed that there was a reasonably strong tendency for males to be cast in the dominant role.

The above findings suggest that although female sex-role portrayals in advertising have improved slightly throughout the years, women are still predominantly shown in domestic (rather than working roles) and as subservient to men. On the other hand, men continue to be portrayed in dominant roles, and constitute the majority of voice-over announcers and on-camera spokespersons. As such, it is important to discuss the effects these female role portrayals have on women. Specifically, how women as a whole feel about traditional versus modern portrayals in light of the women's liberation movement, which (if either) role portrayal they prefer and why, as well as how these sex-role portrayals influence communication effectiveness.

#### Modern versus Traditional Role Portrayals of Women in Advertising: Female Viewer Preferences and Communication Effectiveness

According to Wortzel and Frisbie (1974), since much of the pressure to show women in advertisements in roles other than housewife or mother appeared to have been generated by the Women's Liberation Movement, it was worthwhile to ask if women who believed most strongly in the tenets of the movement also tended most strongly to perceive a product as

more desirable when the woman in the advertisement was portrayed in a working role.

The authors devised and conducted an experiment whereby two hypotheses were formulated and tested. The first hypothesis claimed that when a woman appearing in an advertisement is portrayed in a career or neutral role, rather than in a sex-object, family and fashion-object role, the desirability of the product advertised to women exposed to the advertisement will be enhanced. The second hypothesis claimed that women who most strongly agree with the tenets of the Women's Liberation Movement would more desire a product when a woman appearing in the advertisements is portrayed in a career or neutral role, rather than in a sex-object, family or fashion-object role.

Wortzel and Frisbie's findings indicated no consistent preference for specific female roles. Instead, they found that the women participating in this experiment appeared to have chosen their preferred role-background on the basis of the specific product class with which they were confronted. For instance, the family role background was preferred for products usually used by households or families, whereas the neutral or career role backgrounds were preferred (although the traditional fashion role was still acceptable) for products that women used alone (i.e. women's grooming and women's personal). There was no product for which a sex-object role was considered the most enhancing role portrayal.

Wortzel and Frisbie noted that the results of their study should satisfy readers at both attitudinal extremes with respect to Women's Liberation. While male chauvinists can conclude that women are perfectly satisfied (and probably willing customers) when portrayed in their traditional homemaker, fashion, or sex-object roles, women's liberationists can just as easily attribute the results to socialization. Wortzel and Frisbie claimed that the reason why the women that were studied here preferred the role portrayals they chose is that advertising (not to mention

other facets of society) has socialized women to expect and accept traditional role portrayals in advertisements.

Similarly, a study conducted by Ducker and Tucker (1977) found no differences between female subjects who show strong orientations toward the women's liberation movement and those who show weak ones in the perception of advertisements portraying women in the role of mother, sex object, housewife or glamour girl. As a result, Ducker and Tucker claimed that their study established an important conclusion with regard to pro-feminism and its relationship to reactions of roles for or portrayals of women in advertisements. The holding of pro-feminist opinions, even by women whose personality characteristics are under the independence classification, apparently does not significantly affect the subjects' regard for the roles assigned to women in advertisements.

In addition, a study by Lull, Hanson, and Marx (1977) concluded that even young viewers were generally not as sensitive to sex-role stereotypes in television commercials as feminism advocates might hope. Lull et al. stated that fewer than half of the subjects in their study recognized media portrayals as sexist, despite the fact that all of the commercials presented to them were clear examples of common female stereotypes.<sup>5</sup> Women were generally more aware and critical of the stereotypes than men, however.

Lull et al. found that women recognized the stereotypes significantly more often than men in four of the six individual commercials they viewed.<sup>6</sup> Hence, while there was no widespread recognition of sex-role stereotyping, Lull et al. noted it appears that those who have made a cognitive commitment to feminism are now somewhat more critical of outmoded cliches in female role presentations than those who have not.

Sharits and Lammers (1983) also argued women's situations are improving. Sharits and Lammers used a person perception approach whereby subjects were exposed to an advertisement and asked to indicate the various perceptions they had of the



model in the advertisement by rating the model on a set of social psychological attributes. Viewers ratings were subsequently factor analyzed in three factors: responsible-mature; social image-status; and independence. Overall, Sharits and Lammers' results strongly suggested that women are not overwhelmingly portrayed in a less positive fashion than men. Specifically, male models scored either higher than or equal to female models on both the responsible-mature and independence scales during prime time.

In contrast, a consultive panel of the National Advertising Review Board (NARB) claimed in its 1975 report, entitled "Report on Advertising Portraying or Directed to Women" and reprinted in Advertising Age, that advertising considered sexist is resented by a growing number of younger, better educated men and women in various walks of life. The NARB found that one of the most frequently-voiced complaints about advertising is that it portrays women too often simply as housewives and mothers (as well as shoppers, cleaners and family cooks), thus minimizing their roles in the business and professional world.

The NARB noted that one problem about the advertising of household products relates to the matter of cumulative impressions. While any number of individual advertisements may be perfectly acceptable when taken one at a time, an endless procession of commercials all showing women using household products raises implications that women have no other interests except laundry, dishes, waxing floors and fighting dirt.

According to the NARB, it is especially true that in the advertising of household products, women are often portrayed as too dumb to cope with familiar everyday chores unless instructed by a man or assisted by a supernatural male symbol. The NARB claimed that even off-camera voice-over announcements tend to be made by predominantly male voices. Hence, in many of the commercials the implication is clear that a woman can use the product only if carefully told what

to do. Apparently, it takes a man to manufacture the product or to understand its virtues well enough to explain it.

The NARB claimed that women feel such advertising diminishes their own sense of worth, that it ignores and negates other facets of their mind and spirit and that it belittles their attributes and accomplishments. Even though nudity and suggestiveness are resented by many women, the NARB did not recommend the elimination of all advertisements that imply something goes on between the sexes; rather, they recommended identifying the kinds of advertising approaches that are offensive, unfair or demeaning.

According to Whipple and Courtney (1980), the evaluation of effective, socially responsive advertising has received increased attention during the last decade because of the growing concern over the negative side effects of some advertising campaigns. Whipple and Courtney also stated that in the process of selling products and services, advertising tends to sell supplemental images which may contribute to the maintenance of some undesirable aspects of the status quo in our society. The main purpose of their study was to determine if more progressive role portrayals in advertising were at least equally preferred, if not more preferred, than these traditional approaches.

Whipple and Courtney found that progressive role portrayals were indeed equally, if not more, preferred. In particular, commercials portraying female product representatives showing working housewives, depicting men participating in household tasks and using female voice-overs were rated as effective as matched commercials employing more traditional portrayals.

A study by Leigh, Rethans, and Whitney (1987) claimed that women's role portrayals were found to strongly influence advertising effectiveness, especially when the target audience was considered. In specific, consistency between an advertisement's role portrayal and the audience's role orientation generated more favorable attitudes toward the

advertisement and the spokesperson, while inconsistency between these factors generated considerably less favorable attitudes.

Leigh et al. found that modern women were more severe in downgrading advertisements which were inconsistent with their role orientation, while traditional women appeared to be more tolerant. Leigh et al.'s results confirmed the market segmentation view that communication effectiveness is enhanced by tailoring the advertisement to the target audience. A safe strategy for a company faced with a vaguely defined target audience, therefore, may be to use more modern role portrayals.

