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## Lady Lawyers: How *The Good Wife* Portrays Females in the Legal System

### Abstract

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This research is an attempt at analyzing the messages that entertainment media sends to the public about female lawyers. Although much research has been done on this topic, it has not been revisited in many years, since the overwhelming response to *Ally McBeal* in the late 1990's. Since culture is constantly changing, it is important to keep studying this representation to analyze positive or negative growth or change. An analysis of a more current television show, *The Good Wife*, which first aired in 2009, was used in this research to examine how American television portrays females in the legal system, how stereotypes and prescribed gender roles influence how these women behave, and what these characters suggest about the way society thinks about female lawyers in regards to their professionalism and success.

### Introduction

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In recent years, Americans have become more and more interested in television shows and films that center on stories of legal activity, specifically the courtroom drama. For those involved in the legal world, these television shows may provide insight into how American culture views the legal culture and those employed within it. Although analysis has been made on how films influence the public perception of the justice system, the legal process, the practice of law, and legal professionals, this topic continues to hold relevance in today's society, which is why it is important to continue research as different television shows are aired and subject to the public eye. Given the large amount of television shows about the legal world are aired today, the way in which these shows represent lawyers and those of other legal occupations is only gaining relevance and importance. Culture is constantly shifting, so a constant awareness of its nature is necessary in order to recognize positive and negative changes. This paper will examine how American television portrays females in the legal system, how this different from the way in which male lawyers are depicted, how stereotypes and prescribed gender roles influence how these women behave, and what these characters suggest about the way society thinks about female lawyers.

The questions this research will attempt to answer are as follows:

- How do media use the notion of professionalism to frame whether or not women are fit for the job of being a lawyer?
- Do media project female lawyers who are successful in their profession as more masculine in temperament or character than those women who are unsuccessful as lawyers?

- What messages are being sent in these television shows about what constitutes a successful female lawyer?
- Is there something unique in the way female lawyers are presented in the realm of professionalism?

This research is significant primarily because of the increase of female lawyers not only in the profession itself, but present within media in recent years. Only in the last century have women really begun to become major players in the legal field. Although women now account for almost half of the lawyers in the United States (Marek 77), in 1930 only 2% of the national bar was made up of women, until then “few occupational roles were viewed by the public as more patriarchal than that of lawyer” (Sheffield 74-75). In fact, only in 1970 did the American Association of Law Schools prohibit discrimination in their admissions policies regarding sex. Because of this exclusion of females in history, the dramatic increase and attention on females in the legal system is significant.

Because television shows centering upon the legal system are becoming increasingly more numerous and more popular, it is incredibly important to be knowledgeable as to how these television shows are affecting societal expectations and attitudes. If media is portraying female lawyers a certain way, it is likely that viewers’ attitudes regarding female lawyers will be molded and influenced by these depictions.

## Literature Review

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The presence of women in the legal profession was contested as early as 1872 when *Bradwell v. Illinois* determined states were constitutionally allowed to bar women from the legal profession (Marek 77). Even up until the 1930s, the “motion picture industry and public...embraced and demanded female domesticity”, believing that women had no place in the professional field (Sheffield 74); in fact, “few occupational roles were viewed by the public as more patriarchal than that of lawyer” up to that time (Sheffield 75). It was not until 1970 that the Association of American Law Schools even outlaws discrimination based on sex in regards to admissions policies (Marek 77).

By the 1970s, the number of women in the legal field had grown significantly, and television responded by including more women characters, mostly supporting roles (Klein 261). In the 1980s women consisted of 8% of the total bar, by 2005 this number had reached 30% , and the 2011-2012 academic year included a law school enrollment made of 47% females (*Lawyer Demographics*). Television’s response to this increase has included at least seventy female lawyer characters present in the past twenty-five years (Klein 259-60).

