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# Politics, Feminism, and Popular Television: Madam Secretary as a Politician, Wife, and Mother

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Politics, Feminism, and Popular Television:  
*Madam Secretary* as a Politician, Wife, and Mother

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A Thesis

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the Faculty of the Arts and Humanities

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In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

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by

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## ABSTRACT

A recent surge in political dramas on television has produced an opportunity for media scholars interested in gender, politics, and entertainment media. To date, most research involving the study of fictional politics has revolved around male characters, leaving a gap in the study of female political characters. This study looks at the representation of the character of the US Secretary of State, Elizabeth McCord, in the television drama *Madam Secretary* in order to evaluate whether the show challenges or reproduces the postfeminist notion that “women can have it all.” Through a qualitative textual analysis of six episodes of *Madam Secretary*, the negotiation of Elizabeth’s roles as politician, wife, and mother are examined. Findings reveal that, within a patriarchal White House climate, the character of Elizabeth is able to stand up for herself. However, she is always involved in making decisions about whether or not she can “have it all” as she juggles her political career and her family life. The study finds that the show *Madam Secretary* reaffirms the postfeminist view that “women can have it all,” while also suggesting that this is a regular choice that women must make on a daily basis. Furthermore, the show presents an unrealistic portrayal of a woman in a high-ranking political office. Specifically, viewers are presented with a fictional Secretary of State who has no flaws and appears capable of solving any crisis, as long as her supportive

husband and staff are by her side. This unattainable depiction of the position of Secretary of State sets unrealistic standards for actual women who aspire for political office.

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## CHAPTER ONE: PROBLEM STATEMENT

“Shonda, how do you do it all?” The answer is this: I don’t. Whenever you see me somewhere succeeding in one area of my life, that almost certainly means I am failing in another area of my life. If I am killing it on a *Scandal* script for work, I am probably missing bath and story time at home. If I am at home sewing my kids’ Halloween costumes, I’m probably blowing off a rewrite I was supposed to turn in. If I am accepting a prestigious award, I am missing my baby’s first swim lesson. If I am at my daughter’s debut in her school musical, I am missing Sandra Oh’s last scene ever being filmed at *Grey’s Anatomy*. If I am succeeding at one, I am inevitably failing at the other. That is the tradeoff. That is the Faustian bargain one makes with the devil that comes with being a powerful workingwoman who is also a powerful mother. You never feel a hundred percent OK; you never get your sea legs; you are always a little nauseous. Something is always lost. Something is always missing (Rhimes, 2015).

Shonda Rhimes is a writer, director, and producer best known for her work on *Grey’s Anatomy* (ABC, 2005 – Present), *Private Practice* (ABC, 2007 – 2013), *Scandal* (ABC, 2012 – Present), and *How to Get Away with Murder* (ABC, 2014 – Present). These four series all focus on lead female characters and their lives in and out of their chosen professions. As Rhimes alludes to in her statement above, the women in these shows constantly bounce between balancing their careers, friendships, romantic relationships, and families. In contrast to many other entertainment programs, Rhimes’ television productions do not showcase examples of women “having it all.”

But what does it really mean for a woman in contemporary American society to “have it all”? As will be discussed in the literature review, “having it all” is a cultural

construct with specific dimensions. Generally, women who have it all are typically represented as doing it all: raising children, having families, having successful careers, while also staying fit and sexually attractive. Furthermore, they are affluent, heterosexual, and, more often than not, white. In the quote above, Rhimes is asked how she does it all. However, the more important question to ask may be why women are expected to do it all in the first place. This question itself creates a measure of a woman's success. The concept implies that having it all should be the end goal for women, and if a woman does not have it all she has not succeeded in life.

Over the past decade, television networks have increased the amount of primetime television shows that have female lead characters. We have also seen an increase in the number of television shows focusing on female political characters, such as *Scandal*, *Veep*, *House of Cards*, *State of Affairs*, and *The Good Wife*. These television representations of women do have an impact on the way the public views women as potential political leaders. For example, if we do not see women politicians in the media, we don't believe that women can or should be politicians. When the media repeatedly show us female political characters that have no personal flaws, we are more likely to hold actual female candidates for political posts to similar impossible standards. This is one reason why it is important to analyze and critique media representation of women in politics, even when they appear in entertainment programs.

When studying feminism in popular television, the role of feminism in the media in general, as well as the distinction between "femininity" (a subject position) and



“femaleness” (a social gender) are relevant (Kuhn, 1997, p. 150). Although the representations of feminism in the media change as the generational definition of feminism changes, Bonnie Dow (1996) argues that three main themes are consistently seen: discrimination, particularly in the workplace and in education; sex-roles, relating to a woman’s place in a family; and the concept of women as sexualized objects (p. 28). Furthermore, according to Dow (1996), there are three significant ways in which television serves as a medium for defining women. It does so by “mediating social change, in reproducing assumptions about women’s ‘appropriate’ roles, and in appealing to and constructing a subjectivity for women as a television audience” (1996, p. xix). The appropriate roles discussed reproduce the postfeminist thought that women can “have it all,” as these roles form the definition of a woman who has it all.

In this thesis, I focus on an entertainment television program and how it represents the character of a female politician. I am interested in whether this particular show fits the broad pattern of representing women on television that Dow has outlined. At the same time, my study aims to address the gap in existing research on how female political characters, in particular, are represented in television dramas. The focus of my analysis is not a show produced by Rhimes, rather CBS’s television series *Madam Secretary*, which began in 2014. Specifically, I am interested in whether or not the show *Madam Secretary* challenges or reproduces the notion that a successful woman in the United States today can have it all. *Madam Secretary* is a mainstream television drama airing on CBS that focuses on the life of a woman in one of the most influential political

posts in United States politics as Secretary of State. Due to the focus of the main character's roles as not only a politician but also a wife and mother, it is a relevant television show to study in order to examine the popular culture idea of having it all.

*Madam Secretary* first aired on September 21, 2014 on CBS. The show, now in its third season, focuses on White House politics. As the show's name suggests, the main character is the United States Secretary of State. Elizabeth McCord, a former CIA agent and university professor, who is appointed to the role of Secretary of State when her predecessor dies in a plane crash. Advertisements and news stories about the premiere of the show implied that it would be heavily influenced by Hillary Clinton's time as the Secretary of State, which was not necessarily true (Hibberd, 2014).

It is important to note the show's choice of political office for its main character. To date, the office of the Secretary of State in the US has been held by three women: Madeleine Albright, Condoleezza Rice, and Hillary Clinton. In that sense, the position of Secretary of State is already associated in the minds of many viewers with a woman and, for that reason, depicting a female character in that office is not a controversial move on behalf of the television show *Madam Secretary*. Rather, it is a choice that reflects the status quo in American politics over the past couple of decades, preceding the current administration. It is also a choice that is likely to fit with the mainstream beliefs of the majority of CBS viewers. CBS reported on its website in December 2014 that, according to Nielsen, *Madam Secretary* succeeded in the network's goal of attracting "upscale

audiences.” CBS defines an upscale audience as a household making over \$100,000/year and/or adults with four or more years of college (CBS, 2014).

In short, *Madam Secretary* is a politically themed fictional television drama, which lends importance to discussing how politics are represented in entertainment television. In my analysis, I focus on the emerging genre of television political dramas as well as the representation of women in such dramas.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, I discuss postfeminism and the media, as well as politics in entertainment television. The purpose of discussing postfeminism in general is to provide context for the concept of “having it all” as a woman in American society. I explore the history behind “having it all” in popular culture. Because I analyze whether or not *Madam Secretary* supports the notion that American women can have it all, I summarize postfeminism’s representation in the media, specifically postfeminism’s representation in entertainment television.

### POSTFEMINISM AND THE MEDIA

Before providing a summary of postfeminism, it is necessary to recognize the larger context in which this movement is situated. The waves of the feminist movement are a common way of classifying types of feminism and feminist thought. The evolution of “the wave metaphor has been meaningful because it captures the forward and backward movement, the ebb and flow, of feminism” (Dicker, 2016, p. 5). This metaphor has been central to many scholars’ understanding of the feminist movement, particularly in the United States. However, it has also been challenged for its various limitations (Cobble, Gordon & Henry, 2014).

The first wave of the feminist movement, occurring during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, concentrated on gaining the right to vote for women. First-wave feminism

coincided with the movement for the abolition of slavery, creating similarities in the fights for equality on the basis of race and sex (Kinser, 2004, p. 126-127). A key theme during second-wave feminism was a critique of patriarchy (Snyder, 2008, p. 184).

Feminists maintained that living in a world controlled by patriarchy was a choice, and not a natural preference for women (Dow, 1996, p. 39). Second-wave feminists also had strong views about domesticity. Domesticity was considered to be a patriarchal way of life, allowing little room for feminism in the domestic space (Hollows, 2006, p. 102).

In the 1990s the third wave of the feminist movement emerged, which is sometimes referred to as, and at other times distinguished from, postfeminism (Braithwaite, 2002, p. 335-336). Rather than insinuating that feminism is over or no longer necessary, which was a common theme in the media, this wave of feminism created a milder form of second-wave feminist values (Dow, 1996, p. 87-88; Mann & Huffman, 2005, p. 63; Braithwaite, 2002, p. 337). Some authors distinguish between the third wave of feminism and postfeminism, arguing that the third wave of feminism is a political and social movement that shares some values with second-wave feminism and critiques others. In contrast, postfeminism is often described as a sensibility that asserts the irrelevance or transcendence of feminism (Gill, 2007, p. 147-148). Other authors argue that the two overlap and represent similar movements (Braithwaite, 2002, p. 336-338).

Postfeminism is more than just a movement; it has become a part of culture, specifically media culture. Elana Levine (2009) argues that consumption-based culture

has created a patriarchal common sense: “In this new hegemonic and patriarchal common sense lies a rich arena within which feminist scholars can continue to engage with both the dangers and the pleasures of our changing media age” (Levine, 2009, p. 143). A patriarchal common sense is embedded in the media, which allows for scholarly or pop cultural challenges to patriarchy to be largely ignored by the same media.

Postfeminism is often characterized by the sexual empowerment of women. (Duits & van Zoonen, 2011, p. 491). The sexual empowerment of women is viewed by some as sexual objectification and by others as sexual subjectification of women (Gill, 2012, p. 737). Critical scholars have pointed out that sexualized images of women in the media do not necessarily represent the feminist supported ideal of sexual liberation, but are also intertwined with problematic social stereotypes which reflect the sexism, racism, ageism, classism, and homophobia that exist in mainstream culture (Gill, 2012, p. 742; Duits & van Zoonen, 2011, p. 492). Representations of sexual empowerment vary in the types of media that women are portrayed in, from advertising to television shows (Gill, 2012, p. 737). Gill argues that the media encourage women to imitate sexualized representations and that this is coded as a form of sexual empowerment (2012, p. 738). In short, what passes for “sexual empowerment” of women in media portrayals often reduces the value of women in all aspects of life to their sexuality and their bodies.

Recent studies, however, question how problematic this is, because young people have been found to be able to recognize and sometimes ignore negative media portrayals (Gill, 2012, p. 739, Duits & van Zoonen, 2011, p. 498, 502-503). However, it is also

problematic how general the term empowerment has become, as it has been used to advertise all sorts of products and concepts, minimizing its influence (Gill, 2012, p. 743). The recognition that postfeminism is characterized by the sexual empowerment of women is significant for my study because I am studying a character that is empowered by her status in United States politics. It is important to observe whether the show, in order to portray Elizabeth as a woman who can have it all, may do this through representing her as a sexually empowered woman.

I now turn to the concept of “having it all” and how it has been addressed in the media studies literature. The postfeminist idea that women can “have it all” emerged in films and television shows of the 1980s. Genz (2009) asserts that, “the female/feminist icon of the ‘Superwoman’ who emerges in the 1980s” was, in part, created as “a foil for the feminine housewife” (p. 32). However, Genz also notes that this allegedly empowered woman and her “feminist promise of ‘Having It All’ becomes translated in backlash narratives into an imperative of ‘Doing It All’” (2009, p. 32). In other words, media portrayals of the postfeminist “superwoman” suggested that it was the individual woman’s responsibility to live up to the task of balancing career, family life, and parenthood, while also remaining sexy and physically attractive. The postfeminist dream of having it all came with the price tag of doing it all and making it look easy.

Angela McRobbie adds to this conversation when she describes this form of women’s empowerment as a choice, and the responsibility to make a choice. Women have the responsibility to choose to have it all, and therefore to do it all (McRobbie,

2009, p. 47). This is not necessarily empowering for women, contrary to what media representations may suggest, as this definition considers women to be successful only if they are mothers, wives, and sexual (specifically heterosexual) human beings all at the same time.

Rosalind Gill further elaborates on these “postfeminist heroines” and their key characteristics (2007). She speaks of a “traditional femininity,” which is described as being white, heterosexual, domestic and anti-feminist. In contrast to that, her article aims to describe the elements of a “postfeminist sensibility.” In her analysis, she identifies the following elements of a postfeminist sensibility: whiteness, heterosexuality, young, can-do/girl power attitude, health, and attractiveness. Gill also expands on the focus on women’s bodies as she discusses media representation: “On one hand women are presented as active, desiring social subjects, yet on the other they are subject to a level of scrutiny and hostile surveillance that has no historical precedent” (Gill, 2007, p. 163). These elements of the postfeminist sensibility make up the definition of a postfeminist woman who “has it all” and they also inform my analysis in this thesis. It is not coincidental that the character of Elizabeth McCord, as depicted in the television drama *Madam Secretary*, is a white, heterosexual, well-educated and affluent woman, who is married with three children and is also conventionally attractive. While my thesis does not specifically analyze references to Elizabeth’s physical appearance throughout the show, there are multiple scenes in the show where the writers of the show make it clear that “madam secretary” is considered to be an attractive woman.