According to Jaffe (1991), contemporary female portrayals have proven to be more effective in advertising due to an increase in the number of women entering the work force and an evaluation of women's roles in society. Specifically, masculine traits often associated with the modern woman such as "assertiveness" and "leadership ability" were found to engender a higher advertising response than feminine traits often associated with the traditional woman, such as "tenderness" and "compassion." Jaffe stated that while modern positioning is essential for effective communication with modern women, traditional women display virtually no differences in advertising response between the two portrayals. As a result, practitioners must adopt a contemporary positioning strategy if they want to attract both modern and traditional women.

Taken as a whole, the above studies imply that there is no widespread recognition of sex-role stereotypes by female viewers who are oriented toward the women's liberation movement. It is generally concluded by both modern and traditional women that communication effectiveness is enhanced when the sex-role portrayal of the advertisement is contemporary in its appeal, however. In addition, women are generally more aware and critical of these stereotypes than men, and have shown increasing concern in recent years over

the potentially damaging side effects of some advertising campaigns. In order to understand the magnitude of these effects on women, a brief discussion of the relevant literature is discussed below. The articles specifically relate to how sex-typing influences women's achievement aspirations and self-concepts, as well as how women are affected physically.

### The Backlash of Female Sex-Role Portrayals in Advertising on Women

Geis, Brown, Walstedt, and Porter (1984) stated that implicit sex-stereotyping in TV commercials operates as a demand characteristic which may inhibit women's achievement aspirations. According to Geis et al., TV commercials carry demand, in the form of presentations to the viewer, of what appears to be social consensus about sex-roles. On the macro level, they are broadcast publicly, and so appear to represent "everyone." On the micro level, the characters portrayed are shown as accepting their role relationship, thus appearing to validate the complementary roles within the scenario.

Geis et al.'s study specifically concerned itself with the internalization of unspoken but implied assumptions about women's place in society. Men and women viewed either locally-produced replicas of four current, sex-stereotyped commercials, four replicas that were identical except that the sex roles were reversed, or (control) named their favorite TV program. All subjects then wrote an essay imagining their lives "10 years from now." The essays were coded for achievement and homemaking themes.

Geis et al. noted that their research showed subtle implications for sex-typing in television commercials that can influence self-concepts. Women who viewed traditional commercials de-emphasized achievement in favor of homemaking (compared to men, and compared to women who had seen reversed

role commercials). Geis et al. claimed that innumerable commercials portray implicit assumptions of sex-role stereotyping--in so doing, they reflect the culture, but this research also shows that in doing so they may be creating the culture.

Gould (1987) studied the cumulative effects of television on both genders' sex role concepts and broader overall self-concepts. He assessed gender differences in self-consciousness traits and advertising responses across a sample of adult Americans according to a three-dimensional self-consciousness scale: private self-consciousness; public self-consciousness; and social anxiety.

Gould's results indicated that there are differences between genders in public self-consciousness and social anxiety, with the effects particularly pronounced for younger females. Specifically, females seem more conscious of their public self-concept roles than males, although both genders approach their private self-concept roles in about the same way. While his results were limited in generalizability, Gould did suggest that women orchestrate their roles in our society with greater attention both to themselves as social objects and to external cues, such as advertising, that address their needs in these roles.

Feminists argue that the backlash these sexually oriented advertising portrayals have on women is inappropriate. According to Wolf (1991), during the past decade, while women breached the power structure, eating disorders rose exponentially and cosmetic surgery became the fastest growing medical specialty. Wolf concluded that it is no accident so many potentially powerful women feel this way--"we are in the midst of a violent backlash against feminism that uses images of female beauty as a political weapon against women's advancement" (Wolf, 1990, p. 10).

Specifically, Wolf stated advertisers had to make sure that their number one consumers would keep buying when housewives fled the Feminine Mystique for the workplace. How

was this achieved? Wolf claimed somehow, somewhere, someone must have figured out that women would buy more things if they were kept in the "self-hating, ever-failing, hungry, and sexually insecure state of being aspiring beauties" (Wolf, 1991, p.66). In other words, Wolf argued that the beauty myth, in its modern form, arose to take the place of the Feminine Mystique, to save magazines and advertisers from the economic fallout of the women's revolution.

Their ploy worked. For instance, Wolf noted the diet industry currently grosses \$33 billion-a-year, the cosmetic industry currently grosses \$20 billion-a-year and cosmetic surgery industry grosses \$300 million every year (growing annually by 10 percent). As for the backlash on women physically, the American Anorexia and Bulimia Association states that anorexia and bulimia strike a million American women every year; 150,000 of whom, it reports, die. In addition, Wolf claimed that on any day 25 percent of women are on diets, with 50 percent finishing, breaking or starting one. Wolf also stated a 1984 Glamour study of thirty-three thousand women reported that 75 percent of those aged eighteen to thirty-five believed they were fat (while only 25 percent were medically overweight) and 45 percent of the underweight women thought they were too fat.

Given the recent trends projected in the media, these facts are not surprising. Wolf claimed in the twenty years after the start of the second wave of the women's movement, the weight of Miss America plummeted, and the average weight of Playboy Playmates dropped from 11 percent below the national average in 1970 to 17 percent below it in eight years. In addition, Wolf noted that 38 percent of dancers currently show anorexic behavior and the average model, dancer, or actress is thinner than 95 percent of the female population.

In response to women's physical and emotional undernourishment, Wolf claimed advertisers subsequently dwell on the forbidden richness or sweetness women crave--Milk 'n

Honee shampoo, Max Factor 2000 Calorie Mascara, Estee Lauder's Re-Nutriv and Skin Food are a few examples. Simply put, Wolf stated the woman allows herself only on the outside what she truly desires on the inside. Why do women care so much what magazines say and show? Wolf argued they care because, though the magazines are trivialized, they represent something very important: women's mass culture. Specifically, Wolf claimed magazines offer the feeling of being "plugged in" without hostility to a million like-minded people of the same sex.

Unfortunately, the beauty backlash is spread and reinforced by the cycles of self-hatred, provoked by women in the advertisements, photo features, and beauty copy in the glossies. Wolf noted that magazines promise to tell women what men truly want, as well as what faces and bodies provoke men's attentions. Wolf argued that what men want from women is actually what their advertisers want from women. The magazine's message about the beauty myth is thus determined by its advertisers, Wolf claimed.

Faludi (1991) shared a similar perspective pertaining to the backlash of female imagery in the U.S. advertising, entertainment industry and media. Faludi concurs with Wolf's argument that after the women's movement in the '70s (and a decade of flat-to-declining sales) the beauty industry aimed to restore its own economic health by persuading women that they were the ailing patients--and professionalism was their ailment. Faludi cited several examples: "Is your face paying the price of success?" worried a 1988 Nivea skin cream advertisement,--"if only she were less successful, her visage would be more radiant." "The impact of work stress...can play havoc with your complexion," Mademoiselle warned; it can cause "a bad case of dandruff," "an eventual loss of hair," and, worst of all, weight gain." Most at risk, the magazine claimed, are "high-achieving women," whose comely appearance can be ravaged by "executive stress" (Faludi, 1991, p. 202).

Faludi stated that for the most part, fashion makers' efforts to regain control of the independent female consumer was reserved for women who played by the backlash's rules. For less adaptable women, however, another fashion message began to surface--the threat of discipline. As a result, the beaten, bound, or body-bagged woman became a staple of late '80s fashion advertisements and editorial photo layouts. Faludi claimed female mannequins were suddenly being displayed in the windows of major department stores, as the battered conquests of leather-clad men and as corpses stuffed in trash cans.