Despite this growth, women are still disadvantaged in many areas of the legal world. Only 20.1% of all Fortune 500 General Counsels, and even less (16.4%) are General Cuounsels for Fortune 501-1000 companies. Only 20.6% of all law school deans are female, and in 2011 women lawyers made on average \$253 less per week than their male counterparts (*A Current Glance at Women in the Law*). Women also struggle to receive the same assumption of intelligence as their male counterparts; in fact, half and three-quarters of female attorneys believe that they are held to higher standards than their male counterparts or have to work harder for the same results” (Rhode 1004). Women lawyers fight a “historical, even if misguided, reality that relates lawyering with masculinity and good lawyers with men” (Epstein), supposedly because “characteristics traditionally associate with women are at odds with those traditionally associated with professional success, such as assertiveness, competitiveness, and business judgment”

(Rhode 1004). That is to say that “real” women, those who are feminine and possess stereotypical female attributes, would have neither the inclination nor ability to operate effectively in the legal profession” (Sheffield 89).

These biases and stereotypes which work against female lawyers “in the form of representational inaccuracies, persist in prime-time television’s depiction of women lawyers” (Klein 260). This is important because, according to DeFleur, incidental learning takes place as a result of our consumption of television, especially because “television absorbs extensive time daily” for most Americans (58-59). Because of “television’s ability to shape our view of the world in general, and the legal system in particular”, it works as a “powerful cultural force” (Marek 77), which causes a “concern that viewers, including both potential lawyers and clients, are obtaining an inaccurate picture of the legal profession” (Klein 273).

These inaccurate pictures of the legal profession are concerning for several reasons: a) “portrayals of lawyers in fictional narratives affect the career choices of many people” (Menkel-Meadow 2), b) “depictions of lawyers affect how students and new lawyers experience both their legal educations and their first forays into legal practice” (Menkel-Meadow 3), (c) “narratives about lawyers, in written or visual form, present us with assumptions about what lawyers and the legal system look like” (Menkel-Meadow 5), and (d) “stories and depictions of lawyers matter—both because these stories reflect what we think about lawyers, and because they can shape what readers, viewers, and would-be attorneys may think about lawyers in the future” (Menkel-Meadow 24). In order to understand the importance of these depictions, one might compare the representation of lawyers in television to the representations of another occupation such as a member of wait staff at a restaurant. Because most Americans are likely to have had plenty of their own experience with wait staff personally, depictions of these characters in television most likely will not influence a previously held, personal idea of what people of these occupation are like; however, contact with lawyers is a much more uncommon occurrence. Some citizens may not ever have contact with lawyers. Because of this lessened real-life contact, any impressions of lawyers created by the media are much more likely to adhere in the minds of viewers who do not hold any preconceived notions.

Many themes persist in past studies of the representation of female lawyers on television, most of which include the television shows *L.A. Law* and *Ally McBeal*, of which gained popularity in the 1980s and 1990s. Of these, several themes emerge, including patterns of personal/professional conflict, sexualization, motherhood, mentorship, competence, and relationships with male characters. Perhaps the most common, and accordingly the themes that “generate the most viewer interest are those that involve sex or domestic strife” (Epstein).

In *L.A. Law*, “dissonance between their professional and private lives” exists for every female character (Glass 401-02). *Ally McBeal* promotes the personal/professional conflict, which, according to Cohen, is a dominant postfeminist theme. (Cohen 256). This theme is not only present in these two television shows, but “would recur in virtually every subsequent portrayal of fictional women lawyers” (Sheffield 75).

This personal professional conflict often derives from the sexualization of these women characters, as “everything professional is also personal...no one is immune to the impact intimacy and sexuality has on his or her professional life” (Epstein). Women lawyers on television are often recipients of “comments about personal appearance, degrading remarks and conduct, and verbal and physical sexual advances” (Glass 405), even though historically most “female cast members are all thin, attractive, and fashionable” (Cohen 255). This issue is so prominent that “unattractive professional women run the risk of limited or jeopardizing their

careers for failing to measure up to the appearance standard” (Sheffield 89). If there are differences in female lawyer characters in television, physical attractiveness is not one of them (Klein 267).

