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Levy, Yael. *Chick TV: Antiheroines and Time Unbound*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2022, 200 pp., \$60 (hardback). Reviewed by Stephanie O'Brien, the University of North Carolina at Asheville, sobrien@unca.edu.

Yael Levy's thorough and ambitious, *Chick TV: Antiheroines & Time Unbound*, weaves together intricate case studies of female-focused television dramas from the early 2000s in support of her thesis that narrative temporal complexity, when analyzed through a feminist lens, reveals antiheroine characters that resist patriarchal order, even if those characters appear to uphold dominant ideologies. The most surprising of these reveals? How about *The Real Housewives* as antiheroines?

Readers who resist the characterization of female-focused texts as "chick," might find it challenging to open a book with a stereotypical descriptor in its title. Levy approaches this concern early on by examining discourse surrounding the adjective "chick" when characterizing media texts, e.g., "chick lit" and "chick flick." Levy writes that the descriptor is a conservative and economic "discursive concept" that minimalizes women's voices for "the purpose of consumption and marketability" (3). Rather than argue against this concept or its constructs, Levy analyzes these texts for their "radical potential despite perceived inferiority" (3). Levy challenges us to take back the power of the phrase.

Levy continues with a historical discussion of the antiheroine arguing that she is often minimized because female characters traditionally are meant to maintain social order. Levy contends that antiheroines' moral and social transgressions must instead be revealed through "a different hermeneutic strategy" (10). The antiheroine resists and upends the patriarchal, narrative order. The space of this upheaval is buried, often deeply, in the temporal complexity of early 2000s television narratives. Expanding on the work of Jason Mittell, Levy examines how "chick TV" narratives play with time to speed up or delay chronological order. She argues that narrative complexity in "chick TV" reveals

antiheroic female characters who resist "chronormativity," a cultural construct of the patriarchal and social normative order (24).

Levy's thesis is developed in four chapters, each titled for the challenge the combination of antiheroine characters and temporal complexity poses to patriarchal order: Resistance, Deviation, Serialization, Rewriting. Chapters include the main case study with additional examples that reinforce the type of challenge and temporal shift. The scripted narratives and docuseries Levy examines vary from heavily female-centric, *Girls*, *The Real Housewives*, *Sister Wives*, and *Nurse Jackie*, to ensemble casts with strong female leads, *Six Feet Under*, *Being Mary Jane*, and *Desperate Housewives*.

"Resistance" is revealed through implied, intra-diegetic narrative elements – a story within a story, fantasy sequences, docusoap confessionals – that delay time by pushing back against the patriarchal path for women. "Deviation" is explicit, episodic elements such as flashbacks, flashforwards, and flash-sideways that disrupt patriarchal flow by opening other temporal spaces. "Serialization" opposes patriarchy through implied textual serial temporality. Seriality allows for a view beyond one episode and one season, which at first may seem to uphold hegemonic order. "Rewriting" pushes back against hegemony through intertextual readings across varied TV texts. Comparing antiheroines and narrative complexity in several television texts reveals that repetition of traits, both character and narrative, challenge patriarchal time and assumptions.

Levy builds on theories of complex narrative temporality and anti-heroic character studies while combining these with feminist theories of the body and performance, effectively entwining varied scholars, from Butler, Modleski, Mittell, and Mulvey to Kristeva, Levi-Straus, Hall, and Halberstam.

Meticulously researched and footnoted, this book presents a new crossroads of Feminist TV Studies and Narrative Studies. Levy's focus on "chick TV" and feminist influences make this book an obvious choice for feminist television studies courses. It is also a text that could enhance courses in screenwriting and characterization through its detailed breakdown of narrative devices in service of antiheroine character development. Its deeply theoretical considerations and complex analysis, make this text best suited for upper-level or graduate courses.

Like the narratives it wishes to examine, Levy's book is intricate at times. Attempting to follow the descriptive passages about jumps in narrative temporality while conjuring antiheroine character traits, one can get lost if not familiar with the TV text under consideration. Thankfully, Levy provides visuals to guide our reading and comprehension: a visual continuum of antiheroism, which Levy often uses as character descriptives; a detailed table of the various seasons of *The Real Housewives*; and, in the conclusion, a table recounting the intersection of "chick TV" narratives and antiheroism that presents the four layers of patriarchal challenge and their modes and degrees of opposition to the hegemonic

order. It might be helpful to the reader to view this table first and refer to it as you read through the chapters. Levy also includes an appendix that describes each antiheroine the text analyzes and her place along the continuum.

Even though this study is narrowly focused on one period of time and one type of programming, it lays the foundation for an expansion of the thesis. Levy purposefully does not look at situation comedies leaving open questions about how the inclusion of a laugh track or comedy might affect the intersection of narrative complexity and antiheroism. The texts Levy examines are also very Anglo-focused, with *Being Mary Jane* the exception. As Levy addresses in the conclusion, the next steps in this research would include a focus on race and queerness traits of antiheroines.

Chick TV: Antiheroines and Time Unbound merits a place beside the work of Spigel, Modleski, and Mittell. Combining feminist and narrative theory enhances the scholarship of character analysis to consider not just traits, dialogue, and setting, but also complex temporality that opens liminal narrative spaces where resistance takes place.