Faludi also noted that a fashion layout in Vogue, entitled "Hidden Delights," featured one model in a blindfold being pulled along by her corset ties, another woman with trussed legs, and still another with her arms and nude torso restrained in straps. Other mainstream fashion magazines, according to Faludi, offered fashion spreads with women in straitjackets, yanked by the neck with choke collars, and packed, nude, into a plastic trash bag. Faludi observed that fashion advertisements in the same vein have more recently proliferated: a woman lying on an ironing board while a man applied an iron to her crotch (Esprit); a woman in a straightjacket (Seruchi); a woman dangling by her legs, chicken-style, from a man's fist (Cotler's--"For the Right Stance," the advertisement read); a woman knocked to the floor, her shirt ripped open (Foxy Lady); and a woman in a coffin (Michael Mann) (Faludi, 1991, p. 194). Given the strong messages of these examples, one must wonder if advertisers aren't trying to "put women in their place." To a lesser degree, the same might be said for recent television programming.

According to Faludi, women's disappearance from prime-time television in the late '80s repeated a programming pattern from the last backlash when, in the late '50s and early '60s, single dads ruled the TV roosts and female characters were eliminated from the set. Faludi stated that



by the 1960 season only two of the top ten rated shows had regular female characters--"Gunsmoke" and "Real McCoys"--and by 1962 the one woman on "Real McCoys" had been killed off. Faludi pointed out that the vanishing act eventually spread to domestic dramas, where the single father took charge of the household on shows such as "Bachelor Father," "My Three Sons," "Family Affair," and "The Andy Griffith Show."

Faludi noted that in the 1985-86 season women also began to shrink and dwindle as a new breed of action-adventure series that only portrayed women as victimized girls began crowding out more balanced fare. In this new crop of programs, uneasy critics commented that the viciousness of the assaults on the young female characters rivaled slasher films. For example, on "Lady Blue," teenage boys armed with scalpels eviscerated their female prey, and on "Our Family Honor," a seventeen-year-old girl was slashed to death with a coat hanger. Meanwhile, those female characters who weren't under attack that season were likely to be muzzled or missing from action. An analysis of prime-time TV in 1987 also found that 66 percent of the 882 speaking characters were male--about the same proportion as in the '50s.

Faludi noted in the 1987-88 season, the backlash's high watermark on TV, only three of twenty-two new prime-time dramas featured female leads--and only two of these characters were adults. In a sharp drop-off from previous seasons, 60 percent of the shows launched as series in this season had either no regular female characters or only included women as minor background figures while 20 percent had no women at all. Not surprisingly, according to Faludi, a devastating proportion of the female audience simply shut off their sets, and, by December, the network's prime-time ratings had plunged a spectacular nine points from a year earlier, with an average loss of 3.5 million households a night and the lowest rated TV season ever.

Even less surprising, by the following season, programmers backed off a bit and admitted a couple of strong

female leads into the prime-time scene. Specifically, "Roseanne" and "Murphy Brown," both featuring outspoken women--and both, not coincidentally, created by women, became instant and massive hits. "Roseanne" is one of the most successful series launched in television history and has held the number one ratings slot season after season.

But two strong women were considered too many, and, Faludi noted the "tart-tounged" Roseanne Barr especially became a lightning rod for that rancor: The media labeled her "the most hated woman in America," television savaged her in print, and her former executive producer took out a full-page advertisement in Daily Variety to deride the comedian. As if that weren't bad enough, James Rees, the son of the former congressman, launched a nationwide "Bar Roseanne Club," soliciting more than six hundred responses, almost all from men who thoroughly agreed with Rees's assessment of "old lard butt" (Faludi, 1991, p. 146).

Faludi reported that by the following season, prime time had again reverted to traditional feminine icons, as new series filled the screen with teenage models, homemakers, a nun and--that peculiar prototype of the last TV backlash--the "good suburban housekeeper witch" (Faludi, 1991, pp.147-148). Faludi claimed that by the next season, only two of thirty-three new shows were about women with jobs. The rest of the shows portrayed women as housewives, little girls, or invisible.

These portrayals and treatments of women led Faludi to conclude that not only do some programming executives personally want to expel the independent woman from the American set, but their advertisers, who still view the housewife as the ideal shopper, demand it. This puts television programmers in an impossible bind: the message advertisers want the networks to promote appeals least to modern women. Hence, while female viewers consistently give their highest ratings to non-traditional female characters, television's biggest advertisers (packaged-foods and

household-goods manufacturers) want traditional family shows that fit a sales pitch that's virtually unchanged after two decades. Advertisers apparently prefer to reflect the housewife viewer because she is perceived as a more passive and willing consumer, because she is likely to have more children, and because they are simply used to this arrangement.

The above findings suggest that sex-stereotyping in advertising plays a strong role in the socialization of men and women. For women, these roles are overwhelmingly defined as being either that of a traditional woman or sex object, and as subservient to men. As such, women are affected both emotionally and physically in a detrimental, sometimes harmful manner. Even more disturbing is the notion that women's situations are getting worse, not better. Based on these conclusions, it is essential to discuss how to best portray women in future advertising appeals. Specific marketing recommendations are given about bringing marketing procedures in step with reality, more accurately portraying women in their life roles and keeping up with social change.

#### Recommendations for Marketers about Female Sex-Role Portrayals in Advertisements

Lundstrom and Sciglimpaglia (1977) claimed that women, more than men, found advertising to suggest that they don't do important things; portray women offensively; and suggest that their place is in the home. They also noted that Women felt they were more critical of their role portrayals than they had been in the past (namely, younger, better educated, upper status women who reject the values and stereotypes of women's traditional role in society). Considering the increasing number of working women, particularly in higher status jobs, and of households headed by women, a number of implications for marketing and advertising management are seen.

These implications include that it is no longer appropriate to think of women as one monolithic market segment, and that the benefits of products marketed to women must be in alignment with what is really considered important by them. Additionally, as the number of working women increases and as the actual role of women in society changes, advertising which remains locked to an older, more traditional image of women becomes less appropriate.

Bartos (1978) argued that the dichotomy of traditional and modern sex roles for women is no longer appropriate because there are many "in-between" stages that exist. She classified these lifestyles as stay at home housewives; plan to work housewives; career oriented working women; and "just a job" working women. Bartos stated that the keys to keeping up with social change in the marketplace are available to all, and that any practical-minded marketer can challenge the underlying assumptions on which past definitions are based. Specifically s/he can learn whether their assumptions are out of date, and, if needed, bring his/her marketing procedures in step with reality.

Bartos claimed marketers can learn whether new or changing groups represent differing market opportunities by evaluating their market potential. Bartos also noted that marketers who can meet the challenge (i.e. close the gap between the realities of social change and their procedures) first will reap the benefits of discovering new marketing opportunities.

Scheibe (1979) claimed that when advocating change, it is particularly important to keep in mind the reasons for change and the effects of change on all parties. She noted if characters portrayed in television commercials are being used by viewers as sources for role models, the role of advertising takes on a new dimension. Viewed in terms of the sale, the realistic nature of the characters portrayed may make little difference in the success of the commercial; viewed in terms of the socialization process, the realistic

nature of the characters becomes a very important issue. Scheibe noted that any rationale behind change for advertising must hinge on this socialization aspect, and very little research has been done on the extent to which viewers are using television characters as sources for identification.

Accepting that this identification does occur, Scheibe stated that, for many reasons, advertisers must broaden character portrayals in commercials. One reason is that the social changes that are occurring in our society are dramatically affecting the behavior of men and women. Another reason is that things not always seen as appropriate or possible for women are now being challenged because people are now more open to new ideas. Scheibe noted that advertisers can work to anticipate the changes by making social conscience a solid part their strategy. The changes needed are those that can be made to present desirable characters for all sexes (not to be judged in vague terms of "reality," but in terms of proper examples for role models).