Another way the personal/professional conflict makes its way into the realm of female lawyers on television is through the idea of motherhood. Many of these characters “are mothers and are usually considered to be ‘good mothers’” (Klein 271); however, these “working mothers are held to higher standards than working fathers and are often criticized for being insufficiently committed, either as parents or professionals” (Rhode 1009). This means that although female lawyers can be good mothers, they cannot be good mothers and good lawyers simultaneously.

One unique characteristic of female lawyers is the commonality of mentoring relationships which “set the women lawyers apart from the men, who do not seem to have any comparable bonds” (Glass 381). Although these mentoring relationships exist, “many senior women do what they can but are too overcommitted to provide adequate mentoring for all the junior colleagues who need assistance” (Rhode 1007). These experienced women mean well and desire to help other women in their profession succeed, but generally are not able to follow through with their promises.

The intelligence/competence of female lawyers on television is a topic with varying viewpoints. Epstein claims that “female characters never enjoyed the successes of their male counterparts on their shows, and, perhaps even more significantly, in the hearts and minds of American viewers” (Epstein), whereas Klein states that most of these characters are “reasonably creditable as attorneys” (Klein 271). Sheffield agrees with Klein’s statement, claiming that “the only demonstrable progress made in the world of fictional women lawyers has been popular culture’s concession that women can be competent attorneys” (Sheffield 110). The importance of this representation of intelligence can affect the public’s perception of credibility of real female lawyers, and “television can help women lawyers to be accepted by the public as the equals of their male counterparts if they are so portrayed” (Glass 405).

Last but certainly not least of the primary themes already observed in the representation of female lawyers is their relationships with, and reliance on, male characters either professionally or personally. In the professional area, female attorneys were rarely, if ever, capable of accomplishing their goals alone: a man always arrived to lend a helping hand or rescue the woman lawyer from certain failure” (Sheffield 77). Even if this women were represented as intelligent, competent, and successful professionally without a man, it is often portrayed that they are incomplete, unhappy, and emotionally unstable without a male partner”, a conformation to “patriarchal ideology” (Cohen 245-255). For many of these female characters “true fulfillment comes not from career advancement but from finding love” (Sheffield 112), often at the expense of “commitment to ethics and ideals” which “sometimes given way to affairs of the heart” (Sheffield 77).

Because of the common presence of these themes of personal/professional conflict, sexualization, motherhood, mentorship, competence, and relationships with male characters in the past, it will be important to note whether or not these themes re-emerge and to what extent in a current television show such as *The Good Wife*.

## Methods

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In order to determine how television shows portray women in the legal system, an intense feminist reading of two episodes the *The Good Wife* was conducted. Comedy series were disregarded in this research; it may be argued that comedy series do not present a character

(specifically a professional) in such a way that society would reasonably make realistic and universal assumptions about the social group these characters belong to. The television shows selected feature women lawyers as primary characters rather than secondary characters, which will presumably present a more complete representation of the character. A point has also been made to analyze only television shows that are currently on the air, as they are likely reflections of the most current sense of what women are like as lawyers.

Examining television shows rather than films may be a more effective method for determining the media influence of public perception of female lawyers, simply because a television show requires a larger investment for the watcher. Television shows produce much more viewing time (average of one hour per episode, once a week for several months to complete a season; most shows produce a multitude of seasons) than a film (average of 1-3 hours total). Because there is a larger amount of viewing time and this viewing time takes place over a larger period of time, society may make broader conclusions about the characters present in a television show than they would about a character present in a movie.

A total of 75 episodes of *The Good Wife* were aired at the time this report was started—the pilot episode debuting on September 22, 2009 and the most recent episode (Episode 7 of Season 4) being aired on November 11, 2012. Although episodes of Season 4 were aired as this report was being written and finalized, only the first seven episodes of this season were included in the pool of episodes considered for analysis. Using a random number generator found on [www.random.org](http://www.random.org), the two episodes for each television show to be analyzed were determined. The rationale for using a random number generator is that it provided a true random selection of the episodes, which would include episodes such as the first or last episode of each show or season which may have been excluded if the episodes were simply chosen by personal discretion. As a result, the episodes chosen for analysis were episodes 1, 21, and 48. Episode one of *The Good Wife* is naturally the first episode of Season 1 properly entitled “Pilot” which aired September 22, 2009; episode 21 is the 21st episode of Season 2 entitled “Unplugged” which aired on May 11, 2010; and episode 48 is the second episode of Season 3 entitled “The Death Zone” which aired October 2, 2011 (“The Good Wife”).