When analyzing entertainment television, it is important to define the significance of studying representations. Politics, gender norms, and family norms are all a part of our culture and television represents our culture while also having cultural impact. As Lotz (2007, p. 3) has argued:

Television is not just a simple technology or appliance – like a toaster – that has sat in our homes for more than fifty years. Rather, it functions both as a technology and a tool for cultural storytelling. We know it as a sort of ‘window on the world’ or a ‘cultural hearth’ that has gathered our families, told us stories, and offered glimpses of a world outside our daily experience.

Because television has become such an integral part of our daily lives, television itself has become a part of our culture. We pick and choose, and piece together the representations presented to us in order to make sense of our culture. In this context, when television offers to its audiences predominantly patriarchal representations, this influences our definitions of who women should be in society and how women should act. We learn what it means to have it all as a woman by watching other women, specifically through the “window on the world” that television provides (Lotz, 2007, p. 3). Importantly, this impact is not influenced by both the number of female characters on television and by the style in which they are portrayed.

Female roles in popular television have increased throughout the last 35 years (Hollows and Moseley, 2006, p. 12). In order to understand this increase in female roles, it is important to recognize how women have been represented on television over time, and also to consider the array of social and cultural issues that have been addressed during that time (Dow, 1996, p. xiv). Popular television serves as a form of

entertainment, but the source of this entertaining content is not necessarily original. Many times the source of content in a popular television series will reflect real world events and phenomena. These representations are “how the ‘meaning’ of feminism was (and still is) translated into public discourses that are consumed by millions of Americans” (Dow, 1996, p. xvi). The ways in which these popular television series interpret and represent real world events become a part of the public discourse about the actual events. Writing about television programs in the 1980s, Dow (1996) argues that, “reproduction, relationship stability, and mental health are problems for successful female professionals on these shows” (p. 98).

There has been much research on the representation of women in comedies, such as *Murphy Brown*, *Maude*, *One Day at a Time* and *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (Hermes, 2006; Anderson Wagner, 2011; Kalviknes Bore, 2010). Scholars consistently find key themes among these romantic comedies and female-centered sitcoms, themes that focus solely on the interests of female viewers (Tasker & Negra, 2005, p. 107-108). One theme is the conflict between women’s personal and professional lives, a theme that could be explained by political issues such as a pay gap between men and women. However, the political aspects of these issues are largely ignored (Tasker & Negra, 2005, p. 108). This conflict is closely related to the idea of “having it all” which is of interest to me in this study. Given that the main character of *Madam Secretary* is a high-powered politician, it would be interesting to see how the conflict between her personal and professional lives are portrayed by the show.

Previous studies have shown that television shows tend to represent feminism as a type of lifestyle rather than as a political movement; therefore, it is important to research how that translates into specific television shows (Dow, 1996, p. 32). Another key theme of postfeminism is the display of empowerment. Women use the justification of being empowered when choosing to leave the workplace to focus on being a wife/mother, a matter often referred to as “retreatism” or “downsizing” (Tasker & Negra, 2005, p. 108). The fact that political aspects of feminism are ignored in these shows is relevant to my analysis of *Madam Secretary*.

The postfeminist female character on television is acknowledged by the range of possible choices she has as well as her prominence in the workplace (Hermes, 2006, p. 80). Postfeminist themes place an increasing importance on the family, as well as a distinct difference between issues of patriarchy and a preference for individual choice (Dow, 1996, p. 100, 103; Probyn, 1997, p. 127). While some authors argue that this concentration on the family creates examples of women who have it all (Hollows, 2006, p. 107-108), other authors suggest that the purpose of postfeminism is to create the dialogue that women have a choice, which is echoed from the previous phase of liberal feminism (Probyn, 1996, p. 134). Some real-life women in popular television, such as Martha Stewart, have been said to have given women the choice to live a “liberated life of domesticity,” a life that they have chosen rather than have been forced into due to gender roles (Brunsdon, 2006, p. 49).

Another key theme of postfeminist television shows is using aspects of girliness in order to create less threatening female representations. As Tasker and Negra point out, “The ‘girling’ of femininity more generally – the competent professional adult woman who is made safe by being represented as fundamentally still a girl – is itself a characteristic of postfeminist representations” (2005, p. 109). This theme explores the tensions and contradictions of being female, feminine, and feminist. This is a theme seen over and over again in the television show *Ally McBeal*. *Ally McBeal* explores whether or not the central character can be both feminine and a feminist. Moseley and Read (2002) suggest that, “it was the programme’s combination of *feminine discourses* (the construction of Ally as a mini-skirted male fantasy) with *feminist discourses* (Ally as a feminist role model),” that created the tension between Ally’s pursuits to be both feminine and a feminist (p. 232). This conflict between being both feminine and a feminist is explored further, explaining that Ally’s outward appearance is in direct conflict with her career as a lawyer.

Moseley and Read (2002) argue that, “the postfeminist reading suggests that Ally is *too feminine* to be *truly feminist*” (Moseley & Read, 2002, p. 236-237). For Ally, having it all does not necessarily mean that she is doing it all well, it just means that she is balancing her feminine desires with her feminist desires. Ally is not giving anything up; she is not “retreating” to domesticity as described earlier. She is both feminine and a feminist, always struggling to maintain the two (Moseley & Read, 2002). Moseley and Read (2002) argue “the show is distinctive, however, in that it does not centre on a

*conflict* between career and personal life, but instead on the struggle to hold them together” (p. 232). In the end, it is not about choosing career over family, it is about maintaining roles.

These themes are also seen in *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, another highly studied fictional postfeminist character.

Bridget neatly expresses the tensions between the lure of feminist politics that enables her to fulfill her public ambitions and a romantic fantasy that sees her swept off her feet by a mysterious hero. These apparently conflicting impulses leave the postfeminist singleton in a state of constant emotional turmoil and ambivalence (Genz, 2010, p. 100).

The effort of the main character to balance her different roles is a key theme that I explore in the show *Madam Secretary*. Specifically, I analyze Elizabeth’s roles as a politician, wife, and mother. What is different about Elizabeth, as compared to Ally or Bridget, is that she is not looking for a man. Elizabeth already has a husband and is a mother to three children, but she must still maintain several roles. She still tries to keep the romance alive in her relationship with her husband, and she still tries to support and take care of her children. Although she may have reached the postfeminist goals of being a powerful career woman, a wife, and a mother, she must still work hard every day to maintain these roles. The question is, what does she have to sacrifice in order to maintain her roles as a politician, wife and mother, or are her expectations inherently contradictory?

Finally, although my focus in this study is on television, it should be noted that postfeminism has also invaded Hollywood, influencing the representations of both men and women in films.

Most commentators envision postfeminism as a white ‘chick’ backlash that denies class, avoids race, ignores (older) age, and ‘straight’-jackets sexuality. A few celebrate the poise, panache, and performance of the ‘girly woman’ or relish the coolly cutthroat competence of the ‘glam’ exec. A very few believe that boy characters or male critics can also be postfeminists (Holmlund, 2005, p. 117).

Holmlund (2005) explores two films, *Out of Sight* (1998) and *Real Women Have Curves* (2002), in order to analyze how, if at all, the postfeminist discourse is represented. In the film *Out of Sight*, the main female character, Karen, is described as having it all in the end, a postfeminist dream come true (Holmlund, 2005, p. 118). The other film, *Real Women Have Curves*, of the same generation does not necessarily endorse the notion that women can have it all. However, the film does not accurately represent the struggle and conflict women experience when pursuing the postfeminist dream of having it all (Holmlund, 2005, p. 119). The film also fails to address key political issues, such as factory working conditions, but rather dismisses the issues by exploiting social themes of “sisterhood” and “family” (Holmlund, 2005, p. 119). This disregard for the exploration of issues of political context is a key theme found by scholars (Tasker & Negra, 2005, p. 108). Holmlund’s analysis of these films, particularly the classification of having it all as a key theme of postfeminism, is important to my study because I analyze whether or not *Madam Secretary* challenges or reproduces the notion that American women can have it all.

## POLITICAL TELEVISION DRAMA

When speaking about politics in entertainment television, it is relevant to distinguish the defining characteristics of this genre. Richardson and Corner (2012) propose that the following criteria form the definition for a “TV political drama”: 1) political locations, political characters, and political themes, 2) dramatization of the themes, 3) made for television (p. 925). Although these criteria form a very broad definition of a political television drama, it can be understood that the name of the genre serves as a definition in itself. As long as the drama is made for television and contains politics in some way throughout the show, it can be considered a political television drama (Richardson & Corner, 2012). It is questioned whether or not a drama is an appropriate framework for presenting politics on television (Engelstad, 2008). Audun Engelstad (2008) seeks to explore, “whether these dramas seek to reflect real-life politics and political institutions or whether scandal, emotional conflict and dramatic events tend to dominate their plots” (p. 311). Engelstad’s study leads to the conclusion that the dramatic representations do not get in the way of the political content; they actually serve as a means of presenting the content in a way that is relatable to the viewer (Engelstad, 2008, p. 322).

*The West Wing*, one of the most extensively studied political television dramas, is thought to be the formula for creating a successful political television drama due to its tremendous success among viewers (Engelstad, 2008, p. 315). The dramatic aspect allows viewers to connect with the characters on a personal level. Viewers want the characters to

succeed in their political endeavors, not necessarily because they agree with the issues and how they are being handled, but because they are cheering on the characters and feeling their emotions throughout the process (Engelstad, 2008, p. 313).

Relatable representations are key when creating political discourses in popular television, as audiences enjoy being able to see a politician that is authentic, with flaws like any other human being (van Zoonen, 2007, p. 540). The styles in which film and television represent politics allow the viewer to genuinely relate and sometimes invest him/herself in the story (van Zoonen, 2007, p. 532). Mutz and Nir (2010) argue that, “unlike most news content, fictional drama has the potential to produce tremendous emotional and empathic reactions as a result of high levels of involvement in the storyline” (Mutz & Nir, 2010, p. 201).

There are some common themes seen across political television dramas. Some aspects, such as the location and characters, are consistently reused and become generic themes across political television shows, such as the White House and the President of the United States (van Zoonen & Wring, 2012, p. 265). Characters of these television shows tend to resemble real-life politicians, particularly those with White House experience (Engelstad, 2008, p. 311). These political dramas have a tendency to reflect a culture’s current attitudes towards politics, as well as influencing these attitudes (Bailey, 2011; van Zoonen & Wring, 2012).

The theme of the White House being a setting is essential to many American political television dramas. Engelstad (2008) describes *The West Wing* in particular, “the



President is portrayed as a Washington outsider, in the sense that Washington is often seen as dominated by professional politicians out of touch with the public” (p. 313). The representations of the President and others associated with the President tend to be militaristic, a theme widely seen in *The West Wing*. Engelstad (2008) argues that *The West Wing* uses the President and his staff to present an, “image of the United States as a military and moral superpower led by a fundamentally patriarchic office” (Engelstad, 2008, p. 314). The President is associated with military experience, and the military is not typically associated with women; therefore, the emphasis on the military makes this a patriarchal representation (Hungerford, 2010, p. 59).

The patriarchal representation of the White House is consistent even when women are portrayed as the president, as in the television programs *Battlestar Galactica* and *Commander in Chief*. Women shown as president typically inherit the role, through death or other circumstance, rather than being elected to the role: “Even when a woman obtains office, it is done secondarily through the office of vice president, and she is not portrayed as ‘fulfilling’ the role due to her inability to uphold such masculine presidential characteristics” (Hungerford, 2010, p. 71).

Van Zoonen (2005) notes that popular culture and the media influence public opinion regarding female politicians by focusing mostly on female politicians’ roles as wives and mothers rather than on their political achievements and stances on issues. This notion is backed by studies showing that real-life female political candidates receive

more news coverage of their marital and family status than male candidates (Kittilson & Fridkin, 2008).

Hungerford (2010), summarizes the potential impact of current representations of female politicians in popular culture and the media stating, “Further, if women continue to be portrayed as submissive, sexually objectified, and confined to the private sphere of life, then the American public will continue to view women as less capable of being the president” (p. 72). These expectations of female politicians to fit expected cultural definitions of being a woman interfere with women’s chances of becoming president. Female politicians are expected to be wives and mothers, while at the same time being a military hero and strong political figure. This is important to recognize because it relates back to the fact that having it all tends to come with having to do it all. In order for Elizabeth to be seen as a viable president, especially by her male counterparts, she must be a wife, a mother, a military hero, and a strong political figure. This will be analyzed in an episode where Elizabeth fills in as president for the day.

## CONCLUSION

This study aims to address the gap in existing research on how female political characters are represented in a television drama. The character of Elizabeth McCord in the television political drama *Madam Secretary* is analyzed in relation to three key roles: a mother, a wife, and the Secretary of the State. I am interested in how the show *Madam*

*Secretary* engages with the notion of women “having it all” and whether or not the show challenges or reproduces this postfeminist theme. This is an important aspect of the show to study because previous literature has found that media portrayals suggest that political women must have a successful family before they can be successful politicians (Hungerford, 2010). I want to see if this finding also holds true in the television drama series *Madam Secretary*.

## CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The following research questions frame my analysis of how *Madam Secretary* engages the postfeminist theme that “women can have it all.” These questions will guide the analysis of the character of Elizabeth McCord.

- 1) How does the character of Elizabeth McCord, as depicted in the show *Madam Secretary*, negotiate her roles as a politician, a wife, and a mother?
- 2) Overall, does the show *Madam Secretary* challenge or reproduce the notion that “women can have it all”?

The theoretical frameworks that will inform this study are feminist media studies, cultural studies, and feminist television criticism.