Scheibe argued that further research into the influence of television commercials on role and behavior modeling of viewers is the most vital necessity in the area of sex-role portrayals and advertising. With this type of information, Scheibe hypothesized that a strong and acceptable rationale could be established for the types of character portrayals shown on television. Viewers and advertisers could also benefit.

Barry, Gilly, and Doran (1985) stated that predictions of the proportion of women who will be working outside of the home by the year 2000 are as high as 65 percent. As such, marketers no longer have the luxury of advertising solely to the housewife in order to reach the majority of the female population. According to Barry et al., the dichotomy of the housewife versus the career woman is an appropriate categorization because of the phases that exist in between.

Barry et al.'s study investigated differential responses by using three categories of women who were more or less career-oriented, including: low desire-to-work women; moderate desire-to-work women; and high desire-to-work women. Barry et al. noted that, in this way, those women who were not at the extreme ends of the career spectrum (i.e. homemakers and career women) would be studied to determine whether they differed in preferences to advertising appeals and, if so, how they might effectively be reached by marketers interested in maximizing the efficiency of their advertising dollars.

Barry et al. concluded that advertisers who use career themes to attract all women run the risk of missing those women who do not have a high desire to work. On the other hand, advertisers who appeal to homemakers face the risk of missing women who have more than just a low desire to work. Consequently, Barry et al. stated that the means themselves indicate that the more neutral the advertising theme, the greater the likelihood of it capturing the largest proportion of the women's market. They warned advertisers to thus be cautious about creative strategies emphasizing the home- or work-oriented women when the product has the potential to reach a larger audience.

Whipple and Courtney (1985) noted that, in practice, it may be difficult to change advertising strategies because when the overall women's market is the target, many advertisers view modern, liberated roles to be more effective than traditional ones. Whipple and Courtney noted that advertising presents a traditionally stereotyped portrayal of women, and that demography and attitudes among women have changed dramatically over the past decade. In order to improve the validity of future research, Whipple and Courtney contended that advertisers must relate female role preference to product-user characteristics.

Whipple and Courtney stated four interrelated research findings must be considered. Initially, the gender of the

model chosen should match the image of the product held by users. In addition, the role setting chosen for the model should be appropriate to the product use environment and product benefits. It is also important to be realistic and natural, rather than false and stereotyped. Lastly, within any chosen role setting, modern, liberated depictions are generally more effective than traditional ones.

In light of the above observations, it can be implied that the categorization of housewife versus career woman is no longer appropriate--in between stages exist for women, and they want to be accurately portrayed. For instance, there are many women who have careers and are also wives and mothers (these roles are not mutually exclusive). As such, it is generally concluded that modern portrayals are more effective than traditional approaches. Marketers who wish to come into step with reality should thus present women realistically rather than in a stereotyped manner.

The articles in this brief literature review suggest that women are predominantly shown as subservient to men, and in domestic rather than working roles. Since the female characters are shown as accepting of their roles, strong assumptions about women's "place" in society are implied--resulting in negative self-concepts and achievement aspirations for some female viewers. Women are generally critical of these stereotypes, however, and prefer to be portrayed in a more modern way. While many researchers attribute this perspective to women's strong entry into the work force, others believe women have simply grown tired of being portrayed in a sometimes demeaning fashion.

Given this point of view, it is an interesting paradox that little change has occurred in female role portrayals over the past two decades. In fact, some researchers claim that women have increasingly been portrayed in a negative, even harmful manner during recent years as the result of a violent backlash against women's liberation. Whatever the case may be, it is clear that women want advertisers to present them

accurately and with respect. Communication effectiveness is not only enhanced when this is achieved, the behavior of men and women may be deeply affected.

### Purpose

Given the extensive array of studies pertaining to how women are portrayed in advertising, it is interesting to note that Lifetime--a channel specifically geared toward educated, career-oriented women--has not been studied. Because Lifetime claims to be the "women's network," one would think that it would be as selective in how women are portrayed in its commercials as they are in its programming.

If Lifetime wants to avoid sending a mixed message to their potentially captive audience, its pro-women viewpoint should be consistent throughout viewing hours (both in its programming and their advertisements). If this viewpoint is inconsistent, Lifetime should change its format in order to both live up to the image it projects and help counter the backlash negative female imagery has on women. Otherwise, Lifetime loses its uniqueness in being the pro-women channel and its effectiveness for reaching its target audience.

Based on the literature, the role portrayals available for women in advertising are overwhelming subservient (Courtney & Lockeretz, 1971; NARB panel report, 1975; Ferrante, Haynes, & Kingsley, 1988; Gilly, 1988). Lifetime is consequently faced with a dilemma between its goal of portraying women in a positive light and the subservient role portrayals available for women in U.S. advertising. How Lifetime resolves this dilemma is analyzed according to the following research questions.

### Research Questions

Several studies have claimed that maximum advertising effectiveness is achieved when the target audience is



considered (Lundstrom & Sciglimpaglia, 1977; Bartos, 1978; Scheibe, 1979; Whipple and Courtney, 1980; Geis, Brown, Walstedt & Porter, 1984; Barry, Gilly, & Doran, 1985; Whipple & Courtney, 1985; Leigh, Rethans, & Whitney, 1987; and Jaffe, 1991). Given that Lifetime is geared toward women aged eighteen through forty-nine, it can be suggested that Lifetime will maximize their advertising effectiveness if this age group is reached (through commercial role portrayals). To investigate this, the following research question is asked:

RQ<sub>1</sub>: Do the female characters in Lifetime's advertising portray the age groups of its target audience?

Similarly, given that Lifetime is considered "the women's network" (Rimer, 1991, p. 10), it can be suggested that Lifetime will maximize its advertising effectiveness if upscale working women of all races are accurately portrayed in its advertising. To investigate if this, the following research question is asked:

RQ<sub>2</sub>: Do the characters in Lifetime's advertising portray various races?

Past studies have also found that how women are physically portrayed in advertising has a strong effect on their self-concepts (Gould, 1987; Wolf, 1991; Faludi, 1991). Given that Lifetime is geared toward successful women, the physical imagery Lifetime projects in its advertising has the potential to be equated with what a successful women should look like in real life. As such, the role portrayals in Lifetime's advertising also have the potential to strongly affect the self-concepts of its viewers. To investigate this, the following question is asked:

RQ3: Since Lifetime is geared toward successful women, what is the physical image of women that Lifetime projects in its advertising?

In addition, several studies have found that more modern role portrayals are preferred and considered more effective by the majority of women (NARB panel report, 1975; Lundstrom & Sciglimpaglia, 1977; Whipple and Courtney, 1980; Geis, Brown, Walstedt & Porter, 1984; Whipple & Courtney, 1985; Leigh, Rethans, & Whitney, 1987; and Jaffe, 1991). Other studies have found that the role portrayals available for women in advertising are overwhelming subservient (Courtney & Lockeretz, 1971; NARB panel report, 1975; Ferrante, Haynes, & Kingsley, 1988; Gilly, 1988). Given that Lifetime is geared toward progressive women, it can be suggested that more modern role portrayals should take precedence in Lifetime's advertising. In order to investigate whether Lifetime's advertising actually portrays more modern versus traditional role portrayals, the following question is asked:

RQ4: Due to the fact that Lifetime is geared toward career-oriented women, will the majority of women's roles in Lifetime's advertising be working roles rather than domestic, recreational or decorative roles?