In viewing these episodes, general demographic information such as race, age, marital status and number of children/custody status was recorded. Statistical data regarding the number of times each character (a) gave permission (b) received permission (c) was denied permission (d) gave an order (e) obeyed an order (f) used a title of respect (g) was addressed with a title of respect (h) was ridiculed/chastised/lectured (i) ridiculed/chastised/lectured another (j) was interrupted and (k) interrupted another was recorded. This information was collected in order to analyze how respected and powerful the female character was perceived to be. On a Likert scale of 1-7, each character was rated arbitrarily on certain physical and character traits (ie: independent, intelligent/competent, attractive/sexy). General observations were also made regarding the attire, level of involvement in cases, level of personal/professional conflict for each of these characters and effects, if any, of the general semiotics (camera angle, etc) of the episode. Specific language that related to gender or sex was also noted. This information was collected not only from female characters, but from male characters as well in order to make the data more meaningful with comparison.

## Results

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In the first episode of season one of *The Good Wife*, we are introduced to three female lawyers, a female investigator, and a female assistant. Our main protagonist, Alicia Florrick, is a

woman just returning to a career in law after a fifteen-year hiatus. Alicia is experiencing the recent betrayal of her husband, former State's Attorney Peter Florrick accused of abusing his office by using public funds to pay for prostitutes. Consequently dealing with the emotional and financial backlash of his criminal charges, Alicia heads back to the workforce to support her children whose father (previously the bread-winner of the household) awaits trial in jail. After spending so much time away from the workforce and the courtroom, Alicia is portrayed as an incompetent newcomer, making a mockery of herself in her first jury trial and even having trouble using the office telephones. Despite this portrayal, Alicia uses creative and independent measures to win her first jury trial, to the chagrin of the firm's female partner Diane, who sees her as "entitled".

Diane appears in only two scenes in this episode—the first in which she meets Alicia and briefly explains a pro bono case of hers Alicia is to take over. In this scene Diane tells Alicia that she wants Alicia to think of her as a mentor, claiming that "it's the closest thing we have to an old boy's network in this town—women helping women". This offer, although on the surface is an attempt at camaraderie in a profession plagued by men, is empty and impersonal. Diane also warns Alicia that "men can be lazy, women can't" and points out that Alicia will have to work much harder not only because she is a woman, but because of the baggage she carries from the situation with her husband. The second time Diane appears is to confront Alicia for changing the method of defense in the case. In this scene she appears unyielding and judgmental, making assumptions about Alicia's character simply because she is the wife of a state's attorney.

The last female attorney that we see is Sandra Pei, the second chair prosecutor in the case Alicia is fighting. Although Sandra is not a main character, her presence as a commanding, intelligent, and competent lawyer in the courtroom contrasts to early images of Alicia, who struggles to even ask un-objected questions in cross examination.

The investigator at the firm, Kalinda, seems to be judgmental, unyielding, and unconvinced of Alicia's abilities; she is the one who more thoroughly briefs Alicia on the case and works alongside her to collect the evidence needed to win. Kalinda appears cold and rude, inserting her own opinions into the cases and using sarcasm to make Alicia feel unwanted and unqualified. Kalinda appears in almost every scene that Alicia does in relation to her legal presence, which seems to give the impression that the two are doing equal work. Kalinda is perhaps the most sexualized of the female characters, at one point even using her female figure as a tool for flirting and gaining access to important evidence, stating that her breasts are "better than subpoenas".

The female assistant, Sonya, is mainly viewed as a sex object who is constantly doing the bidding of the firm's other junior associate, Cary. She is not very helpful to Alicia, either denying her requests for help (for favor of the male junior associate Cary) or simply abandoning her desk and duties. Sonya is objectified by Cary and the audience almost immediately, as the first time she appears on screen, the camera follows her backside very closely as she walks away.