### FEMINIST MEDIA STUDIES

Feminist media studies emerges from the broader field of cultural studies, which is focused on critical explorations of popular culture. Broadly speaking, cultural studies has been influenced by Marxism, feminism, psychoanalysis, post structuralism, postmodernism, and many other theoretical traditions (Nelson, Treichler, & Grossberg, 1992, 2). As Stuart Hall explains, cultural studies is not a unifier body of theory but an interdisciplinary field of inquiry (Hall, 1990, 16).

Within cultural studies, feminist media studies is distinguished by a specific focus on the analysis of gender. At the same time, although gender is a key factor, it is not

necessarily the only defining factor of feminist media studies because other shared experiences of women, such as ethnicity, social class, economic status, age, and sexuality come into play (Richardson & Wearing, 2014, p. 17-18). According to Richardson and Wearing, representations of women in the media have not changed much over the past 40 years, as women are still represented in opposite roles to men (2014, p. 20). These representations have been studied thoroughly with conclusions that media representations translate to social representations (Richardson & Wearing, 2014, p. 20).

Psychoanalysis within feminist media studies was used to explain the development of sexuality, particularly media representations of sexuality (Richardson & Wearing, 2014, p. 23). Mulvey's (1999) article, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," expanded on the psychoanalytic work to include the analysis of cinema. Mulvey argued that the "cinematic gaze" consisted of affirming the heterosexual fantasy of men. This allowed for man to be an active, desiring subject while woman was left as a passive, desired object (Richardson & Wearing, 2014, p. 24). Tania Modleski (1997) also examined the gendered gaze by studying female pleasures within romance and soap operas.

As feminist media studies expanded many authors challenged previously held ideals of the representations of women in the media. These critics presented new ways of thinking about female-targeted genres, such as soap operas, comedies, and romance literature (Spigel, 2004, p.1210). Radway (1991) examined the representation of women in romance literature, and how this translated to the audience of women reading popular

romance literature. Radway's book, *Reading the Romance: Women, patriarchy, and popular literature*, challenges the hegemonic ideal that women read romance novels in order to reinforce the patriarchal principles with which they live in their everyday lives. Rather than taking romance literature at face value, Radway expanded her study to focus on the actual act of reading itself and the social context in which this is typically done. She found that women who read romantic literature tended to use the books as an escape from their everyday lives. These women protested their patriarchal lifestyles through reading these books, in a sense through their own imaginations. Radway concludes that women who use romance literature as a way to contest patriarchy need to take the next step and express their protests in a social channel so that their disapproving opinions are given a voice.

#### FEMINIST TELEVISION CRITICISM

The emergence of female-centered television dramas, particularly those focusing on postfeminist and third-wave feminist ideals, created a shift in scholarly theories (Lotz, 2006, p. 174). There was a push to frame women in the media as role models, creating a discourse of positive representations of women. This came from scholars of content analysis who believed that these role models were representations of the intersection of gender issues and the media (Lotz, 2006, p. 11-12). However, cultural studies scholars instead found these representations to be stereotypes, which needed to be fought against with more varied representations of women, whether positive or negative (Lotz, 2006, p. 12). Feminist television scholars took a similar approach, finding that television offered a

day-to-day representation that varied between television entertainment programs. They sought to understand how audiences made meaning out of these representations (Lotz, 2006, p. 12). Through these explorations of female-centered television dramas a new field was produced -- feminist television criticism. Lotz (2006) contends that,

Feminist television criticism takes a variety of forms, including studies of female audiences; traditionally 'female' genres such as soap operas; representational strategies used in depicting women, femininity, and feminism; production histories of women in the television industry; and political-economy studies of women as television consumers (p. 18).

Butler (2002) further defines feminist television criticism as a theory that “concentrates on the volatile province of gender discourse – on the way that women alone and women in relation to men are portrayed in language, literature, film, magazines, television, and other media” (Butler, 2002, p. 352). According to Butler, there are two main forms of feminist television criticism. One form believes that what is portrayed on television is exactly what is happening in the real world. Because of its oversimplification, this form has been widely criticized (2002, p. 352). Another form of feminist criticism argues instead that men run society, and they represent women on entertainment programs in ways that maintain patriarchal power. This form of feminist criticism also recognizes that this is not always the case and there are discourses that actually represent women differently (p. 353).

Adriaens and Van Bauwel (2011) have studied the television show *Sex and the City* using the theory of feminist television criticism. They do this through critiquing the representation of postfeminism in the series. These authors among many other authors

critique the use of feminism in this particular show. Adriaens and Van Bauwel propose nine common themes that are to be considered postfeminist including: consumer culture, fashion, independence, (sexual) pleasure, individual choice, humor, hybridism, technology, and the renewed focus on the female body (Adriaens & Van Bauwel, 2011, p. 180-181). In addition, Lotz (2001) proposes that a postfeminist television series contains the following: 1) it explores the diverse relations to power women inhabit, 2) it contains depictions of varied feminist solutions and loose organizations of activism, 3) it deconstructs binary categories of gender and sexuality, and 4) it illustrates contemporary struggles faced by women and feminists (p. 115-116).

In my study, I am not so much interested in whether or not the drama series *Madam Secretary* can be classified as a postfeminist television show or not. Rather, I want to look at how the show represents Elizabeth McCord, the main female character of the show, and how it taps into the postfeminist notion that women can have it all. In that sense, I analyze whether the show represents Elizabeth as a woman bound and constricted by patriarchal ideals or as a woman fighting and defeating patriarchal ideals.



## CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

The study of narratives is important because of their ever-changing form; throughout time the plot may remain the same; however, culture determines how, why, when, and where the story is told (Barthes & Duisit, 1975). Because *Madam Secretary* is a narrative, I have chosen episodes over the course of the first two seasons. This will allow studying the changes in plot over time (if applicable) and how what is occurring in that episode may have changed the plot. The method of this study is a qualitative textual analysis. The narrative being studied is a collection of episodes from the show *Madam Secretary*.

### TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

In my study, I conduct a qualitative textual analysis of the show *Madam Secretary*. Brennen (2013) states that, “When we do textual analysis, we evaluate the many meanings found in texts and we try to understand how written, visual and spoken language helps us to create our social realities” (193). This is in contrast to quantitative studies because, “Qualitative researchers do not study texts to predict or control how individuals will react to messages but instead to understand how people use texts to make sense of their lives” (Brennen, 2013, 194).

I conduct a qualitative textual analysis of six episodes of Seasons 1 and 2 of the television show *Madam Secretary* in order to understand how popular television is

representing women in politics. Two episodes have been chosen for each of the following themes: Elizabeth McCord as a wife, Elizabeth McCord as a mother, and Elizabeth McCord as a politician. I am aware that these themes will be present in all of the episodes and will often overlap. With this in mind, I have chosen two episodes that highlight one of these themes more prominently. These episodes were also chosen because they represent moments when Elizabeth's roles may be in conflict.

The specific questions I keep in mind when studying the episodes are:

- 1) How does the television show *Madam Secretary* represent Elizabeth McCord as a politician, a wife, and a mother?
- 2) Do these roles, as depicted in the show, complement or come into conflict with each other? Is there a role that typically wins priority in Elizabeth McCord's life?

#### EPISODES TO ANALYZE

Following is a brief description of the episodes and my rationale for choosing them.

##### **Elizabeth McCord as a Wife**

In order to assess Elizabeth McCord's role as a wife, I analyze the following episodes: Season 1, Episode 12, "Standoff," and Season 1, Episode 18, "The Time is at Hand." I have chosen "Standoff" because Elizabeth and her husband Henry celebrate their wedding anniversary, and Elizabeth tries to separate her work time from her time with her husband. I have chosen "The Time is at Hand" because Henry enters a suicidal cult in order to save American lives. During this time, Elizabeth sits in the White House

Situation Room watching the whole thing play out. Elizabeth and Henry also discover their daughter Stevie's relationship with her boss.

### **Elizabeth McCord as a Mother**

In order to assess Elizabeth McCord's role as a mother, I analyze the following episodes: Season 1, Episode 15, "The Ninth Circle," and Season 2, Episode 5, "The Long Shot." I have chosen "The Ninth Circle" because Elizabeth calms a mother whose son is being held hostage by terrorists. Also, Elizabeth's son Jason is expelled from school. These are both situations in which other female characters question Elizabeth's role as a mother. I have chosen "The Long Shot" because the McCord family takes in a Russian leader's daughter. Also, Elizabeth's daughter Allison expresses an interest in fashion. These are both situations in which Elizabeth must face the challenge of balancing her work and family life.

### **Elizabeth McCord as a Politician**

In order to assess Elizabeth McCord's role as the Secretary of the State, I analyze the following episodes: Season 2, Episode 1, "The Show Must Go On," and Season 2, Episode 2, "The Doability Doctrine." I have chosen "The Show Must Go On" because the President goes missing and Elizabeth ends up having to act as President for a day. Although her time as the President of the United States is brief, I find it significant to analyze how Elizabeth is portrayed in the highest position of political power in the United States. I have chosen "The Doability Doctrine" because Elizabeth is struggling with being a woman in the President's cabinet. Elizabeth feels that she is not able to persuade

the President and she seeks advice and gains insight from Madeleine Albright, played on the show by Ms. Albright herself, the first actual woman to be Secretary of the State. This is significant because we gain insight into a real female politician's view of being the Secretary of the State.

#### SUBJECTIVITY OF THE RESEARCHER

As was discussed above, this study is informed by the theoretical tradition of feminist media studies and uses qualitative methods. Because of this, it is important to acknowledge my own subjectivity as the researcher who will be conducting the analysis. I am interested in how the media describe politics and political figures and how this affects our views and political leanings in the real world. More specifically, I am interested in how entertainment television represents real or fictional political women and how these representations form or adjust our views of female politicians.

I consider myself a regular political television drama viewer, with my favorites being *The Good Wife*, *Madam Secretary*, *How to Get Away with Murder*, and *Scandal*. I have seen Season 1 through Season 2 of *Madam Secretary*. I became particularly interested in studying the postfeminist notion that “women can have it all” since I became engaged. Being a graduate student, having a fulltime job, and being in a serious relationship was draining and I was struggling to maintain all of these roles. I struggled to understand and grasp how to make it all work. I knew that getting married, adopting a puppy, and someday having children would not make things easier. So, how could I successfully have it all? And, why did I feel the need to have it all?

Knowing that for me having it all meant doing it all, I realized that maybe I needed to reconsider what was most important to me. What do I want right now in this moment, and what can wait for later? I decided that marrying my now husband was my first priority. Second priority was finding my future career. Therefore, going into this analysis, I had already come to the conclusion in my own life that having it all was about choices. I needed to make the right choice for my future family and then make a choice about my career. Choices tend to come with sacrifices, but that is the cost for wanting it all. I discovered that I could have it all, but it was going to take hard work to get to that point.

## CHAPTER FIVE: TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

The character of Elizabeth McCord juggles many roles throughout her day. She is a wife, a mother, and as of recently she is a politician. Though these roles may be classified separately, in Elizabeth's life they overlap and are in conflict with one another on a daily basis. I am interested in studying these moments of conflict, the moments when Elizabeth's roles as wife, mother, and/or politician impede her from fulfilling another role to the best of her ability. However, I observe whether the opposite may also take place whereby Elizabeth's experiences as a wife or mother may help her be a better politician, and vice versa.

In this section, I discuss each one of Elizabeth's three major roles in turn by focusing on specific scenes in each of the six episodes that were chosen for analysis. In the following section (section 6) I analyze themes that cut across the episodes and will also compare the scenes that emerge in the show *Madam Secretary* to major themes that were identified in the pre-existing literature.

### ELIZABETH AS A WIFE

The two episodes I examine here highlight more specifically the character of Elizabeth's role as a wife and the difficulty of balancing this role with her political and professional responsibilities as Secretary of State.

## **“Standoff”**

This episode follows the story of a Texas police officer that is shot and killed at the Texas-Mexico border. The Mexican government is holding a suspected drug cartel member responsible for the Texas police officer’s death. The Mexican government agrees to release the suspect to the United States government only if the United States promises not to punish him with the death penalty. Disaster ensues when the governor of Texas hears of this consideration. Meanwhile, Elizabeth and Henry are celebrating their 25<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. They attempt to spend a few days alone in New York City; however, political and family matters stand in their way.

While analyzing this episode, I look for moments in which the character of Elizabeth’s role as a wife either helps or hinders her ability to perform her duties as a mother and/or as a politician. The reason why this episode was chosen is because one of the main story lines is Elizabeth and Henry celebrating their 25<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. This is a monumental day celebrated by married couples, and the fact it was chosen to be a part of the storyline suggests that the show is trying to make a point about Elizabeth and Henry’s relationship. Following are two specific scenes that illustrate the tensions that I am interested in.

### *Elizabeth Leaves for Texas*

Elizabeth and Henry are in their hotel room in New York City. They have just had a night full of arguments, the most recent of which is about Henry lying to Elizabeth about the full extent of his involvement with the NSA. Elizabeth gets called away from

the anniversary celebration to deal with the Texas governor who has supported the forced extradition of the suspected drug cartel member responsible for the death of a Texas police officer. Elizabeth's staff has not been able to appease the governor, so Elizabeth is heading to Texas to settle the matter. Elizabeth is in the process of packing before she leaves New York when the following exchange occurs.

Henry: "I can go to Texas with you."

Elizabeth: "I don't know how long it's gonna take, or what's gonna happen. But I know it's not going to be relaxing or romantic. Maybe it's just best to put this occasion out of its misery."

Henry: "I'm sorry about this weekend. I'll make it up to you."

Elizabeth: "We'll make it up to each other. I don't know when, I don't know how, but we will. I'll see you back at home, okay?"

Henry: "Okay."

Henry does not reject Elizabeth wanting to make the trip to Texas alone, as they agree that their anniversary celebration has not gone as planned. They have spent the entire night upsetting one another. They had created a rule about not using cell phones, and then disappointed each other when they broke this rule. Elizabeth kept bringing up how she felt uneasy about the way that she had left things with their daughter Stevie, as she had recently told Stevie about her CIA involvement under the Patriot Act. The couple also ran into a man that Henry was spying on for the NSA. Elizabeth was frustrated when she learned that Henry had lied to her about the extent of his involvement with the NSA.