As stated previously, several studies have claimed that maximum advertising effectiveness is achieved when the target audience is considered (Lundstrom & Sciglimpaglia, 1977; Bartos, 1978; Scheibe, 1979; Whipple and Courtney, 1980; Geis, Brown, Walstedt & Porter, 1984; Barry, Gilly, & Doran, 1985; Whipple & Courtney, 1985; Leigh, Rethans, & Whitney, 1987; and Jaffe, 1991). Past studies have also found males to account for the majority of voice-overs (NARB panel report, 1975; Ferrante, 1988; Gilly, 1988; Whipple & Courtney, 1980). Given Lifetime's target audience, it can be suggested that the majority of voice-overs should be more female than male.

To investigate whether males or females constitute the majority of voice-overs, the following question is asked:

RQ5: Since Lifetime's audience is mostly women, will the majority of product voice-overs also be women?

Lifetime claims to be "respectful of women" (Werts, 1991, p. 20), and "designed to inspire women to take charge of all aspects of their lives," (Werts, 1991, p. 20). Given these claims and Lifetime's "pro-women" stance (King, 1990, p.2), it can be suggested that the touching behavior between males and females in Lifetime's advertising should substantiate this point of view. To investigate this, the following question is asked:

RQ6: Because Lifetime describes itself as promoting equal roles, will the touching behavior between males and females portray equality?

As alluded to earlier, maximum advertising effectiveness is achieved when the target audience is considered (Lundstrom & Sciglimpaglia, 1977; Bartos, 1978; Scheibe, 1979; Whipple and Courtney, 1980; Geis, Brown, Walstedt & Porter, 1984; Barry, Gilly, & Doran, 1985; Whipple & Courtney, 1985; Leigh, Rethans, & Whitney, 1987; and Jaffe, 1991). Given Lifetime's target audience of highly educated women, and the presumption that Lifetime wants maximum effectiveness in its advertising, it can be suggested that women in Lifetime's commercials should make their own purchasing decisions. To investigate this claim, the following question is asked:

RQ7: Given that Lifetime is geared toward educated women, will women make their own decisions?

## Methodology

### Procedure

Five episodes of "L.A. Law" were videotaped in their entirety during the week of February 17, 1992 through February 21, 1992 on Lifetime. This resulted in 104 commercials (excluding local commercials, movie advertisements and Lifetime promotional advertisements) two trained coders sorted into one of three categories, including: commercials having people in them (N=89); commercials having no people in them (N=8); and commercials showing parts of people (such as hands) (N=7). For the purpose of this study, only those advertisements which showed people were analyzed. People advertisements were sorted according to the sex of the character in the commercial into: "female-only" (FO) advertisements (N=23); "male-only" (MO) advertisements (N=17); and "female/male" (F/M) advertisements (N=28).<sup>7</sup> Aspects of the commercials then were viewed by two trained coders according to different coding categories for FO and F/M advertisements.<sup>8</sup> Individual characters within the ads (N=189) were later coded in response to the research questions posed.

In reference to research question one, the age of each character was categorized by whether s/he was a/an: Infant (a newborn through one-years-old); toddler (a small child one through two-years-old); young child (three through ten-years-old); adolescent (eleven through sixteen-years-old); young adult (sixteen through twenty-years-old); adult (twenty-one through thirty-four); middle aged person (thirty-five through fifty-five); or senior citizen (sixty or older).

Similarly, in light of research question two, the race of each character was categorized by whether s/he was: "White," "Black," "Oriental," "Hispanic," "American Indian," or "other." Furthermore, each character was categorized in

reference to research question three by: weight, height and style of dress. Specifically, those characters who were perceived as observably heavier than others were categorized as "overweight," those characters who were perceived as being of average weight were categorized as "average," and those characters who were perceived as observably below average weight were categorized as "thin." In terms of height, those characters who were perceived as observably taller than others were categorized as "tall," those characters perceived as being of average height were categorized as "medium" and those characters perceived as observably shorter than others were categorized as "short."

In reference to research question four, each character was categorized according to the working, domestic, recreational or decorative role s/he had in the commercial. Within working roles, each character was categorized as being either a "boss" (someone in a supervisory position), "subordinate" (someone in lower management), "clerical worker" (secretary, receptionist) or "other." For domestic roles, each character was categorized as doing one of the following tasks: "cooking," "cleaning," "bathing/hygiene," or "other." In terms of recreational roles, the following categories applied: "organized sports" (basketball, baseball, etc.), "individual sports" (frisbee, biking, etc.), "playing/running around" or "other." Finally, decorative roles pertained to men or women who were scantily dressed and served no other purpose than to be fondled or adorned by the opposite sex. In reference to research question five, the voice-over for each commercial was categorized as being either male or female.

Female/male commercials included two more research questions. In reference to research question six, each character was coded for touching behavior. Within the touching category, each character was categorized by: "males touching females first," "females touching males first," or "not applicable." Each character was categorized as either

"grabbing" (to take a hold of another person aggressively or suddenly), "caressing" (a gentle touch or gesture of affection), or "other" touching behavior. Finally, in reference to research question seven, each character was coded for advice giving or advice taking behavior by: "males giving advice to females," "females giving advice to males," "males taking advice from females," or "females taking advice from males."

### Reliabilities

Two trained coders viewed Lifetime's commercial excerpts from "L.A. Law," and coded individual characters in the advertisements according to categories based on the research questions. The reliability of agreement and kappa between the coders was found to be acceptable [see Table 1], warranting the results below.

Table 1. Coder Reliabilities for FO & F/M Ads

	<u>Age</u>	<u>Weight</u>	<u>Height</u>	<u>Roles</u>
FO Ads				
% agreement	.93	.93	.93	1.0
Kappa	.76	.75	.86	1.0
F/M Ads				
% agreement	.93	.86	.86	.8
Kappa	.87	.79	.77	.74

### Results

#### Female-Only Advertisements

For descriptive purposes, product type, voice-overs, demographics, appearance and roles were observed. The largest percentage of commercials (35.7 percent) pertained to

clothing advertisements, followed by home products (25 percent), beauty products (12.5 percent), food products (10.7 percent), personal hygiene products (8.9 percent) and health related products (7.1 percent). No service products were observed.

**RQ1: Do the female characters in Lifetime's advertising portray the age groups of its target audience?** Lifetime claims that it targets women aged 18 through 49. The results suggest that the majority of Lifetime's advertising portrays adult women on the younger side of this range, however, with women aged twenty-one through thirty-four-years-old constituting 82.1 percent of the sample. In contrast, 2 out of 56 women were coded as being in the upper half of Lifetime's target audience (i.e. middle aged women between thirty-five and fifty-five), resulting in a much lesser percentage at 3.6 percent. The second highest percentage of females portrayed were young children (10.7 percent), while young adults and senior citizens each accounted for 1.8 percent of the sample.

**RQ2: Do the female characters in Lifetime's advertising portray various races?** Lifetime claims to be the "women's network" (Rimer, 1991, p. 10), thus implying that it is a channel geared toward all women. The results strongly suggest, however, that Lifetime's advertising overwhelmingly portrays Whites more than any other race (approximately 83.9 percent of the sample consisted of White females). In terms of minority representation, 7 out of 56 Black females were observed, (constituting 12.5 percent of the females portrayed), while Oriental and Hispanic women each accounted for 1.8 percent of the sample.

**RQ3: Since Lifetime is geared toward successful women, what is the physical image of women that Lifetime projects in its advertising?** Lifetime claims to target

successful women. As such, the physical imagery Lifetime projects in its advertising has the potential to be equated with what a successful women should look like in real life. Assuming that this is the case, Lifetime's advertising portrays the successful woman to be thin (71.4 percent) and tall (65 percent). Successful women were to a much lesser degree of average weight (28.6 percent), and medium height (35 percent). No overweight or short women were observed.

