

# Preliminary Honours Proposal

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## Research Topic and Significance

My research will investigate popular contemporary television examples of a relationship triangle that occurs between three workplace colleagues: a high-level professional male, a low-level professional female, and a mid-to-high level female. The high-level male and low-level female engage in a cross-class romantic relationship, and the mid-to-high level female acts as a work spouse to the male, and as a mentor to the female.

I will engage in a textual analysis of three television shows that portray this triangle: *Mad Men* (AMC), *Grey's Anatomy* (ABC) and *The Good Wife* (CBS). Each program features this triangle as a significant story arc, taking place over multiple seasons. These programs make a compelling sample, as they have marked differences in their overall narrative structures, as well as production details. Each program has a different narrative focus (Don Draper and Alicia Florrick are the focal points of their respective programs, while *Grey's Anatomy* is an ensemble drama), takes place in different types of workplaces (advertising agency, hospital, law firm) and different time periods (the 1960s and present day). The programs are produced by three different networks for three different target demographics, and have had varying levels of popular and critical success.

My research will seek to determine: 1) the contemporary social factors that influence the creation and reception of these triangles in television programs, and 2) the ideologies that underlie them.

I believe that by examining enough instances of this triangle, it can be boiled down into a group of salient characteristics that reflect a recurring ideology of dominant culture, but also appeal to a feminist negotiable reading.

## Research Methodology

I will engage in a critical textual analysis of the triangles in the television shows:

- 1) From *Mad Men*, I will examine the triangle between Megan Calvet (Jessica Pare) Don Draper (Jon Hamm), and Peggy Olsen (Elizabeth Moss).
- 2) From *Grey's Anatomy* I will examine the triangle between Christina Yang (Sandra Oh), Owen Hunt (Kevin McKidd), and Teddy Altman (Kim Raver).
- 3) From *The Good Wife*, I will examine the triangle between Alicia Florrick (Julianna Margulies), Will Gardner (Josh Charles), and Diane Lockhart (Christine Baranski).

Because of the time constraints on this thesis I am limiting myself to three instances of this triangle, but I see the potential for further research in the area that could consider the progression of this triangle over time.

Based on my research to date, I foresee the theoretical framework being based on four factors present in the triangle:

- 1) the homosocial relationship between the low-level female and mid-to-high level female;
- 2) the cross-class relationship between the low-level female and her two superiors;
- 3) consideration of the love triangle as a representation of the Electra complex, and
- 4) gender roles within workplace structures.

By examining the meanings of these elements of the triangle, I hope to determine the ideology or ideologies that lie behind them.

I will then place those ideologies within either a dominant or a negotiable decoding of the triangle, using a Cultural Studies process as my framework. This will provide insight about the reasoning behind the ideologies of the writers and producers who create the triangles, and the beliefs of the audiences who receive them.

## Working Bibliography

To date, I have yet to find any sources that specifically address this relationship triangle in popular culture. However, there is scholarship regarding its individual elements, as identified in my methodology, which I have included in my summer reading list. These sources will assist in developing my theoretical framework.

Also of interest are the considerable non-academic articles from pop culture critics that analyze the chosen programs, which will provide insight into the cultural environment that these triangles are created in, as well as their reception.

### Primary data

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