After many arguments about the kids and about their work, time away from each other may be just what they need, and this could be why Henry does not disagree with Elizabeth wanting to travel to Texas alone. Elizabeth acknowledges that their trip was supposed to be relaxing and romantic, two things that they failed to accomplish. Nevertheless, among the disagreements and the failed attempt at a relaxing and romantic weekend, the couple remains a team. This is directly illustrated in the conversation as Henry promises to make up the disastrous weekend to Elizabeth and Elizabeth states that they will make it up to each other. This is important to note, because even though they may have failed at having a romantic weekend together, they do not blame each other. Through these actions, the show is presenting the couple as maintaining gender equality in the domestic space.

This scene illustrates that sometimes Elizabeth stops fighting to have it all. In certain situations, it is easier to tackle one problem at a time. We also see this represented in the way that Elizabeth moves about the room during this conversation. Elizabeth is not focused on the conversation that she and Henry are having. The camera follows her around the room as she grabs her things and packs them in a rush. The conversation between her and Henry does not stop and neither do her hurried movements. We are given a clear visual indication that she is very busy and right now her relationship with Henry is not her main focus.

The character of Elizabeth is portrayed as choosing to be a politician and to settle the conflict that the Texas governor has caused. She will figure out a way to make it up to

Henry later. It is possible to tackle only one problem at a time because she knows that she and Henry are a team and they will work things out. This is an important scene for expressing that Elizabeth struggles at maintaining her roles as wife and politician, but the type of relationship that she and Henry have helps her to know that she is still valued and supported by her husband.

*Problems With Nostalgia*

Elizabeth heads to Texas to speak with the Texas governor. Rather than trying to make him see the big picture when it comes to international affairs with Mexico, the approach her team had tried and failed with, Elizabeth presents the governor with his personal big picture. She explains that if he does not return the Mexican suspect to Mexico, he will be arrested. Given his interest to run for President, an arrest and a “no-travel” designation in Mexico will make his attempt at international affairs difficult. The Texas governor agrees to return the suspect and Elizabeth returns to D.C. with a win. After discussing the failed weekend with her secretary, which she calls a “universal fiasco,” Elizabeth heads home and Henry is on the couch. This is the last scene in the episode, featuring Elizabeth and Henry discussing their failed anniversary celebration.

Henry: “Look, I’ve been thinking about how everything went so wrong this weekend.”

Elizabeth: “Oh, God, me too. And I am sorry. It’s my fault. I was completely wrecked with guilt about leaving, with just being away. And then this whole ongoing thing with Stevie.”

Henry: “Okay. Look, it’s my fault too. The nostalgia, all of the pressure of trying to make everything perfect, trying to get back to our old lives. It just forces us to confront how different everything is. We gotta stop doing that. We just need to move into the unknown and trust that whatever happens...”

Elizabeth: “Live and let learn.”

Henry: “Yes.”

Henry and Elizabeth confront the fact that they cannot have things the way they used to be. They have grown a lot, both individually and as a couple, over the past 25 years and they cannot expect things to be the way they were 25 years ago. This is Henry’s way of telling Elizabeth that she has not failed, not as a wife, not as a mother, and not as a politician. He is telling her that she can be all of these things; they both just cannot hold their lives to the same standard that they once did. Henry is validating the postfeminist notion that women can have it all in this scene, but to have it all you have to let go of the past. They have to let go of their nostalgia, but not of each other, and not of their children or their careers.

In contrast to the previous scene described above, we see a steady camera angle throughout this conversation. After Elizabeth arrives and takes off her jacket she sits next to Henry on the couch. The two share a very close and personal conversation, represented not only through their words, but also through how closely they sit to one another and how they shift their bodies so that they are fully facing one another. Rather than showing

a frantic Elizabeth that is conducting every task imaginable at once, we see a calm Elizabeth, focused solely on her husband and their conversation.

Another key part of this scene is the guilt that the character of Elizabeth admits to. She says that she feels guilty about leaving; we are left to assume that this means leaving her husband and her children. But the question that I ask myself is why does she feel guilty? Does she feel guilty that her son Jason injured his ankle while she was gone? If so, what could she have done to prevented this accident from happening? Does she feel guilty for leaving her conversation with Stevie in a bad place? If so, what could she have done to help Stevie understand better? Stevie probably just needs time to process new information about her mother, and we learn in future episodes that time away is all Stevie needed. Does she feel guilty for not being there to prevent the Texas governor from creating chaos? If so, what could she have done to change the mind of a man who already knew what he was going to do? Why is all of the responsibility for fixing this situation on her? Another reason she may feel guilty is for leaving her husband in the middle of their anniversary weekend. This is something that could have been prevented; she could have stayed in New York and continued with their anniversary celebrations. However, they both acknowledge that this was a weekend to “live and let learn.”

In each of these scenarios where the character of Elizabeth could have a reason for feeling guilty she could not have done much to help the situation, whether she was in New York or in D.C. This guilt comes from not being able to manage all of her roles, or from the unrealistic expectations of being able to perform all of those roles at the same

time. It is not guilt that can be pinpointed on specific situations and circumstances. It is the type of guilt associated with women who have it all, but struggle with doing it all well. No one is telling Elizabeth that she should feel guilty; it is her own internal struggle, a struggle brought on by social expectations and gender norms. Her husband even tries to place the blame for their failed weekend on himself. But Elizabeth insists on feeling guilty because it is the price for not being able to prevent disorder among her roles.

This is an important scene for expressing that Elizabeth can be a wife, a mother, and a politician. That being said, this scene also emphasizes that taking up these three roles simultaneously creates the need to re-evaluate the idea of success. Success as a wife does not mean traveling away for a few days on a romantic trip. Elizabeth and Henry agree that there is a learning curve, and they are just going to have to learn while life goes on. In this scene, the character of Elizabeth can have it all, be a wife, a mother, and a politician, but that comes at the price of feeling guilty for failing at handling all of these roles perfectly.

### *Conclusion*

In conclusion, this episode brings into focus the couple's marriage by revealing just how different their lives are compared to 25 years ago. A major theme that we see in this episode is that of Elizabeth and Henry sticking together as a team and avoiding blaming one another for their failed anniversary celebration. Neither Henry nor Elizabeth caused this weekend's events; they each had a role in the end result, along with their jobs and their children. The character of Elizabeth is portrayed as choosing not going to fight

to have it all; rather, she addresses each issue one at a time. In the end, Henry and Elizabeth agree that they will just have to “live and let learn.” Their lives have changed over the last 25 years, so they realize that the best way to move forward is by letting go of nostalgia for the past and learning from the events of this weekend.

### **“The Time is at Hand”**

This episode follows the story of a cult in Bolivia, formed of many United States citizens. The cult members are preparing for a mass suicide, as they believe that the end of the world is near. The cult, the Covenant of John, takes a United States congressman hostage when he attempts to rescue a constituent’s daughter. Henry is a world-renowned religious scholar and has a history of projects with the NSA. Because of his background, Henry is asked to travel to the cult’s camp in Bolivia to discuss with the cult leader alternatives to mass suicide. Meanwhile, Elizabeth watches from the Situation Room.

While analyzing this episode, I look at moments when the character of Elizabeth is portrayed as struggling either internally or aloud about the political implications versus the personal implications of Henry being involved in the prevention of the cult’s mass suicide. The reason why this episode has been chosen is because of the danger and political significance of Henry entering the cult. Elizabeth feels the need to protect her man on the ground even more strongly than in other situations because this man is her husband. Elizabeth was in the CIA; these types of maneuvers in even more dangerous situations were a norm for her. But this one is different. This one is personal. Following are two particular scenes that illustrate this tension.

### *Oval Office Conversation*

After meeting with the upset but hopeful father of a cult member, Elizabeth returns home to chat about the impending cult suicide with her religious scholar husband. Elizabeth and Henry discuss possible ways to prevent the mass suicide of the Covenant of John members. Henry says that the cult leader may be able to be persuaded through biblical scholarship, as the book of Revelation does not describe suicide when discussing the events of the apocalypse. Henry thinks that the cult leader just needs a way out of the situation he has put himself in. Elizabeth proposes that Henry get on the phone with the leader to discuss the matter and Henry agrees. Now Elizabeth just has to get one more person on board with her plan, the President of the United States. In a highly contested discussion in the Oval Office, the President, Elizabeth and Russell, the President's Chief of Staff, discuss the implications of Henry intervening with the cult.

Elizabeth tries to talk the President into allowing Henry to speak on the phone with the cult leader in order to persuade him to leave Bolivia and prevent the mass suicide. After back and forth and Russell supporting Elizabeth's recommendation, the President decides that Henry should speak to Reverend Finch, but in person, not over the phone. This scene ends with Elizabeth saying nothing; the look on her face shows us that Henry traveling to the cult is far from the outcome she had wanted. I ask myself, does Elizabeth say nothing because there is nothing to say? The President has made up his mind so there is no reason to try to talk him out of something you just talked him into. Or

is the character of Elizabeth portrayed as quiet because the response that she wants to give is not one that is professional, it is one that is personal?

I believe that Elizabeth says nothing and just stands there with a look of fear and worry on her face, because of both of these reasons. She knows that it would be disrespectful to the President to try to talk him out of something she just persuaded him to do. But she also cannot say to the President that she does not want her husband traveling to the cult, considering that the cult is planning a mass suicide. Fortunately, Russell says this for Elizabeth, chiming in to ask whether Henry traveling to Bolivia is actually necessary. The President reassures them both that Henry will have backup. However, while the President and Russell finish their conversation, the camera stays focused on Elizabeth. The character of Elizabeth's face is portrayed as showing all of the fear and guilt for putting her husband in this situation.

So where does this leave Elizabeth, as a wife and as a politician? She cannot keep her husband safe without taking back the argument she just presented in support of involving Henry. But is it Elizabeth's responsibility to keep Henry safe? Can't Henry pass on the offer? Henry ends up going to the cult's camp in Bolivia, and although we are not shown a scene where he is asked to go, we can assume that he had a chance to turn down the offer. I do not believe that the character of Elizabeth fails as a politician or as a wife in this scene but her roles are clearly in conflict. The social expectations for a wife are to be nurturing, caring, and supportive of her husband. This is in sharp contrast with the expectations of ruthless, stoic politicians. She does her best to present an argument in



support of Henry being involved and she succeeds because the President agrees to Henry speaking with Reverend Finch. She succeeds as a politician, because she gains the President's support. However, her ability to balance this success with her role as a wife is put into question because she is not able to express her fear for her husband's safety in her conversation with the President.

### *Watching from the Situation Room*

The tension from the previous scene develops further in the final scene of this episode. When Henry and his security team arrive at the cult's camp in Bolivia, the President, Russell, Elizabeth and other military and government personnel are seated in the Situation Room, ready to provide support from afar as the events play out. Although Elizabeth is not in control of the communication between Henry and the Situation Room, she has a front row seat to a very dangerous rescue mission. This is definitely not her first rescue mission, as we are shown her rescue mission of two young American men held hostage in Syria in the first episode, but definitely her first rescue mission where a family member is involved.

The scene that plays out in the Situation Room is the longest scene in the episode, spanning over nearly 11 minutes. Most of this time is spent in the cult's camp, and more specifically in Reverend Finch's tent with Henry. Throughout the events being shown inside and outside the walls of the cult compound, the viewer is also shown glimpses of the Situation Room. The character of Elizabeth is portrayed as calm and focused in most of these shots, occasionally making joking comments; such as, "Would you tell him to

shut up and get on with it?” when Henry jokes with his security team outside the walls of the cult’s camp. This comedic tone reveals the pressure for women, specifically in political situations, to hide emotion.

Other times, we are shown a more alert and commanding side of Elizabeth, either requesting back up for her husband, reassuring the room that they should not send in reinforcements, or pointing out potential moments of distress (such as Christine entering the tent, or seeing a knife). In addition, the character of Elizabeth is portrayed as feminine. She notes the first time that she sees the daughter of the man she met with earlier in the episode. When her husband shares his very personal religious journey with Reverend Finch, Elizabeth tells the room, “He doesn’t tell that story to just anyone. It looks like it worked.” And, she sadly exclaims, “They had the poison,” when the reinforcements announce that they entered a room where many had perished.

Through this scene, we see many sides of the character of Elizabeth, and I believe that she would have been calm, focused, alert, commanding, caring and considerate even if it was not her husband in the middle of this dangerous rescue mission. All of these traits are necessary to be a strong and successful Secretary of State, and that is one reason we see her as a part of this scene. These traits are a part of the unrealistic balance required of her to have it all. Elizabeth is purposefully constructed by the show to model idealized behavior and gender performance in this stressful political situation. On one hand, Elizabeth is doing her job. She has engaged a rescue mission to bring home many Americans in danger. On the other hand, Elizabeth is being a wife. Her husband is at the

center of this rescue mission, and he is not sticking to the plan that they have laid out beforehand.

As in every other episode, the character of Elizabeth is torn between her role as a wife and her role as a politician; sometimes the roles oppose one another. In this particular situation, however, she has a lot more to lose if she makes the wrong decision. This episode forces the viewer to imagine the situation through Elizabeth's eyes. The scene sets up showing her watching every move her husband makes. When the sound and camera are lost in the Situation Room for a few moments as Henry enters the cult's camp, the viewer also loses the sound and camera. Elizabeth's distress becomes the viewer's distress and allows for the viewer to understand her struggle in maintaining these roles, rather than blaming her for not speaking out to the President or for mentioning the idea of Reverend Finch and Henry communicating in the first place.