Most of the action in this episode revolves around Alicia and her re-entry into the legal world, faced with a difficult first case and the constant reminders of her painful relationship. Alicia is the only character who we see at home, interacting with her mother-in-law and children. Alicia's personal/professional conflict is the main theme of this episode and assumingly the entire series, as she cannot escape the ties of her relationship.

In regards to attire, most of these women dress in modern, professional clothing. Alicia and Sonya wear business suits, either with skirts or pants. Diane does as well, but her style choices have slightly more feminine touches complete big necklaces or broaches. Kalinda's attire

is by far the most notable, as she is often seen wearing a leather jacket, displays prominent cleavage in most scenes, and is even at one time seen wearing blue jeans and high-heeled boots. Although Kalinda is an investigator and not a lawyer, her close contact with the lawyer characters and her prominent presence may cause audience members to draw connections between her character and the lawyers, making their assumptions of lawyers truly encompass all those in the legal system.

The male characters we see in this episode are Peter, Alicia's husband and former State's Attorney; Will, partner at the law firm and Alicia's old law school classmate; Matan Brody, prosecutor in the case Alicia is trying; Richard Questa, judge; Cary, the other junior associate at the firm; and Glen Childs, the State's Attorney who takes over after Peter's resignation. Although the roles of each of these characters in and of themselves are not incredibly important to this research, their relationships with and attitudes towards the female characters are important to note. Peter's presence in the episode involves his announcement of resignation at a press conference and also a visit from Alicia in jail. In these scenes, it seems as if Peter is wholly insensitive about the effect his actions have had on his and Alicia's marriage and is only concerned with the legal ramifications of his abuse of office charge. Will's character in this episode is seemingly to work as Alicia's connection to the firm, as he acts as a much better mentor to Alicia than Diane would hope to be. Matan and judge Questa are the only male characters actually seen in the courtroom, both in which they openly remind Alicia of her personal life. Before the first hearing Alicia must attend in 15 years, Matan attempts to distract her with conversation about her husband, claiming that he admires her work ethic as he would be "curled up in a ball somewhere". Judge Questa also mentions Peter when he learns of Alicia's relationship with him, claiming that he and Peter "never did seem to see eye-to-eye". Cary's appearance in this episode is very brief, but he makes an interesting comment to Alicia regarding their similar status as junior associates saying that, "it looks like we share an assistant, so let me know if I'm hogging her, and let the best man win". Not only does this statement objectify the female assistant, but Cary's use of the word "man" as a universal term for "person" is important sexist language to note. Childs' only presence in the episode is to accuse Alicia of unethical practice by gaining insider knowledge from Peter (which she did).

In "Unplugged", we see Alicia work as second chair in a divorce case (with Kalinda's help as always) while Diane struggles with the economic downturn, negotiating with the firm's male partner Will about the layoffs of several employees, including one of the junior associates (Alicia or Cary). Catching wind of the upcoming decision to let one of them go, Cary and Alicia engage in last minute politicking to keep their hard-earned spot. Cary does this by speaking to other associates at the firm, pointing out Alicia's "problems at home" and speculating on "how many good working years" she has left. Alicia becomes worried that a budding relationship with Will may affect her chances, as he attempts to remain "unfairly objective" as Kalinda describes. Because of her suspicion that Will may not show his preference toward her for fear of being exposed, Alicia speaks to Diane. This is mostly at Kalinda's urging as she argues that, "she wants to mentor, so ask her to mentor". Unfortunately, Diane points out that Cary "doesn't have a family" and therefore can be in the office earlier and stay longer than Alicia is able to plus Alicia has ignored her name and connections (with Peter and the State's Attorney's office) from which she could manipulate information. In the end, Will and Diane choose to keep Alicia in the office and let Cary go, much to his surprise.