**RQ4: Due to the fact that Lifetime is geared toward career-oriented women, will the majority of women's roles in Lifetime's advertising be working roles rather than domestic, recreational or decorative roles?** Lifetime claims to target career-oriented women. The results suggest that 8 out of 56 female characters observed held working roles, however, constituting a small percentage of the female role portrayals on Lifetime's advertising (at 14.3 percent). Within the work role category, 75 percent of the women observed were that of a subordinate, while the remaining 25 percent were portrayed in clerical roles. No women held supervisory positions.

Interestingly, recreational (35.7 percent) and domestic roles (28.6 percent) were observed more than any other role. Specifically, women were overwhelmingly portrayed as cleaning (46 percent), followed by cooking (38 percent), or bathing (16 percent) within the domestic role category. As for the recreational role category, organized sports (i.e. basketball, etc.) accounted for the largest percentage of the sample (55 percent), following by playing/running around (20 percent), and "other" recreational roles (25 percent). The remainder of the sample pertained to women in the role of product spokesperson (17.8 percent) or decorative roles (3.6 percent).

**RQ5: Since Lifetime's audience is mostly women, will the majority of voice-overs also be women?** Lifetime



claims not only to be the "women's network," but hold a pro-women stance. As such, it can be suggested that Lifetime also believes women to have an important voice in society. When it comes to women having a voice in Lifetime's advertising, within FO commercials at least, it seems that relative equality is being observed. Males held a slight majority, however, with male voice-overs accounting for 51 percent of the sample versus female voice-overs at 49 percent.

### Female/Male Advertisements

For descriptive purposes, product type, voice-overs, demographics, appearance and roles were observed, as well as touching behavior and advice giving. The largest percentage of commercials (48.1 percent) pertained to food advertisements, followed by personal hygiene products (15.8 percent), services (9.8 percent), health products (9 percent), clothing products (8.3 percent) and home related products (7.1 percent). Beauty products accounted for 2.3 percent of the sample. Again, the remaining results are discussed below according to the research questions.

**RQ1: Do the female characters in Lifetime's advertising portray the age groups of its target audience?** Despite Lifetime's targeting of women aged 18 through 49, the results suggest that 39 out of 66 women observed were coded as adults on the younger side of this range (women aged twenty-one through thirty-four-years-old this time constituting 59.1 percent of the sample). In contrast, 6 out of 66 female characters observed were coded as middle aged women (between thirty-five and fifty-five-years-old), again making up a much smaller percentage of Lifetime's target audience at 9.1 percent. Interestingly, the second highest percentage of women pertained to young adult women between sixteen and twenty-years-old at 10.6 percent, followed by young children (7.6 percent), adolescents (6.1

percent), senior citizens (6 percent) and toddlers (1.5 percent).

The majority of males (46.9 percent) were also observed as adults between the ages of twenty-one through thirty-four-years-old. Fourteen out of 67 middle aged men constituted the next largest percent of men, however (20.9 percent), followed by young children (15.6 percent), young adults (11 percent) and adolescents (3 percent). Toddlers and senior citizens each additionally accounted for 1.3 percent of the sample.

**RQ2: Do the female characters in Lifetime's advertising portray various races?** Regardless of Lifetime's declaration of being a network for women, the results suggest that Lifetime's advertising overwhelmingly portrays White women more than any other race (at 89.4 percent of the sample). Among minority representation, 3 out of 66 Black women characters were observed (at 4.5), followed by Oriental women (3 percent), Hispanic women (1.5 percent) and "other" races (1.5 percent).

For males, the majority of characters portrayed were also White (86.6 percent). Six out of 67 men were coded as Black (9 percent), followed by "other" races (3 percent) and Hispanic men (1.5 percent).

**RQ3: Since Lifetime is geared toward successful women, what is the physical image of women that Lifetime projects in its advertising?** Given Lifetime's target audience of successful women, it can be implied that Lifetime's advertising represents the ideal appearance of a successful woman in life. Assuming that this is the case, Lifetime's advertising portrays the successful woman to again be thin (56.1 percent), but this time of a more average height at 55 percent (tall women additionally constituted 45 percent of this sample and no short women were observed). In addition, successful women were portrayed to a much lesser

degree of average weight (39.4 percent), and 3 out of 66 women were observed as overweight (4.5 percent).

In contrast, the largest percentage of males were portrayed as of average weight (73.1 percent) and medium height (72 percent). In addition, 10 out of 67 men were observed as overweight (at 14.9) and 11.9 percent of the men were considered thin. Finally, 28 percent of tall men were observed.

**RQ4: Due to the fact that Lifetime is geared toward career-oriented women, will the majority of women's roles in Lifetime's advertising be working roles rather than domestic, recreational or decorative roles?** In spite of Lifetime's targeting of career-oriented women, 16 out of 66 women were observed in a working role (24.2 percent). Within the work role category, 81 percent of the women held subordinate roles, followed by "other" work related roles (19 percent). Again, no women were observed holding supervisory positions.

In addition, recreational roles again constituted the highest percentage of advertisements for women (43.9 percent), followed by decorative roles (13.6 percent), and domestic and spokesperson roles (each 9.1 percent). Within the domestic role category, 50 percent of the women observed were cooking and another 50 percent of the women observed held "other" domestic roles. As for the recreational role category, the largest percentage of female characters held "other" recreational roles (76 percent), followed by women playing/running around (24 percent).

For males within the sample, recreational roles also held the highest percentage of advertisements (62.7 percent), followed by working roles (26.9 percent), decorative and spokesperson roles (each 4.5 percent) and domestic roles (1.5 percent). Within the working role category, however, 21 percent of the men observed held a supervisory position. The other men observed held subordinate roles (63 percent) and

"other" work related roles (16 percent). As for domestic roles, 1 man out of 67 was observed in a domestic setting. No other domestic tasks pertaining to males were observed.

Within the recreational role category, the largest percentage of male characters men held "other" recreational roles (51 percent), while the rest of the men observed were playing/running around (49 percent). As for the total sample, recreational roles captured the highest percentage of advertisements (53.4 percent), followed by working roles (25.6 percent), decorative roles (9 percent) and domestic roles (5.3 percent).

**RQ5: Since Lifetime's audience is mostly women, will the majority of voice-overs also be women?** Based on the pervasiveness of Lifetime's pro-women stance, it can be assumed that the channel believes women to have an important voice in society. When it comes to women having a voice in Lifetime's advertising, it seems that little to no equality is being observed, however. Males overwhelmingly held the majority of voice-overs accounting for 67 percent of the sample compared to female voice-overs, which constituted 33 percent of the sample.

**RQ6: Because Lifetime describes itself as promoting equal roles, will the touching behavior between males and females reflect equality?** Lifetime claims to be "respectful of women" and "designed to inspire women to take charge of all aspects of their lives," (Werts, 1991, p. 20). Given these claims and Lifetime's "pro-women" stance (King, 1990, p.2), it can be suggested that the touching behavior between males and females in Lifetime's advertising should substantiate this point of view. The results were found to be contradictory to this claim.

Specifically, the largest percentage of touching behavior observed overwhelmingly occurred by males touching females first (73 percent), followed by females touching

males first (27 percent). The largest percentage of men observed were grabbing (63 percent), followed by caressing (22 percent) and "other" touching behavior (15 percent). Within the female touching male first category, the largest percentage of women observed performed "other" touching behavior (74 percent), followed by grabbing (26 percent).