Overall, this scene is one of the most powerful displays in the first season of Elizabeth's commitment to both her job and her husband. She loves this man, and although she's beyond stressed watching him in this cult, she is also proud of him and how he is able to persuade Reverend Finch. Elizabeth knows the line between family and career and although this particular situation is especially blurry, she is able to come out with a "win." The show uses these neatly wrapped up endings of the episodes to represent the character of Elizabeth succeeding in all of her pursuits of the last hour and this has the effect of portraying her as a hard-to-relate, unrealistic "superwoman" – not unlike the postfeminist heroines identified by other media scholars. This time, Elizabeth and

Henry's strong relationship is illustrated in their support for each other's individual pursuits.

### *Conclusion*

In conclusion, Elizabeth's strength as a wife in this situation is seen in her support for Henry before, during and after the events at the cult's camp. Elizabeth believes in her husband and his abilities as a religious scholar, and this is made apparent in both the Oval Office conversation as well as the Situation Room viewing. She also displays her strength as a politician while negotiating the plan with the President. We experience, as viewers, the character of Elizabeth's distress in the Situation Room, and we feel her struggle to stay in the politician mindset while her husband is in danger. In the end, she is able to remain relatively calm and see Henry home safely.

### ELIZABETH AS A MOTHER

In this section I focus on two episodes that foreground Elizabeth's role as a mother and I examine how being mother intersects with her political career.

#### **"The Ninth Circle"**

This episode follows two separate story lines, one family related and one work related. Elizabeth has signed off on a CIA operation in Turkey to help uncover the murder of her predecessor. During the operation, an American soldier, Brett Borris, is killed. The United States government works to cover up the op in order to maintain affairs with Turkey; however, Elizabeth is also tasked with keeping Brett's mother quiet when she learns the truth surrounding her son's death. Meanwhile, Elizabeth and Henry must deal

with their son's issues at school. As the episode progresses, Jason is bullied and attacks his bully, eventually resulting in an expulsion from his new school.

While analyzing this episode, I look at moments in which the character of Elizabeth's role as a mother either helps or hinders her ability to perform her duties as a wife and/or politician. One reason why this episode has been chosen is because one of the main story lines focuses on how she deals with lying to the mother of a fallen soldier in order to protect international affairs with Turkey. This story line shows how Elizabeth deviates from protocol in certain situations because of the loss and pain Brett's mother feels. Another reason this episode has been chosen is because of Jason's bullying situation and Elizabeth's need to intervene and protect her son. Both of these situations highlight the maternal desires and pressures Elizabeth experiences. These pressures are applied by the societal expectations regarding the qualities of idealized motherhood and idealized femininity.

#### *Elizabeth Breaks Protocol*

Elizabeth, Andrew Munsey, the Director of the CIA, and Russell Jackson, the President's Chief of Staff, are discussing how to deal with the recent events in Turkey. The team has signed off on a CIA operation to help uncover the murder of Vincent Marsh, Elizabeth's predecessor. They decide not to disclose their involvement in the operation, which resulted in the death of an American soldier, Brett Borriss. Elizabeth is concerned about Brett's body, which is currently being held by Turkey. She is worried

that Turkey will never release the body and Brett's family will never be able to see him again.

Elizabeth: "What about the body? Just leave it over there?"

Andrew: "Brett Borris knew the risks, they all do."

Elizabeth: "Brett knew what he was signing up for. But his friends and family didn't. And they're going to start asking questions. And they might go to the press, then what?"

Russell: "Stall them."

Elizabeth: "With what? And we can't hold them off forever."

Russell: "You'll think of something."

Throughout this entire scene, we see Andrew and Elizabeth exchanging ideas on the best possible way to resolve the situation at hand. Russell chimes in a few times, but most of the scene is concentrated on Andrew and Elizabeth. Rather than switching back and forth between the two speakers, the camera takes a few moments in between conversation to show us Russell's face and body language. We see that he is the only person in the room sitting down for most of this stressful scene, symbolizing that he is not the one taking the action; he is the one instructing what should take place. Russell's job is to make sure that what needs to happen happens, and that is exactly what he is doing in this scene. Like most of the scenes in the White House, this one ends with the camera focused on Elizabeth's reaction to the conversation that occurred. This is because

the show is told through Elizabeth's point of view, and this allows us to know what she is feeling. In this case, she has a look of worry on her face.

Elizabeth is definitely not new to this particular situation. She was in the CIA for a majority of her career. She knows what would have happened if she died on a mission, but the reason she quit was because of her family. She believes that Brett's family deserves this final closure. After Elizabeth leaves this heated meeting, she has her daily check in with her team. She leaves this meeting in a rush when she learns that Brett's mother is downstairs requesting a meeting with her. Although Elizabeth's team reminds her that it is not protocol for her to take a meeting with Brett's mother, she ignores their warnings.

When Elizabeth meets with Brett's mother, she hears of a need for closure, something that would be satisfied with the delivery of Brett's body. Brett's mother explains that her family is a military family and that she is used to the idea of dying for your country. But she does want Brett's death to mean something. Elizabeth approaches the President requesting his sign-off on her visiting Turkey in person to apologize for the death of two Turkish citizens. Russell recommends a rougher approach, one that the President refers to as "bringing out the hammer." At the same time, he refers to Elizabeth's approach as a "soft touch." These comments are the show's way of expanding on the gendered notion of politics, revealing how the character of Elizabeth is representative of an idealized type of femininity.

Before Elizabeth proceeds with her “soft touch” plan, Brett’s mother approaches her again. After video footage is released showing the events during Brett’s death, his mother threatens to go to the press to release that it was a CIA operation. Instead of persuading her to keep quiet, Elizabeth tells Brett’s mother to come with her to Turkey and if she fails to bring home Brett’s body she will not stand in the way of her releasing this classified information to the press. Although Elizabeth breaks protocol again, everything works out in the end and they return home with Brett’s body. This is the show’s comment on a more feminine approach being the better approach, and possibly the better way to be a politician, in this episode.

A lot can be said for the unfolding of events in this episode. Arguments can be made for the character of Elizabeth’s emotional attachment to this situation leading to the rescue of the body and the prevention of anyone leaking the confidential operation to the press. Additionally, had Elizabeth not been a part of the decision on how to deal with the situation, a “soft touch” approach would most likely not have been considered. The President’s classification of Elizabeth’s approach as a “soft touch” compared to Russell’s approach as “bringing out the hammer” suggests patriarchal attitudes in the Oval Office.

This story line gives us a great glimpse at how Elizabeth runs her office differently because she is a mother. She knows how hurt, confused and concerned she would be if her son or daughter were to die and no one could release any information on their death. When she breaks protocol to meet with Brett’s mother, the conversation is as the Secretary of State, but we see Elizabeth’s role as a mother illuminated. Eventually,



when Elizabeth ignores the implications of Brett's mother going to the press and promises to not stop her if Brett doesn't come home, she is making an emotional decision not a political one. I believe that the character of Elizabeth's experiences as a mother help her to be a better politician in the episode, which is what the text suggests She reveals possible means to an end that the men are not able to see. Although her emotions may make political decisions difficult at times, everything works out in the end.

*Jason and the Bully*

In a parallel plot in this episode, Elizabeth has to deal with a parenting challenge involving her youngest child, Jason. One of the first scenes in this episode revolves around a bully in Jason's class. The bully, Preston, has been posting on social media about Elizabeth. The scene before this one is set at a press conference for the State Department. The State Department's Press Coordinator briefly mentions the situation in Turkey before being shut down as she promises that the United States was not involved. The transition to the family's conversation about Preston shows the McCord children getting ready for the day in the kitchen with the TV program "Nation at Large" discussing Turkey in the background.

Alison: "Do you have any microloans in Turkey?"

Stevie: "No, thank God. Hey, gadget head, actual human present."

Jason: "Morning, sorry I forgot to light up with joy."

Alison: "It's that Preston kid again."

Stevie: "Preston? Oh, is that the dweeb in your class who posts all that

crap about mom on his page?”

Jason: “Yeah, it’s just trash talk. I shouldn’t even be bothered by it. His dad runs some sort of international corporation. So, everything mom does is somehow ruining his trust fund.”

Stevie: “Ugh, you should unfriend him.”

Alison: “No.”

Jason: “Really?”

Stevie: “Yeah, cut him off.”

Alison: “No.”

Stevie: “You don’t need that.”

Jason: “Okay, but he’ll find out.”

Alison: “Exactly.”

Stevie: “So, I mean at least you won’t have to listen to his brilliant opining anymore.”

Alison: “Alright, but he goes to our school.”

Stevie: “What’s your point?”

Alison: “So, it will be awkward.”

Stevie: “He’s thirteen years old. His whole life is awkward.”

Alison: “Whatever.”

Stevie: “You might as well own it, dude.”

Jason: “Alright, fine. You know what? Awkward’s going with bossy. It’s

done.”

Alison: “This is the worst idea.”

Henry: “What’s done?”

Stevie: “Jason just unfriended someone.”

Alison: “Big mistake.”

Elizabeth: “Ugh, is that like blocking someone?”

Stevie: “No, blocking someone is different. Unfriending is a statement.”

Alison: “Unfriending is worse.”

Henry: “I don’t get it. If you want to confront someone, why don’t you just do it in person?”

All: Questioning and laughs.

Henry: “What? Come on. Unfriend isn’t even a word.”

Elizabeth: “Do you really want to be in the middle of this?”

Henry: “No, I really don’t.”

One theme we see in this conversation is the importance of the children being a team when determining how to deal with their personal struggles, a concept that Elizabeth often brings up with Henry. Elizabeth actually mentions at the end of this episode that she is much better at dealing with the politics of international affairs than with the politics of middle school affairs, therefore the parents are not a part of this team. This is the first representation of that fact in this episode. Alison is the child that best understands what is going on with Jason and his bully. This may be because they go to

the same school and she has witnessed this type of behavior before and/or because she is closest in age to Jason. Stevie seems to understand the politics of “unfriending” but also helps with focusing on the big picture. Although Jason describes Stevie as “bossy,” he does end up following her advice to proceed with unfriending Preston.

The camera reinforces this theme of the children being represented as a team. For most of the scene they are the only ones present and we see a wide angle shot so that all of their reactions are visible throughout the conversation. Once their parents enter the room, we see the camera switch back and forth to show either the children together or Henry and Elizabeth together. This represents the different ideas about the conversation that is taking place, as Elizabeth and Henry barely understand the discussion their children are having. At the end of the scene, we see Elizabeth quietly persuading Henry to stay out of their children’s conversation.

Later in the episode, Jason is approached by Preston. Preston begins his rant about Elizabeth. Jason, fed up with Preston’s constant bullying, punches Preston and breaks his nose. Jason, Henry and Elizabeth discuss the situation and the consequences of his actions. It is decided that Jason will apologize to Preston in front of the dean in order to prevent being expelled. As the three approach the dean, Jason apologizes for punching Preston but does not apologize for standing up for his mother. Although Elizabeth and Henry both stand up for Jason pleading his conscience, the dean insults them all by proceeding to expel Jason.

As mentioned previously, the strongest theme that I see throughout Jason's situation is the importance of the children being a team, which relates back to Henry and Elizabeth's relationship being all about teamwork. The kitchen scene shows that they all work together to find the best solution for their personal conflicts. They bounce the different scenarios off of each other to get feedback on what the possible outcomes might be. When Jason gets in trouble the parents get involved in this family team. Henry, Elizabeth and Jason work together to find a solution. In the end, Henry and Elizabeth support Jason for standing up for what he believes in, even if that means being expelled.

Elizabeth realizes that her children's conversation about the politics of social media is not in her wheelhouse. Rather than jumping into the conversation and questioning methods of confrontation, the way Henry does, Elizabeth stands back and lets her children talk it out. We saw in the last chapter that much of Elizabeth and Henry's marriage is built around them remaining as a team, and it is interesting that in the kitchen scene it is the children that we see acting as a team. This family trait shows up again later on when we see Elizabeth and Henry coaching Jason over Skype for how he should proceed by apologizing for punching Preston in the nose. Sticking together as a team is also seen when the three discuss Jason's future at a public school after he is expelled from the Quaker school. Through this storyline, we learn that Elizabeth handles being a mom the same way that she handles being a wife and politician. She is there to be a part of the team when she needs to be. She lets her children make their own decision, but she is also

protective of them and intervenes when there is a crisis, reproducing the nurturing and caring traits associated with idealized femininity and motherhood.

### *Conclusion*

In conclusion, this episode is filled with emotional decisions made by the McCord family. We see an emotional Jason upset with a bully at school, a bully that he ends up punching in the nose and getting expelled for his actions. We also see an emotional Elizabeth, who makes political decisions based on the thoughts of a mother. We get a glimpse into the patriarchal attitudes of the Oval Office when her plan is referred to as “soft” compared to Russell’s “tough” plan. Contrastingly, in Elizabeth’s political life we see her role as a mother illuminated and brought front and center, while we see that in her family life she takes a step back and lets the children come to a conclusion in the world of “middle-school politics.” Through the story of Brett Borris, we are able to relate to both his mother and Elizabeth.

### **“The Long Shot”**

This episode revolves around the story of Anton Gorev’s bid for the Russian presidency and Alison’s love of fashion. Russia’s President Ostrov has recently died, creating a power grab for the presidency by his wife, Maria Ostrov. Given Maria’s interest in invading Ukraine, the United States and Elizabeth in particular works to help Anton Gorev in his bid for the Russian presidency. After Henry learns that Anton’s daughter may be in danger, the McCord family hosts her in their home. Alison shares her

love of fashion with her distracted mother, leading to an argument over how she is ignored by Elizabeth.

One reason why this episode has been chosen is because one of the main story lines focuses on how the family takes in the daughter of a Russian ally, even though that may have been a questionable political move by Henry and Elizabeth. Another reason this episode has been chosen is because of Elizabeth and Alison's fight over Elizabeth being too distracted to pay attention to Alison.

