

# David and Lisa

Dir: Frank Perry, 1962

Oprah Winfrey Presents: David and Lisa

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(Dir. Lloyd Kramer, 1998)

### A review by Diane R. Wiener, University of Arizona, USA

*David and Lisa* is a love story about two mentally troubled teenagers who meet in a residential facility for the "disturbed." Both the 1962 film (released on VHS in 1999) and the 1998 ABC television broadcast (*Oprah Winfrey Presents: David and Lisa*) are based upon psychiatrist Theodore Rubin's fictionalized case study, *Lisa and David*. Even though Dr. Rubin referred to them as "exceptional children," the difficulties David and Lisa face are beyond those of childhood and clearly fall into the purview of adolescent angst. Frank Perry, who directed the 1962 film, accentuated this distinction, and it is also strongly emphasized in Oprah's 1998 production. *David and Lisa* is imparted as a coming-of-age story, with more than a hint of honesty about adolescent sexuality.

ABC-TV notes on its webpage, "David and Lisa: The Inside Scoop," that:

*Oprah Winfrey Presents: David and Lisa* is a classic love story updated with a '90s twist. A moving tale of hope and triumph, it follows two teens who are living at a school for disturbed youth. As the pair slowly fall in love, they find in each other the power to rebuild their lives.

The site includes the "Spotlight" video hyperlink, "Oprah on making David and Lisa," which is introduced by the text, "find out why she wants to share this timeless love story with a whole new generation." Oprah's well-intended pop psychology thesis lies in her chosen theme song for the production. This syrupy sweet tune, "Touch is Love," expresses David's longstanding problem with being touched, and how it is cured as he forms intimacy with Lisa.

*People* magazine echoes Winfrey's good-feeling rhetoric. Reviewer Mike Lipton calls the television movie "a case study in how to rejuvenate a screen classic," and describes "three riveting performances" by Lukas Haas as David, Brittany Murphy as Lisa, and Sidney Poitier as the doctor who monitors their care (Lipton, 1998: 28). The remake is not very different from husband and wife team Frank and Eleanor Perry's film (which also featured distinguished acting). Other than having David call Lisa "disassociative" rather than "schizophrenic" (as he did in 1962), resituating the story in sunny California, and the obvious differences in cinematic equipment dictated by modern lighting and editing, the 1998 television production is annoyingly apolitical, and its "timeless" quality is disturbing.