**RQ7: Given that Lifetime is geared toward educated women, will women make their own decisions?** Lifetime claims to have a target audience of highly educated women. As such, it can be suggested that women in Lifetime's commercials should make their own purchasing decisions. The results prove that this was not the case. Of the females observed within the advice giving category, women took advice from men 100 percent of the time. No males were observed taking advice from females.

## Discussion

### Interpretation

This study empirically supports the argument that, at least in some respects, the advertising practice at Lifetime has been inconsistent with its programming goals of portraying women in a positive light. It is clear from the results shown here that Lifetime's advertising portrays women in roles generally perceived to be subordinate and traditional, rather than modern and progressive. Even more important to the study is the finding that despite an explicit commitment to being "respectful of women" (Werts, 1991, p. 20), substantial levels of sexism are, nevertheless, evident in Lifetime's advertising content.

Perhaps the most blatant attack Lifetime's advertising has on women is the subservient role portrayals it projects. For example, despite Lifetime's claims of targeting career-oriented women, less than one-third of all females were

portrayed in a working role (in both FO and F/M commercials). Furthermore, of those women portrayed in a working role, no women were observed as holding a supervisory position-- rather, women were portrayed in either subordinate or clerical roles. In contrast, 21 percent of the men observed held a supervisory position.

Women's roles within FO commercials tended to be more defined than their roles in those with both men and women present. In FO commercials, women held either subordinate or clerical roles, whereas nearly 20 percent of the women in F/M ads performed "other" work-related roles. The increase in the use of women in "limbo" settings might be due to the fact that advertisers no longer overwhelmingly associate women with stereotypical locations and roles (Ferrante, Haynes, & Kingsley, 1988). It also may be explained by the fact that when both men and women are present, the men's role is considered more important, resulting in less defined roles for women.

Domestic roles also constituted nearly one-third of all female role portrayals within FO commercials. Of the women portrayed, 84 percent were performing "traditional" household tasks such as cleaning or cooking. In addition, when both men and women were present, half of the women observed were cooking and another 50 percent of the women held "other" domestic roles. In contrast, only one man was observed in a domestic setting (holding a can of Lysol Country Scent). Forty-six percent of the women, on the other hand, were observed performing "heavy" cleaning tasks such as scouring out carpet stains or cleaning the bathroom (within FO commercials).

Even more disturbing than the subservient work and domestic role portrayals Lifetime depicts, is the lack of equality observed between the touching behaviors of men and women. As mentioned previously, Lifetime claims to be "respectful of women" and "designed to inspire women to take charge of all aspects of their lives" (Werts, 1991, p. 20),

yet men were more than twice as likely to touch women first. In fact, men were observed "grabbing" women more any other touching behavior. Conversely, the largest percentage of women within the female-touching-male-first category were observed performing "other" touching behavior (see Belknap & Leonard, 1991; for similar results).

The implication of this finding is that the advertisements, when it comes to touching behavior, promote passivity for women and aggressiveness for men. As such, the pervasiveness of Lifetime's pro-women stance is, at the least, questionable or worse, increases the problem of violence against women based on the assumption that characters portrayed in television commercials are being used by viewers as sources for role models (Scheibe, 1979).

In addition, despite Lifetime's claims of targeting highly educated females, women were portrayed as incapable of making their own purchasing decisions without the help of a man (no men were observed taking advice from women, however). Lifetime also claims to be the "women's network," implying its believe that women have an important voice in society. Based on the results, women only have that voice in the company of other women. In the company of men, women suddenly become mute.

Specifically, while the division of voice-overs was fairly even in FO commercials (with the males holding a slight majority by 2 percent), males accounted for twice as many voice-overs in F/M advertisements. This may be explained by the fact that when women are portrayed alone or with other women, they have a better chance of equality and "being heard," whereas when men and women are portrayed together, men most often take the dominant role. The implications of this finding are clear-- a woman can use the product only if carefully told what to do, and it takes a man to manufacture the product or to understand its virtues well enough to explain it (NARB Panel Report, 1975).

Just as disturbing as the subservient role portrayals Lifetime's advertising projects is the stereotypical manner in which women are physically portrayed. Given Lifetime's claims of targeting successful women, it can be implied that the physical imagery Lifetime projects in its advertising can be equated with what a "successful" woman should look like in life. Assuming that this is the case, Lifetime overwhelmingly portrays the successful woman as "thin" (in both FO and F/M commercials) and "tall" (in FO ads). Conversely, no overweight women were observed in FO commercials and no short women were portrayed in either FO or F/M commercials (women of medium weight were moderately represented, however). These findings are particularly intriguing based on the comments of Pat Fili, Senior Vice President of Programming and Production at Lifetime, who stated that a good example of the channel's goals was reflected when the show "America's Diet Club" was quickly dumped because women reacted negatively to the traditional connotation of dieting to adapt oneself to society's thin ideal (Werts, 1991, p. 20).

Interestingly, women of average height constituted the largest percentage of female role portrayals in F/M advertisements. This may be explained by the stereotype that women should not be taller than men because it implies dominance. Especially interesting was the finding that men, in direct contrast to women, were least likely to be portrayed as tall and thin--rather, of average weight and height. Men were also more than twice as likely to be portrayed as overweight than females (in F/M commercials).

In addition, Lifetime claims that it targets women aged eighteen through forty-nine. The results suggest that the majority of Lifetime's advertising portrays adult women on the younger side of this range, however, for both FO and F/M commercials (i.e. "adult" women twenty-one through thirty-four-years-old). Adult women represented over three-fourths of the female role portrayals in FO commercials and 50 percent of the portrayals in F/M advertisements.



In contrast, women in the upper half of this age group ("middle aged" women between thirty-five and fifty-five) represented less than 10 percent of Lifetime's female role portrayals in FO and F/M advertisements. As such, Lifetime is minimizing its advertising effectiveness by not targeting its entire viewing audience (Lundstrom & Sciglimpaglia, 1977; Bartos, 1978; Scheibe, 1979; Whipple and Courtney, 1980; Geis, Brown, Walstedt & Porter, 1984; Barry, Gilly, & Doran, 1985; Whipple & Courtney, 1985; Leigh, Rethans, & Whitney, 1987; and Jaffe, 1991).

Interestingly, the second highest percentage of females portrayed in FO advertisements were young children, while young adult women (sixteen through twenty-years-old) represented the second highest percentage in F/M commercials. These findings may be explained by the notion that advertisers like to show women in the "traditional" role of mother when the commercial is FO, and as younger (and therefore more attractive) when men are present. In contrast, men were portrayed as much older than their female counterparts in both FO and F/M commercials. Although the majority of males were observed as adults, middle aged men constituted over 20 percent of the role portrayals observed. Evidently, the old standby of older man with younger woman still applies.

Also of interest was the finding that male young children were twice as likely to be portrayed than female young children in F/M advertisements. When the percentage of male young children is compared to female young children in FO commercials, though, a more equal comparison is observed. As mentioned previously, females have a better chance of equality when they are portrayed alone or with other females, than when men and women are portrayed together.

Lifetime also claims to be the "women's network" (Rimer, 1991, p. 10), thus implying that it is a channel for all women. The results strongly suggest that Lifetime's advertising overwhelmingly portrays Whites more than any

other race in both FO and F/M advertisements, however. Minority women, on the other hand, are gravely underrepresented (especially Black women within F/M commercials). While Black women constituted 12.5 percent of the females portrayed in FO advertisements, only 4.5 percent were portrayed in the company of men. Also of interest was the finding that Black men were twice as likely to be portrayed than Black women (in F/M commercials)--implying once again that women have a better chance of equal representation when they are in the company of other females versus being with men.