#### *A Family Who Multitasks*

The McCord family is getting ready for their day, a scene that we repeatedly see play out in the series. Henry describes his successful book as the couple jokes about just how successful a religious scholar's book could be. The girls discuss who should take Jason to school and Alison describes her new column for the school newspaper. The interactions between characters are less important to focus on in this scene than how a single character interacts with the world around them. Every family member is multi-tasking during this morning conversation. It is not until the end of the conversation that Elizabeth's political life interrupts the conversation.

Elizabeth: "Was that your publisher?"

Henry: "Yeah, apparently my book is a best seller."

Elizabeth: "Congratulations!"

Jason: "You think they will make it into a movie?"

Henry: "Let me clarify what best-seller means in the religious non-fiction

market.”

Elizabeth: “700 copies sold?”

Henry: “Just over a thousand, baby! I guess my sales shot up when my rant on C-Span went viral.”

Jason: “Nothing like a well placed tantrum to spike your popularity.”

Henry: “I prefer trenchant social commentary.”

Jason: “Oh whatever, Kanye McCord.”

Alison: “But I take him every day.”

Stevie: “I know, and I would, but I have an early class.”

Alison: “Can you drop Jason off this morning?”

Henry: “Sure.”

Alison: “Thanks, I have to be at school early today. I joined the school paper.”

Henry: “Really? That’s brand new.”

Stevie: “That’s awesome!”

Elizabeth: “What’s your beat? That’s, you know, journalist talk.”

Alison: “I’m writing a weekly column.”

Henry: “About what?”

Alison: “Fashion.”

Stevie: “But your school has uniforms.”

Alison: “All the more reason to obsess about the weekend looks. I’ll write



about trends, what's in, what's out, some of it's psychological too.

Like, why do we keep giving block heels a chance?"

Henry: "Right, nobody looks good in those."

Elizabeth: "Hey, hey, hey. I wear block heels."

Stevie: "You walked right into that one, dad."

Alison: "I thought in my column I could contrast expensive looks with affordable alternatives. Then I could write about makeup too."

Elizabeth: "Now, that's a good idea."

Alison: "Maybe we could go to the mall this weekend and check out the higher end makeup lines? Then I could find similar shades in drugstore brands. Compare and contrast, you know? Mom?"

Elizabeth: "Hang on. One second. Anton Gorev wants to speak with me. The last I heard he was held up in London."

Alison: "Mom?"

Elizabeth: "Just, baby, give me a minute."

Alison: "Forget it, I have to go."

Elizabeth: "Is she mad? I heard mall, makeup and then I kinda went out."

Henry: "She wants you to take her to the mall."

Elizabeth: "Oh, I can do that. I gotta make this call though."

Henry: "And, for the record, I think you look great in block heels."

Elizabeth: "Nice try."

In this scene, we get a glimpse at how busy and hectic the lives of the McCord family are. The visual that comes to mind when we think of a family breakfast, everyone sitting around a table passing a plate of pancakes, is clearly not applicable here. A very interesting aspect of this scene is the focus of the camera while different family members are speaking. For most of the scene, we as viewers are shown the character of Elizabeth. We see her reaction to the events unfolding in the kitchen, and her constant multi-tasking.

Although the scene ends with uncertainty, and possibly concern, regarding Anton Gorev's request for a conversation, the McCord family quite often breaks up tough or heavy topics with a joke. Henry jokes about the success of books written by religious scholars. Jason calls Henry "Kanye," referring to Kanye West when Henry sheds light on the reason for his book's success. And, Henry jokes about his comment on block heels before Elizabeth leaves for her call with Anton Gorev. Humor is important in this episode to show that for this family in particular, tough subjects are approached with comedic relief rather than showing emotion, which would leave the characters vulnerable.

For most of the scene, the character of Elizabeth seems to only be distracted by her morning chores (cleaning dishes and making toast). However, once her phone rings, she is completely taken over by the situation with Anton Gorev. It is during this time that she is actually addressed for the first time in the scene. Rather than finishing her conversation with Alison, Elizabeth turns to Henry to tell him about her notification from Anton Gorev. Elizabeth is not completely distracted, because she recognizes that Alison is upset and she makes a point to ask Henry why.

The importance of this scene lies in the fact that all of the family members are busy and must multitask to get ready for the day. However, only Elizabeth is not able to follow the conversation fully, and this is after she is interrupted by Anton Gorev's request. Alison is not able to understand that her mother needs a minute to process this information, and she leaves upset. For most of the scene, the character of Elizabeth can choose to multitask and still be engaged in the conversation. But when her phone rings, she is unable to listen and process this new information. The lesson to be learned in this scene is that a mom's time is split between so many tasks, and sometimes it is difficult to remain engaged in them all. I do not believe that Elizabeth chose to ignore her daughter, but rather was shocked by the request from Anton Gorev, which caused her to no longer be able to multitask successfully. In this situation, Elizabeth puts her role as a politician ahead of her role as a mother.

Later in the episode, Alison approaches Elizabeth. Earlier in the day, Alison has sent Elizabeth her article. Elizabeth tells Alison how great the article was. As soon as Alison starts talking about her idea for the makeup article, Elizabeth draws a blank. She forgets most of their conversation this morning and apologizes, blaming it on the surprising notification from Anton that she received around the same time. Alison storms out of the room, upset for the second time today with her mom's inability to focus on her.

When Stevie discusses the situation with Elizabeth, she reveals that Alison has been ignored lately, a fact made apparent by Elizabeth's recent actions. Elizabeth is surprised that Alison has actually been interested in fashion for quite some time.

Elizabeth eventually apologizes to Alison, telling her how much she is loved and appreciated. Alison acknowledges that her mom is trying and she understands how hard it is being a mom. This situation reveals to us that it is difficult for the character of Elizabeth to remain focused on her children and her family life when something noteworthy in her political career comes up. This surprise from Anton Gorev was noteworthy enough to cause Elizabeth to begin to ignore her daughter. From this conversation with Stevie, however, we see that this was not a one-time occurrence, but that Elizabeth has ignored what Alison is interested in for a while now.

Henry and Elizabeth discuss her distance from Alison and Elizabeth becomes emotional. She says that she is built to fix crises and Alison is not a crisis and therefore gets ignored. Henry consoles her, saying that it was just a fight and Alison will be fine. It does seem that Alison is fine as the family is seen playing a board game later in the episode. But Elizabeth has definitely taken this fight with her daughter as a wake up call that she needs to pay more attention to the types of things that she takes an interest in. She is already learning more about fashion on her own, immersing herself in the things her daughter cares for.

We all make the mistake of not thoroughly listening to the ones we love. Either we get busy doing something else or we are so immersed in our multitasking lives that what is going on around us seems trivial. Compared to the issues that Elizabeth deals with on a daily basis, fashion is trivial. She has alluded to her lack of fashion in previous episodes. However, fashion is currently a priority in her daughter's life. Elizabeth learns

through these encounters that not every interaction needs to be dealt with as if it were a crisis. She learns that paying attention to the things that are happening with her children will make her a better mother, but she admits that she will never be a perfect mother. We can see through Stevie that as her children get older, they begin to better understand their mother's work life. We are left with the impression that it is impossible to be a perfect mother, but that it is possible to be a successful working mother if one remembers to listen and learn what is important to her children, which is placing a lot of pressure and responsibility on the individual woman.

*Russian Election Secrets*

After the recent death of Russian president Ostrov, both his wife and Anton Gorev are making a play for the presidency. Elizabeth spends her day working to clear up money for Gorev to use to run for the presidency as his presidential bid is much more favorable to peace than that of Maria Ostrov. Henry spends his day trying to collect Russian government secrets, an aspect of his new job at the military university. After Henry learns that part of Maria Ostrov's plan is to kidnap Anton Gorev's daughter Olga, Henry persuades Olga to come stay with him and Elizabeth for a while. Henry and Elizabeth discuss their secrets while they prepare for dinner with the family and Olga.

The tension in this conversation is high, mostly because Elizabeth knows Henry is aware of more than he is revealing. This aspect of Henry's new job, the part that even the Secretary of State is not privy to, has never really been a problem for their relationship until now. Rather than letting Elizabeth in on the secret, Henry reminds her that they

made a promise to Anton Gorev that they would protect his daughter. This is the first moment in the episode that we see Henry and Elizabeth alone together. Interestingly enough, both of their days end with a member of the Gorev family, Henry rescuing Olga from her impending kidnapping and Elizabeth attempting to trade Anton money for Russian government secrets. Neither Henry nor Elizabeth can explain why they are in contact with the Gorev family, but they both are able to deduce their secrets.

In this scene, we see Henry getting ready for dinner, either as a part of the multitasking habits discussed previously or as a method of distraction from Elizabeth's interrogation. Throughout the whole scene, Elizabeth follows him around while he sets the table, asking prodding questions. The secrets of their jobs are no longer a curiosity but a matter of a stranger living in their home. Neither discusses the possible threat to safety that their family may experience as a result of Olga being in their home. Rather, they discuss the big picture; the threat to Olga impacts the bid for Russian presidency.

Most of the time, the word to describe Henry and Elizabeth's relationship would be teamwork. But, in this particular episode, they are playing on different teams. Elizabeth is working with the goal of protecting the United States by having Anton Gorev as the President of Russia. Henry is working to keep his secrets with the DIA. The only thing that unites them in this scene is their promise to protect Olga, which was not a political promise but a personal one. They want what is best for their country, but also for their family and Anton's family. Later in the episode, Elizabeth speaks with Anton about the President's approval of Olga staying with the McCords. Anton is surprised that the

President has no problem with this, but Elizabeth explains that President Dalton is a father too; he understands the need to protect his children. Anton also acknowledges that Elizabeth could use the situation to gain Russian government secrets from him by threatening his daughter. She makes it clear that this is not something she would ever consider doing.

Anton is assassinated by one of his bodyguards towards the end of the episode. After Elizabeth finds out, she tells Olga and the whole family becomes emotional. Elizabeth later tries to persuade Olga to stay in the United States until Russia is more stable; however, Olga feels the need to return to her home and bury her father. She adds that she has not yet given up on Russia. The two share a final hug before Olga leaves.

As the events of this episode unfold, it is made apparent that both Henry and Elizabeth are more attached to the situation emotionally than politically, causing a conflict between being politicians and being parents. They understand the need to protect a daughter and they defy political protocol in order to protect Olga. The character of Elizabeth is upset at the end of the episode, wishing that she could have seen the assassination coming. In this particular situation, their roles as parents make them not only better political figures, but also better people. Anton trusted his daughter with the McCord family for this reason. Elizabeth spends her day fighting crises, but in the case, she took a step back, with Henry's help, and treated what could have been a crisis as a family matter.

### *Conclusion*

In conclusion, we are left with the knowledge that Elizabeth is not so great at multitasking while being both a mother and a politician. Although Alison forgives her mother, Stevie lets us know that Elizabeth ignoring Alison while she is talking about her interests is not new; it has been going on for a while. Elizabeth does put her role as a politician above her role as a mother when the conversation with her family is not all that interesting to her. She is built to solve crises and she is drawn to them. Her family is not a crisis, and because of that, they sometimes get ignored. We also get a glimpse at the conflict in Henry and Elizabeth's relationship when the goals of their jobs overlap. Typically they remain as a team, but in this episode, they cannot share what is going on in their jobs, causing contention when they discuss the situation with Olga. In the end, they both choose to be parents over politicians, Henry rescuing Olga and potentially shifting the course of Russian history, and Elizabeth defying political protocol to keep Olga safe.

### ELIZABETH AS A POLITICIAN

So far, I have focused on analyzing the character of Elizabeth's roles as a wife and as a mother. She has been maintaining these roles for over two decades, while also having a career in the CIA and in academia. As of recently, her previous colleague and now President, Conrad Dalton, named her Secretary of State. Having only had a political career in the CIA until this point, Elizabeth struggles with being a public-facing member of the government. This particular section will focus on moments in Elizabeth's political



career in which her role as a politician foregrounded and is depicted as being in conflict with her role as a wife and mother.

### **“The Show Must Go On”**

In this episode, multiple crises lead to Elizabeth being named acting President. Air Force One goes missing, the Vice President has an emergency gallbladder removal and the third in line of succession suffers from dementia caused by a series of mini strokes. Not expecting to become President, Elizabeth is tasked with finding Air Force One along with her impending tasks as Secretary of State, one of which is singing at a forum dinner. At the end of the day, order is returned to the United States government, but not within the McCord family.

#### *Madam President?*

After Air Force One goes missing with the President and the Speaker of the House of Representatives on board and the Vice President falls ill, the rest of the cabinet speculates that this is an attack on the United States. They decide the best way to proceed is to assume the worst-case scenario and abide by the presidential line of succession. The next in line is the President *pro tempore* of the Senate; however, it appears that his recent strokes have left him with intermittent dementia. A surprised and unprepared Elizabeth is sworn in as the acting President.

Russell and Elizabeth go through next steps and different protocols in the Oval Office after she has been sworn in. There are multiple times throughout this sequence

when a character alludes to the discomfort of this situation. One of these situations occurs just seconds after Elizabeth walks into the Oval Office for the first time as Madam President. Russell tells her to “have a seat.” She hesitates and then responds, “Give me a moment.” This whole situation is unpredictable and she has not had a moment to soak it all in. This morning she was having breakfast with her family, nothing out of the ordinary, a few hours later she is the acting President of the United States.

A minute later in this same conversation, Russell tells Elizabeth, “We don’t have time for you to get comfortable.” He makes it clear in her first minutes as President that events are going to move very quickly. The character of Elizabeth does not have time to get used to the post, no time to get comfortable even if she wanted to. There is a lot to accomplish, including finding Air Force One, protecting the United States and keeping it all a secret from the media. These are definitely not easy tasks for her first day as President.