These three main female characters are quite this episode than the first. Alicia is cold, removed, and often severe in her speech. She is much more confident in her work, yet is often

fidgety and moody as she is struggling internally with the pressure of supporting her family on her own. Diane and Kalinda are much more likeable, as they both show their vulnerabilities and are no longer cruel to Alicia but rather give her advice and support. The only other female character prominent in this episode is Alicia and Cary's assistant, this time by the name of Courtney, who despite her best efforts, is continuously lectured and shot down by Alicia.

The physical attire of these women is consistent with that in the first episode. All wear business suits and clothing, with Kalinda again in her leather jacket and this time seen in a short skirt and tights in one scene. Diane also shows a little bit more cleavage in this episode than the first, while Alicia remains conservative.

The men we see in this episode are the familiar Will and Cary, Eli Gold (legal counsel who represents political candidates, a divorce lawyer for the firm who goes unnamed, the legal counsel representing the husband in the divorce case, and the judge who presides over the divorce court proceedings. As mentioned before, Will is presumably involved in a potential affair with Alicia and struggles to keep his personal and professional life separate. Eli's relationship with Alicia in this relationship is interesting. Because he is Peter's legal counsel, he must treat her as Peter's wife in regards to Peter's campaign, in which his attitude is that "wives just get in the way", but when Alicia asks for a personal favor in order to help her keep her position at the firm, he is very accommodating and even makes a move to take his legal business to Alicia's firm that potentially saved her position. Although the divorce lawyer representing the husband and the judge in this episode are not particularly important in regards to their gender, or relationships with women, the divorce lawyer who works at Alicia's firm does make one comment when Kalinda brings important news from her investigation that changes the entire divorce case, requesting that she "give [him] an army of women", presumably because she has been so helpful.

In "The Death Zone" is another episode in which Alicia acts as second chair, defending an author of libel charges against a British citizen both in American and British court. This episode is different from the rest for two main reasons: it actually shows Will in court, and the storylines of Alicia and Kalinda do not cross. Kalinda is seen working with Eli Gold (who is obviously intrigued/attracted to her) as he is trying to solicit the business of a prominent campaign manager, while Alicia works on the libel case. The only time these storylines cross is when Eli introduces Alicia to the campaign manager, who dismisses her presence saying "yeah yeah, I get it, you got St. Alicia on your team" which suggests that she is becoming known as a successful and ethical lawyer in the field.

Diane's presence in this episode is again not in the courtroom setting, but attempting to manage her firm. Peter, who is now re-instated as State's Attorney is looking for a firm to represent him legally, and is considering the firm that Alicia works at; however, this is complicating the personal/professional conflict Alicia faces when Peter unfairly requests a voluntary IRS audit from Alicia's firm and none of the others. Diane comes to Alicia's home to question her, whereby Alicia admits she has no knowledge of why Peter would do this, saying that she has "worked hard to keep [her] home life and work life separate".

Alicia's personal/professional conflict continues to be present as she and Will are obviously having an affair. Sexual themes are clearly present in one scene between the two in the office on a break from litigation where Will states that he "want[s] to have" Alicia immediately. They make a plan to meet in Will's bathroom presumably for sexual intercourse but have to abandon this plan as Alicia observes Diane is watching them.

Because Alicia is the only female on the libel case (which includes Will and a British solicitor named Brannen as defendants and a man named Thrush as prosecutor), her presence in the case is very deliberately executed. After being seen questioning an emotional female who lost her husband in a mountain-climbing expedition and providing her with comfort, Thrush makes a comment to Will that it was a “nice touch using the female lawyer”, suggesting that Alicia was only good for connecting with the witness emotionally. In fact, the British judge and court system prefers a more subdued environment and conversation than American court, so Will suggests that Alicia take over for certain questioning as she, presumably because of her female nature, has the capabilities of being more demure and agreeable to the British judge.

The physical attire of these female characters in this episode is fairly similar to previous episodes. All females wear business type clothing, with Kalinda making more sexy choices such as bold colors, belts, and short skirts.

The results of all quantitative data can be seen below in figures 1 and 2, almost all of which is telling in some form or another.