### Implications

Given that Lifetime is a channel geared toward educated, successful, career-oriented women, the above findings are disturbing to say the least. Lifetime is literally faced with a contradiction in terms between its programming stance of being pro-women on one end, and airing subservient female role portrayals in its advertising on the other.

Perhaps the most obvious implication is that the female viewer receives mixed messages. One scenario might be a educated, professional woman (i.e. Lifetime's targeted viewer) watching her favorite show, "L.A. Law." She sees that days episode of both men and women fighting for justice, being successful members of their community driving fancy cars and dressed in fancy clothes. Suddenly, it is time for a commercial break and that same woman is instantaneously cast into another imaginary world--only this time the women are doing back-bends and hand stands to clean the toilet (Lysol Toilet Bowl Cleaner); lugging oversized vacuum cleaners up steep flights of stairs (Dirt Devil Broom Vac); or asking male authorities for advice on important purchases, such as dog food (Cycle) or cold medicine (Actifed). As a result, one must wonder what Lifetime's true message is to women about their roles in society, on and off the screen.

By airing these kinds of commercials, Lifetime is promoting the superwoman syndrome many '90s women today face: not only can they hold down a good job, they can cater to their family just as well (or even better) than the stay-at-home housewife. Lifetime is saying it's okay to be a success in the working world, as long as your household responsibilities don't suffer. In other words, women should succeed to a point, but not forget "their place" in both the home and working world. Moreover, women's self-concepts may be deeply affected by such advertising resulting in potentially harmful, even destructive behavior (Geis, 1984; Gould, 1987; Wolf, 1991; Faludi, 1991).

Potentially more harmful than the superwoman syndrome, is the physical imagery Lifetime presents in its female advertising. Not only are women overwhelmingly portrayed as white, young and attractive, they are often cast as nothing more than decorative sex-objects for men to fondle or adorn. The slogans on several Lifetime commercials speak for themselves: "Get the Hold that Loves to be Held" (Finesse); "Never Underestimate the Power of Beautiful Hair" (Redken); "Nothing Beats a Great Pair of Leggs" (Leggs Pantyhose); "We Keep Our Promise to Young Skin" (Oil of Olay).

The implications this imagery has are particularly harmful when equated with what a "successful" woman should look like. One reason is that women may buy into the belief that in order to be successful (in their careers and love life), they must also be beautiful. As such, no price is too high and no sacrifice is too difficult to achieve that image. While potentially profitable for advertisers, it has been proven that many women end up abusing their bodies through dieting and plastic surgery in order to reach an unattainable goal (Wolf, 1991; Faludi, 1991).

While Lifetime cannot take full responsibility for the subservient female commercials available, its audience of upscale working women should be taken into consideration. Not only for the reasons aforementioned, but because more modern

role portrayals have proven to be more effective (NARB panel report, 1975; Lundstrom & Sciglimpaglia, 1977; Whipple and Courtney, 1980; Geis, Brown, Walstedt & Porter, 1984; Whipple & Courtney, 1985; Leigh, Rethans, & Whitney, 1987; and Jaffe, 1991). Lifetime would be better off both publicly and financially by airing commercials that accurately reflect its target audience. One reason is that Lifetime's advertisements and programming goals would no longer conflict (thus giving them a true "pro-women" image). Secondly, the more effective its advertisements, the more money that will be made for manufacturers--resulting in greater advertising revenues for Lifetime.

In closing, the most important implication of this study is how Lifetime will resolve the dilemma between the advertising that is available to women and its programming goals. No network can survive without advertising dollars, yet Lifetime's pro-women stance should carry over into how women are portrayed on the channel as a whole. Otherwise, Lifetime loses its uniqueness in being the pro-women channel and its effectiveness for reaching its target audience.

Given that Lifetime wants to keep their image, it has no choice but to try and change the advertising that is "out there" in terms of subservient female role portrayals. One suggestion might be for Lifetime to get programmers and advertisers together in order to emphasize the findings that maximum advertising effectiveness is achieved when the target audience is considered (Lundstrom & Sciglimpaglia, 1977; Bartos, 1978; Scheibe, 1979; Whipple and Courtney, 1980; Geis, Brown, Walstedt & Porter, 1984; Barry, Gilly, & Doran, 1985; Whipple & Courtney, 1985; Leigh, Rethans, & Whitney, 1987; and Jaffe, 1991). Lifetime could also emphasize the findings that modern role portrayals are more preferred and effective than traditional approaches. (NARB panel report, 1975; Lundstrom & Sciglimpaglia, 1977; Whipple and Courtney, 1980; Geis, Brown, Walstedt & Porter, 1984; Whipple & Courtney, 1985; Leigh, Rethans, & Whitney, 1987; and Jaffe,

1991). More importantly, Lifetime could sell the idea based on Australia's success in advertising, which overwhelmingly portrays men and women in equal settings occupations and roles. (Gilly, 1988).

Assuming that advertisers agree to produce commercials geared specifically at modern women, a trial period of time could be negotiated to see if these ads result in greater effectiveness and revenues. If they do, it can be assumed that advertisers would be more willing to produce similar ads in the future. As such, Lifetime could perhaps employ a screening department designed to act as a liaison between programmers and advertisers. The department's purpose would be to objectively view incoming ads and then test them for content based on its target audience of upscale women. If an ad was found to be unacceptable, members of the department would have to meet with the advertisers until a mutual agreement on content could be made. If not, Lifetime would either have to go elsewhere or compromise its standards (depending on its financial situation at the time). Another suggestion might be for Lifetime to make its own advertisements and have manufacturers come to them.

Regardless of what is done, Lifetime should at least be aware of the fact that its programming goals of portraying women in a positive light do not coincide with its advertising--resulting in mixed messages to its viewers and the reinforcement of potentially harmful stereotypes. Lifetime should also be in-tune to the fact that women no longer wish to be portrayed in traditional roles, when more modern portrayals apply. Perhaps more than anything, however, Lifetime should live-up to the image it projects and be the true "women's network" it claims to be.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

This study has established important conclusions with regard to Lifetime and the female role portrayals it promotes

in its advertising. Perhaps most importantly, it shows that the advertising practice at Lifetime does not coincide with its programming goals of being "pro-women." It also shows that the female role portrayals Lifetime's advertising depicts are both potentially subservient and damaging to women's self-concepts. Moreover, the findings of this study indicate that there is still a general lack of equality between how men and women are portrayed in commercials, despite advertiser's claims to the contrary (women being the less equal of the two).

Further research into the influence of sex-role portrayals in television commercials on channels targeted at specific viewers should be conducted. In the meantime, Lifetime would be wise to correct its advertising stance and holistically portray women in the positive, progressive manner they deserve.

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup>Farrah Fawcett's examination of domestic violence entitled "Prisoners of Wedlock," which aired last year, is one example.

<sup>2</sup>An example of a recent special is "Anxiety: A Critical Challenge."

<sup>3</sup>Again, advertisements were taken from Life, Newsweek, The New Yorker, Saturday Review, Time, U.S. News & World Report and Reader's Digest. Ads from the New York Times Magazine Section were also analyzed.

<sup>4</sup>This article is based on Belknap and Leonard's interpretation of Erving Goffman's book Gender Advertisements (1976).

<sup>5</sup>These stereotypes included women as household expert, dependent on man, powerless to change, dumb broad, demeaned housekeeper and growing old.

<sup>6</sup>The lowest recognition of female stereotypes by males was for commercial categories in which the woman was portrayed fulfilling domestic tasks.

<sup>7</sup>There were twenty-one commercial repeats observed.

<sup>8</sup>Due to the fact that this study pertains to women's sex-role portrayals, male only commercials were not studied.

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