Twice Russell makes it known that Elizabeth will not be President for long. He tells the secretary, Lucy, not to call Elizabeth “Madam President” and he reminds Elizabeth that she is just “warming” the President’s chair. Elizabeth does not seem to take offense to either of his comments, pausing only briefly to ask Russell to refrain from being “snarky.” Russell leaves Elizabeth in the Oval Office with an offer of assistance saying, “Call if you need anything.” This is definitely not a situation either of them anticipated or wanted. In this scene, Elizabeth also reminds Russell that President Conrad

Dalton is one of her oldest friends. His disappearance impacts her beyond having to assume the job of being President.

As Elizabeth briefs her team on the recent events, they all start calling her “Madam President,” an acknowledgment that she puts to an end immediately. Elizabeth’s team informs her that because they cannot release information on the current presidential situation, she must also perform her duties as Secretary of State. After Air Force One has been found, Russell and Elizabeth wrap up her first and last day as acting President by notifying the families of those on board the plane. Elizabeth and Russell then proceed to feud over the selection of National Security Advisor without her consultation. Russell ends the conversation by stating, “the President of the United States can do whatever the hell he wants.” Following this conversation, before leaving the Oval Office, thereby completing her duty as acting President, Elizabeth arranges a presidential pardon for Erica James, a journalist that her son brought up earlier in the episode. When Russell questions her pardon, she proceeds to tell him, “the President can do whatever the hell she wants.” This is a significant exchange between the two of them in which we see Elizabeth make a rare statement for women’s equality albeit it an indirect way.

Later that night, Elizabeth joins her team for the Pacific Rim Economic Forum dinner. When President Dalton arrives, Elizabeth greets him and he thanks her for “minding the store.” She acknowledges his thank you but informs him that she is “thrilled to relinquish the post.” The character of Elizabeth’s lack of excitement for being President in this episode is both surprising and understandable. I find it surprising that

she is not more excited because we are taught that being President is the most honorable political post that one could hold. Many politicians would love to be President, even if for only one day. However, we saw the same sort of reaction when the President asked Elizabeth to become Secretary of State in the first episode of the series. She never had dreams of being a politician, and definitely not of being president. Her lack of excitement is also understood because this is such a quick change of events leading to her role as acting President.

We see a lot of Elizabeth's role as a politician in this episode. But she does give us a few glimpses at how her role as a woman in general influences her day as acting President. When Russell tells Elizabeth that "the President of the United States can do whatever the hell he wants" she proceeds to do what she wants and then use the excuse that "the President can do whatever the hell she wants." The use of opposite pronouns here is clearly pronounced. He versus she shows who is in charge and who can make a decision without explaining why.

Elizabeth has spent most of her day asking for those around her not to call her "Madam President." I speculate that this might be because knowing that she is Madam President means that the President is in danger, which means one of her best friends is in danger. This is more than just a political play to her; she has someone in Air Force One that she cares for and that she wants to see as President again. Additionally, as mentioned previously, she may just not want this post. She did not want to be Secretary of State originally; she did it to help out her country and her friend. Being called Madam

President makes it all seem too real, and she does not want it to be real. This is made apparent in her agreeing with Russell every time he reminds her that this whole situation is temporary. Similarly to being able to adjust to the role of Secretary of State, I believe that given time and the proper support Elizabeth would have been able to adjust to being President. The character of Elizabeth makes the choice that this is not what she wants; at the end of the day being President doesn't mean having it all for Elizabeth. Having it all is being Secretary of State, a supportive wife, and a caring mother.

### *The President's Children*

The bulk of this episode focuses on Elizabeth as acting President and Henry as a new handler for the DIA. We do not see much interaction between Elizabeth and her children. However, after Elizabeth becomes acting President, her family is taken to the White House for protection. In the process of bringing in Stevie, the Secret Service find her in a hotel room with Harrison, President Dalton's son. We know from previous episodes that Harrison has a history of drug problems, leading to Stevie's fear of a relapse when she finds heroin in his coat. Harrison reassures Stevie that it was an old stash that he forgot about and they are both taken to the White House.

Russell rushed into the Oval Office to notify Elizabeth, now acting President, that her family has arrived. He first reminds her that she has very little time to speak with them and then he lets her know that Stevie and Harrison were found together in a hotel room. We are not actually shown a scene where Elizabeth meets with the children, which implies that she kept it very brief and revealed little about the current political situation.

On her way to the Situation Room, Elizabeth runs into Henry and lets him know about the situation with Stevie. Henry starts to get upset before Elizabeth reminds him that today is not a good day to address Stevie and Harrison's inappropriate relationship. In other words, the character of Elizabeth puts her new responsibility as President ahead of her parental responsibilities.

We must remember, however, that when Elizabeth says this, she does not know that there is heroin involved. We do not find this out until Stevie speaks with Henry. Therefore, her dismissing the issue of Stevie dating Harrison is not all that surprising. Yes this is an issue, and yes it needs to be dealt with, but on this day specifically it is a very minor issue, not considering the heroin. Overall, we cannot blame Elizabeth for putting her job above Stevie's relationship issues. The President of the United States is missing and she is acting President, which is definitely a larger issue. But we still must note that in this situation, her role as a politician does come before her role as a mother.

Henry is able to keep control of his emotions until Stevie tells him about the heroin that she found in Harrison's jacket. He starts to yell at her regarding her irresponsible decisions and ends by telling her to "get out of her mother's way." We, as viewers, are not told why Stevie may be in her mother's way by dating Harrison. We are left to assume that it must be because Elizabeth's job is complicated enough and she does not need this added friction with the President.

As her only act as President, at least on paper, Elizabeth signs a presidential pardon for Erica James, a journalist who has been jailed for not releasing her sources.

This is the same Erica James that Jason mentions at the beginning of the episode. He gets a C on his paper because the teacher does not consider her an American hero, although Jason does. We are left uncertain why the character of Elizabeth signs this presidential pardon. She does so right after a conversation with Russell who says that the President can do whatever “he” wants. Elizabeth signs the pardon and then tells Russell that the President can do whatever “she” wants. This may be a way for Elizabeth to show Russell that whether or not he admits it, she was President for a day, and now there is proof.

Additionally, Elizabeth tells Jason about the presidential pardon she has signed when she gets home from work. In this way we know that she also did this for him – it was an act of a mother, as well as of the President. I believe that Elizabeth in this situation seeks to reconcile her roles as a politician and a mother, and the show suggests that, for her, these roles are never completely separate. She wants to include her family on her day as President and she wants to show Russell that she does have the power of the President, at least for that remaining hour. Elizabeth’s strategic use of the pronoun “she” shows us that she was offended by Russell’s ignorance and denial that she was the one in charge. This may also be Elizabeth’s way of standing up for herself as a feminist, but the show does not expand on this for us to develop further.

### *Conclusion*

In conclusion, this episode reveals much about Elizabeth’s goals as a politician. We are reminded that she never wanted to become Secretary of State, and this is the same when she becomes President. Although I am not analyzing the character of Elizabeth’s

role as a friend, we do see that she values her friendship with Conrad greatly, and his disappearance impacts her emotionally, beyond the emotions that come with finding herself in the role of acting President. Additionally, we see Elizabeth make a stand for women in the Oval Office, when we see her make a point of using her presidential power as a reminder to Russell. We also see in this episode that when it comes to Stevie's relationship problems, Elizabeth chooses to ignore the situation and focus on the political crisis at hand. Additionally, Elizabeth's only presidential act on paper is her presidential pardon of Erica James. We are left to believe that she did this to help out her son Jason and to make a stand against Russell's patriarchal comment.

### **“The Doability Doctrine”**

In this episode, Elizabeth deals with making her voice heard by the President. The newly appointed National Security Advisor, an appointment Elizabeth disagrees with, has been blocking her in meetings with President Dalton regarding the capture of a State Department worker in Afghanistan. Also, President Ostrov, the president of Russia, has gone missing, and Russian Foreign Minister Anton Gorev makes an appearance at a merchant marine event. Lastly, Henry and Elizabeth deal with the aftermath of Stevie finding heroin in Harrison's jacket.

### *Dating the President's Son*

As a continuation of the last episode, “The Show Must Go On,” Henry and Elizabeth confront the situation with Stevie and Harrison. The parents have the heroin tested, which comes back positive. They also have Stevie's hair tested, without her



consent, and the test comes back negative for drugs. Now that they do not have to worry about Stevie having a drug problem, they encourage Stevie to have Harrison speak with his parents, or they will be forced to confront his parents.

An interesting point brought up in this conversation is that Harrison is not just another guy; he is Elizabeth's boss's son. Henry brings up this same point in the last episode when Stevie first tells him about the heroin. Henry tells Stevie to stay out of her mother's way. The show seems to be saying that Elizabeth's relationship with the President comes before Stevie's relationship with Harrison. In this particular situation, Elizabeth's success as a politician comes before Stevie's happiness in her relationship.

It is important to note that Henry and Elizabeth do care about Stevie's health and wellness first. Before confronting her about this inappropriate relationship (inappropriate because Harrison is the President's son and he is still recovering from his drug addiction) they test her hair follicle for drugs. They recognize that the most important thing to consider is that Stevie is drug-free. After this has been settled, they move onto needing to notify Harrison's parents about the drugs that were found.

After Stevie stops responding to Harrison's calls and texts, he goes to the McCord home to find her. Instead, he finds Henry, eager to talk to him about the packet of heroin. Later that day, the President lets Elizabeth know that Harrison spoke to him about the situation. President Dalton apologizes that Stevie was involved and tells Elizabeth "We have to hope we raised him well enough that eventually he will make the right one [choice]." This is an interesting insight into how the President has raised and is raising his

son, a bit of a contrast to the way Stevie is being treated. Henry and Elizabeth recently had Stevie's hair tested for drugs, without her consent. They do not trust, at least in the beginning of this episode, that Stevie will make the right choices as an adult.

The next time the situation with Stevie and Harrison is discussed between Henry and Elizabeth is during a walk in the park. The conversation ends with Elizabeth being rushed off for an emergency in the Situation Room, but not before she tells Henry she needs a vacation. She wants a relaxing vacation with only him, no kids, and no cellphone service. We see that with everything going on in both of their jobs and in their children's lives, this quick walk in the park is their break for each other. Elizabeth realizes that they are in need of some time alone with just each other to relax and reconnect. Until then, we can assume that their time for each other will consist of these quick breaks during their busy days.

At the dinner table that night, Elizabeth takes the President's advice and lets Stevie know that she realizes that she can no longer control her life since she is an adult. "I have no control over your life anymore, Stevie. And that scares the hell out of me." Stevie lets her parents know that after their conversation that morning she realized that she has not been making the greatest decisions. She decided that she needs to take control of her life and her first step was to take the LSAT that afternoon.

While cleaning up after dinner, Henry and Elizabeth discuss whether or not they pushed Stevie too hard and Elizabeth asks if they are horrible parents. Henry responds, "Not today" with a smile. I believe that the situation with the drugs and having the

opportunity to discuss parenting with the President caused the character of Elizabeth to take stock of her own success with parenting. She realizes that there are worse things that Stevie could be doing, such as drugs, and that sometimes she needs to step back and let Stevie learn from her own mistakes.

Although this particular storyline does not impact Elizabeth's political decisions or Henry and Elizabeth's marriage, we do get a glimpse into both. In both the last episode and this episode, we see that there is a concern over Stevie dating Elizabeth's boss' son. Harrison is never directly referred to as the President's son, so we know that this concern is based in fear of Stevie's relationship impacting her mother's career. Both Henry and Elizabeth speak of this concern and Henry goes as far as telling Stevie to stay out of her mother's way. He never expands on how she is in her mother's way, but we are left to believe that this inappropriate relationship just creates more complication in Elizabeth's already complicated job.

Henry and Elizabeth also discuss this matter during a quick walk in the park. Elizabeth jokingly says that she is more concerned with Russian President Ostrov's disappearance than with Stevie's disappearance. They end their conversation with a note to make plans for a vacation alone, away from their kids and their cellphones. We are left with the feeling that because of their hectic work and family lives, they are in desperate need of some time together. It is obvious that family and work need the majority of their time, and for now these quick moments together are what they will have to cherish.

*Office Politics With Madeleine Albright*

In the last episode, “The Show Must Go On,” we learn that President Dalton has appointed Craig Sterling as the new National Security Advisor. Elizabeth was not consulted before making this decision, and she had not has positive experiences with Craig Sterling while at the CIA office. Desperate for some advice on how to make her voice heard in the Oval Office, she turns to Madeleine Albright, whom she sees at a merchant marine event.

Elizabeth: “Conrad's all about his new golden boy, and I'm stuck playing second fiddle. More like they took my fiddle and gave it to Craig Sterling.

Madeleine: “So are you telling me that the president has given you the Heisman?”

Elizabeth: “Yes. Yes. Which is pretty galling, considering that I didn't even want the stupid job in the first place. No offense.”

Madeleine: “It's a tough job, there's no question. But I loved it, and I suspect that you do, too.”

Elizabeth: “Well, admittedly, it has grown on me. But now that I feel like I've been relegated to the outer sanctum, how do I get back in?”

Madeleine: “You do know about my Doability Doctrine?”

Elizabeth: “I do. ‘Where our interests are clear, our values are at stake and we can make a difference, we must act and we must lead.’”

Madeleine: “Right. And that doesn't apply just to international politics. It applies to office politics, too. Look, there's plenty of room in the world for mediocre men. There is no room for mediocre women. And so you have to lead.”

Elizabeth: “That's a little difficult now that the president has obviously made up his mind and gone along with Sterling.”

Madeleine: “If you're gonna go down, then you've got to fight. Hard. And you got to hit him where it hurts.”

Elizabeth: “Oh, my God. I hope I never get on your bad side.”