	Women	Men
Gives permission	-	6
Receives permission	2	4
Is denied permission	12	1
Gives an order	6	8
Obeys an order	3	-
Uses a title of respect	12	44
Is addressed with a title of respect	1	55
Is ridiculed/chastised/lectured	13	16
Ridicules/chastises/lectures another	9	20
Is interrupted	16	15
Interrupts another	4	27

**Figure 1**

	Women	Men
Independent	5.5	6.2
Understanding	4.8	3.6
Ethical	3.5	4
Nurturing	3.9	3.2
Funny	4.3	4.3
Likeable	4.8	3.8
Attractive/sexy	6.1	3.4
Strong	6	6
Intelligent/competent	6	5.7
Realistic	4.4	3.4
Greedy	3.1	4.8
Feminine/Masculine	5.6	5.7

**Figure 2**

## Analysis

The first three categories of figure 1, the number of times a character gives permission, receives permission, and is denied permission is most often seen in the court setting in regards to objects and whether or not the judge sustained or overruled that objections. When a judge overruled an objection, he had given permission that the lawyer whose speech was objected to (in which they received permission) continue with that course of thought and request answer to their question. A majority of the time a character was denied permission was in the courtroom if the other lawyer objected to their statement and the just sustained, denying them permission to continue with that course of thought. Because all three of the judges in these episodes were men, they were the only characters to give permission to other characters, both male and female. However, females (mostly Alicia) were much more likely to be denied permission, which suggests that they are not as powerful, respected, or even as competent in the courtroom as men.

Both men and women gave orders in similar numbers; however, women were the only ones to actually obey those orders, suggesting their subservience and lower stature in their positions.

Titles of respect were often in the form of “Your Honor” when addressing a judge in the courtroom; however, when a character called another by their title and last name (even if just a simple “Mr. Gold”) rather than preferring a first name, that was also counted as a title of respect. Although men much more frequently used a title of respect (which was due mainly to the fact that besides Sandra Pei in the pilot episodes, Alicia was the only female seen in court), men were almost always the recipients of these titles of respect, save one instance where Judge Questa called Alicia “Mrs. Florrick” upon first meeting her. This may suggest that men commonly hold a higher position in the field than women and are more respected.

Although women and men were almost equally ridiculed, chastised, and lectured in these episodes, most of the time the men were the ones who were doing the ridiculing, chastising, or lecturing. This same pattern is seen in the number of times a character was interrupted. Men and women seemed to be interrupted in almost equal numbers, but it was almost always men who would do the interrupting. These patterns suggest that men believe they have a higher authority and power. The fact that women were seen doing this suggests the more feminine qualities of demureness and humbleness.

It is interesting to note that women placed higher in all categories present in Figure 2 besides “Independent”, “Ethical”, and “Greedy”. Men and women ranked equally high in the categories of “Funny” and “Strong”, which means that women were portrayed as more “Understanding”, “Nurturing”, “Likeable”, “Attractive/Sexy”, “Intelligent/Competent”, and “Realistic”. It is important to keep in mind this is an average of all legal characters in all episodes, which does not account for personality differences or changes/developments over time; it also does not account for the difference in total number of male and female characters in these episodes (6 and 13 respectively). However, regardless of that caveat, these results are still very interesting.

Men were seen as much more independent in these three episodes, often because Alicia’s role as junior associate required her to second chair most cases to men and Diane’s role as partner in the firm required her to work closely with Will. Also, two of the female characters present were assistants, which meant that they were only shown working for the requests of others rather than on their own.

Men were perhaps seen as more ethical in these episodes (although not by much) because all three of the judges in these episodes were males. Most of these characters are not incredibly

ethical; for example, Alicia takes inside information from Peter in “Pilot”, hides the last page of a divorce agreement from a judge in “Unplugged”, and makes up evidence in “The Death Zone” (however most of these actions are encouraged/facilitated by male characters) and is having an affair with Will (which also makes him unethical), which is mirrored by Peter’s original infidelity.

Men were seen as much more greedy in these episodes, mostly due to their aggressive nature as lawyers, hungry for power, prestige, and victory. Cary, Peter, and the various prosecuting attorneys are clearly the most greedy of the main characters in these episodes: Cary greedy to succeed and assert power over Alicia and his career, Peter greedy in his self-centered nature of disregard for Alicia’s feelings, and the other prosecuting attorneys greedy of victory and money.

Alicia is by far the most understanding and nurturing character in these episodes. In each episode she is seen at home in conversation with her children son, often telling her son that he is adorable. She is very protective of her children, chastising Peter for his apathy as her children are subjected to his incriminating sex tapes in their school computer labs and refusing to let them be contacted for media interviews once Peter is released from jail and attempting again to run for office. She is also incredibly understanding and nurturing when it comes to her female clients, one who has lost her husband to murder and another who is going through a tough divorce, by giving them advice and support. These characters recognize Alicia’s authority in their situations, having dealt with the essential loss of her husband before, asking her if it gets easier and telling her that they’ll “be turning to [her] for advice on how to bounce back”.

Females were slightly more likeable in these episodes most likely because the smaller number of characters and their prominence in the television shows allowed for a stronger relationship to be formed between character and viewer, while many male characters were only present for one episode, and often on the “other side” of the legal fight.

The most dichotomous scores in this area were seen in the category of attractive/sexy. All female characters in these episodes are quite attractive, even Diane who appears to be in her 50s is an agreeable looking woman. However, all men in these episodes are average looking if not unfortunate looking men, perhaps the most attractive being Will himself. This is an extremely important notion and observation which may suggest that in order for a woman to be successful and be taken seriously in the law profession she must be attractive. The attractiveness/sexiness of these women is often outright stated, as the examples of Cary objectifying Sonya and Kalinda using her looks to help her investigations has shown.

Although females rated higher in “Intelligence/competence” than men, this difference was not as significant as others. What is most important to note with this category is that both men and women were portrayed as intelligent and competent people and lawyers. The only situation in which a character’s intelligence/competence was questioned was in “Pilot” when Alicia was initially made to look like blundering and rusty; however, this was at the expense in which the viewer knew that this assumption would be overcome by the end of the episode, or at least in future ones.

Although females were slightly more realistic than men in these episodes, this was mostly due to the extremely strange characters of the male judges who were all very straightforward, no nonsense, aggressive, and often even rude characters which is not at all consistent with real-life judges one may see in their local courthouse. In all, most of these characters were fairly realistic, which suggests that the public would more readily project the characteristics and behavior patterns of these characters onto their assumptions of real lawyers.

The level of masculinity and femininity of these characters was fairly ordinary, with most characters relating fairly solidly with their own gender, although none to the extreme stereotype of the “manly man” or “girly girl”. This is most relevant in that it suggests that women aren’t required to becoming more masculine or sacrifice their femininity in order to succeed in the legal workforce.

## Discussion

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In all, the themes regarding the portrayal of female lawyers that we see present in *The Good Wife* are themes which have been repeated historically in television media depictions of these characters. Personal/professional conflict, sexualization, motherhood, mentorship, competence, and relationships with male character are all present and relevant in this television show just as they have been in the past. This means that depictions of female characters hasn’t really changed in recent years, an observation that may be disturbing not only for feminists, but for all females in the legal profession. If these portrayals continue to perpetuate negative stereotypes about women, society will only continue to reflect them. As Menkel-Meadows suggested, this can affect societal interpretations along with the desire of both women and men to enter the field and their suspected perception of what law school and the legal world may entail.

Some prominent limitations exist with this research. These observations were made subjectively and most likely with a significant amount of bias. As all observations were made by a singular, white, 22-year-old female interested in a career in law, bias may have been present. This was also a very small sample of only three episodes, all which aired in the first two seasons of the television show.

Further research should expand the data set to include perhaps the whole series of *The Good Wife*, but also other television shows currently being aired, as the number is growing consistently. It may also be beneficial to run audience perception studies of these television shows in order to more fully understand how the public is perceiving these characters rather than relying on a smaller number of observers who may assert their bias.

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