This is the first time in the series that we see a real-life politician. It is interesting that the show choose the first female Secretary of State for this role. This “women versus men” conversation that the character of Elizabeth and the character of Madeleine Albright (played by Madeleine Albright herself) have revolves around Elizabeth’s need to fight for the attention of the President, something that she has not yet had to do in her role as Secretary of State. However, it also refers to the implicit double standard that is used to judge accomplishments of men and women. Albright mentions her “doability doctrine,” which was a real doctrine during her time as Secretary of State (Dobbs & Goshko, 1996).

Albright tells Elizabeth that the doctrine does not apply only to international politics; it applies to office politics as well. The doability doctrine does not state that you should just act, however. It does state that if the right thing to do is clear to you and you can make a difference then you must go for it. Elizabeth soon puts the doctrine to work,

learning minutes before a ransom deadline that the kidnapers of a State Department worker may not actually be Taliban. Although Craig Sterling and the President had given her clear direction to not speak with the kidnapers, she felt that given this new information it was the right thing to do. Eventually, they are able to rescue the worker and all works out, but not before she must confront the team on what she has done.

At the beginning of this scene, we see a consistent wide-angle shot of Elizabeth and Madeleine Albright. They are walking down the sidewalk with their assistants close behind and security even closer. We see the park in the background and they finally take a seat on a bench nearby. After they sit down, the camera shifts to focus only on the speaker, briefly turning to the person listening every once in a while. In all shots, one of the women's eagle pins is displayed (as they are wearing matching pins). In this way, they are portrayed as a team of extraordinary women who share a concern about America's best interests. At the same time, the close-up camera angles during their conversation suggests the importance of what is being said and invites the viewer to listen closely – it is the show's way of highlighting the significance of this conversation.

There are a few other parts of the conversation between Elizabeth and Madeleine Albright that I find interesting. One is that Elizabeth admits to never wanting the job of Secretary of State, but now enjoys it. This is one thing that we continuously speculate about from the first episode. Elizabeth is not excited at all when President Dalton shows up at her home to personally ask her to be his new Secretary of State. Also, in the last

episode, we are shown an uninterested Elizabeth when she becomes the acting President for a day. For the first time, Elizabeth has admitted that she never wanted this job.

Additionally, the comments that Albright makes regarding mediocre men and women sparked my interest. She makes it clear that in order to be successful, Elizabeth will need to lead the conversation. When she is passionate about something, such as her plan for rescuing the State Department worker, we see that she never backs down, even when Craig Sterling talks over her. Madeleine Albright was the first female Secretary of State so this advice for needing to become the leader in these conversations must have been essential to her time as Secretary of State. This also lends greater credibility to the show and the message it sends out about women in politics.

Later in the episode, the team is found in the Situation Room, working on a plan to rescue the State Department worker. Their team in Afghanistan encounters an attack by the Taliban, but they are able to rescue the worker. The President must make a decision whether or not to attempt to save the men that were holding the worker hostage. Elizabeth argues for the President to allow the team to try to save the men, while Craig Sterling argues that they should evacuate the area. The President decides to give the order to evacuate. An upset and disappointed Elizabeth confronts Craig Sterling after they leave the Situation Room. She attacks his interests, saying that his reputation would have led her to believe that he would have wanted any chance to attack the Taliban. He instead just apologizes that things didn't go her way. Similarly to the last episode, we see the

character of Elizabeth struggling between being a strong woman in this office and being an effective politician.

### *Conclusion*

In conclusion, this episode shows Elizabeth facing situations both at work and at home where it is necessary for her to act more assertively in order to achieve her goals. This assertiveness pays off in both cases, which implies that women's success depends on their willingness and ability to work harder than men and also to "stand up" for them. Elizabeth's success is presented in relation to her ability to impress her boss, the President and get his attention. Her parenting style is compared to that of the President. President Dalton tells Elizabeth that he hopes he raised Harrison in a way that eventually he would make the right choices. Whereas, Henry and Elizabeth take a more proactive approach and tell Stevie about their concerns and encourage her to make the right choices before they promise to interfere and protect her. In the end of the episode, Henry and Elizabeth realize that Stevie disappearing for the day to take the LSAT was her way of making the right choice. Also, in this episode, we gain some insight into how to be a successful woman as Secretary of State, this insight coming from Madeleine Albright herself. Albright shares with Elizabeth that international politics and office politics need to be treated in the same way. Also, for Elizabeth to be head in the Oval Office she must lead the conversation.



## CHAPTER SIX: THEME ANALYSIS

While watching and analyzing these six episodes of *Madam Secretary*, I noted moments, scenes and storylines in which it was clear that Elizabeth's roles as a wife, mother and/or politician were illuminated. Specifically, I was looking for common themes regarding Elizabeth's treatment and attitude towards her roles. Also important to note were common themes surrounding Elizabeth's relationships with her husband, her children and her colleagues. Lastly, I was interested in how the character of Elizabeth negotiated her roles throughout these six episodes. Here, I more deeply analyze the common themes revealed in my textual analysis. In addition, I examine how the themes I identified in the show align with or conflict the themes that emerged from the review of the literature. Overall, I analyze how the show *Madam Secretary* comments on the notion that women can "have it all." What is the show's overall response to the question of whether or not women can have it all? And, as viewers, are we to believe that Elizabeth has it all?

### ELIZABETH AS A WIFE

The first episode in which I analyze Elizabeth's role as a wife, "Standoff" focuses on the theme of teamwork. Elizabeth and Henry struggle to remain in the moment and focused on each other during their anniversary celebration, They do not blame each other

for the failed weekend, rather they take responsibility for their actions and they agree to make it up to each other when things settle down. We also see that Elizabeth does not try to salvage the weekend celebration, make up with Stevie and fix the international affairs with Mexico all at once. She chooses to focus on each issue one at a time, starting with Mexico.

In the second episode, “The Time Is at Hand,” we see the theme of Elizabeth’s never-ending support of her husband. Whether she is helping to support his career as religious scholar, ensuring his safety in a difficult situation or providing emotional comfort after a stressful event, Elizabeth remains on his side. In all of these situations, Elizabeth finds herself between a political and an emotional decision. She must decide if putting her husband in danger is the best decision to make, politically and for her family. In the end, Elizabeth’s character does not disagree with the President’s plan to send Henry to the cult in Bolivia. Whether this was because of respect to the President or for Henry, the character is shown as making a political decision, not an emotional one.

The portrayal of Elizabeth’s character in these episodes echoes the postfeminist theme of “making choices.” We see her character having to choose between her career and her family life, and we also see her struggling with feelings of guilt because of having to make that choice. In that regard, the show reinforces the postfeminist notion that it is up to the individual woman to make the right choices and find a way to balance career with family. At the same time, the show softens this theme by presenting the

character of Henry as sympathetic and as being part of “the team” – rather than as a disappointed husband.

Between these two episodes, we see the theme of teamwork. Teamwork for Elizabeth and Henry means not making selfish or emotional decisions. It means not blaming each other and taking responsibility for your own actions. In *Standoff*, Elizabeth does blame herself at the end of the episode, even though Henry reassures her that their lives have changed and they must let go of their nostalgia. We see Elizabeth’s internal struggle with failing to make it all work. We see Elizabeth’s unselfish decision to not intervene with Henry’s trip to the cult in Bolivia, but we also see how distressing every second of the situation is. In the Situation Room, we see and don’t see everything Elizabeth does. When she is left in the dark, so are we. When she is proud of Henry’s progress, so are we. In conclusion, the show portrays Elizabeth as struggling to negotiate her roles in these two episodes. She tackles one crisis at a time in the first episode, but blames herself because she is not able to make it all work. In the second episode, she chooses not to intervene, but is emotionally distressed until Henry returns home.

In the first episode, Elizabeth chooses not to have it all, as it is impossible to be a successful politician and mother while attempting to salvage their wedding anniversary. She goes to Texas to fix the international affairs issue before returning home to her issues with Stevie and Henry. She throws in the towel on their wedding celebration and leaves Henry with a message to “Live and let learn.” Contrastingly, in the second episode she chooses to do the right thing as a politician by letting Henry go to the cult in Bolivia. This

also happens to be the best way she knows how to support Henry, in remaining a team and supporting him in his career. She does have it all in this episode, as she succeeds as a politician and a wife; however, she must deal with the emotional consequence of her husband being in a dangerous situation. In conclusion, the show reveals that when Elizabeth doesn't succeed in having it all, she blames herself and feels guilty. But even when she does have it all, there are still emotional consequences she has to accept.

#### ELIZABETH AS A MOTHER

The first episode in which I analyze Elizabeth's role as a mother, "The Ninth Circle," revolves around the theme of emotional decisions. Elizabeth makes an emotional decision at work, while her son Jason makes an emotional decision at school. Elizabeth promises a mother whose son's body is being held in Turkey that she will do everything in her power to bring him home. Knowing how heartbroken she would be if this were her child, Elizabeth presents her plan to the President, a plan he describes as a "soft touch." Jason pleads his case to his parents and the dean of his school after he punches a bully for criticizing Elizabeth's political decisions. Additionally, Elizabeth takes a step back from involving herself in her children's conversation that she calls "middle-school politics," encouraging Henry to do the same.

In the episode, "The Long Shot," we see the theme of Elizabeth being drawn towards crises. She struggles with paying attention to her daughter Alison when more interesting situations present themselves. In this specific situation, it is an unexpected message from Anton Gorev, a Russian politician. Although we do not see the character of

Elizabeth as repeatedly ignoring Alison, Stevie lets Elizabeth, and us as viewers, know that she has been doing this for a while. We also see that Elizabeth asks many questions regarding the political implications of Olga staying with them rather than helping Henry to make Olga feel welcome in their house. Nevertheless, Henry and Elizabeth both choose to be parents over politicians in the situation with Olga, as Henry rescues her without thinking of the political implications and Elizabeth helps to keep her safe, even though she is not supposed to be taking sides in the struggle over the empty seat for Russian presidency.

Between these two episodes, we see that Elizabeth uses her emotions to make political decisions. In some ways, this echoes the cultural stereotype that women are more emotional than men. At the same time, Elizabeth's emotions are not presented in the show as an impediment to her ability to do her job as a Secretary of State. Rather, in both situations, we see that it is specifically her experience and relatability as a mother that encourages Elizabeth to make some emotional decisions at work. The show does not directly comment on whether or not Elizabeth's decisions were the right ones; however, in both cases, the situations are resolved successfully because of the decision Elizabeth made, which may be interpreted to suggest that women are equally fit for political office, even if their approach to making decisions may be different. In "The Ninth Circle," the President does refer to Elizabeth's approach as a "soft touch" compared to Russell's "rough" approach. We can deduce that because of Elizabeth's experience and relatability as a mother, or just because she is a woman, her approach is soft. This does not mean,

however, that her approach is the wrong one, as the President allows her to move forward with her plan. In conclusion, Elizabeth is able to negotiate her experiences as a politician and a mother to make the best decision for all parties involved, decisions that turn out to be successful.

A contrast between the two episodes is Elizabeth's role in Jason's life as compared to her role in Alison's life. Jason is dealing with a bully and his pending expulsion for punching the bully and in this situation we see Elizabeth as an involved member of the family, Contrastingly, Alison is expressing her excitement in writing a new fashion column for the school newspaper. Elizabeth is distant and forgets key parts of the discussion when Alison approaches her later. We find out that this is actually typical of Alison and Elizabeth's relationship.

Although Elizabeth's relationships with her children differ, we see the common theme that Elizabeth is drawn towards crises. She is familiar with dealing with international crises and although she tends to avoid "middle-school politics" we do see that when it comes to being a mother, she is more involved when the situation is a crisis. I believe that, by emphasizing this theme, the show tells its viewers that, when a crisis is going on, that must take priority. Whether it is a crisis at work or with one of her children that takes priority over anything else going on in her life. In that regard, the show portrays Elizabeth's character as driven by the situation, rather than by maternal instincts or duties. At the same time, the show demonstrates that it is difficult for Elizabeth to negotiate her roles when a crisis is taking place. Whichever role involves a crisis is the

one that takes priority, therefore not allowing the character to have it all because she is not able to do it all at the same time.

#### ELIZABETH AS A POLITICIAN

The first episode in which I analyze Elizabeth's role as a politician, "The Show Must Go On," revolves around the theme of Elizabeth's comfort level in the world of politics. In the very first episode of the series, we are presented with a surprised and unprepared Elizabeth as the President approaches her to take on the role of Secretary of State. We see the same reaction from Elizabeth in this episode as even more quickly she finds herself as the President of the United States. We also see Elizabeth tell Henry that her first day as President is not the day to bring up Stevie's relationship drama, a promise he tries his hardest to keep until he learns that heroin is involved. When it comes to a career in politics, or at a least a new political post that she is not experienced in, Elizabeth is uncomfortable. She gets comfortable when there is no other choice, and even Russell acknowledges that Elizabeth would need time to get comfortable. We see that Craig Sterling is comfortable with his post from the start, but this is the only contrast the show gives us. We are left to believe that Elizabeth needs time to get comfortable with her political career, but the show does not explicitly say if this is because she is a woman.

In the second episode, "The Doability Doctrine," we see the theme of standing up and making the choice you believe is right. Elizabeth takes Madeleine Albright's advice and makes a last minute call to negotiate with the men who are holding a State Department employee hostage in Afghanistan. The President and Secretary of Defense

warn her not to negotiate with terrorists; however, she follows her own instincts. Her decision is the right one in the end, but she must still face them both in the Oval Office.

Between these two episodes, we find two versions of a politically uncertain Elizabeth, as she is unsure of her current political role. In “The Show Must Go On,” Elizabeth goes from being Secretary of State to President of the United States in a matter of hours. She has a new political role, one that she does not want and is not prepared for. We see Elizabeth ask Russell to give her a moment multiple times, and she never disagrees with him when he reminds her that her new role is temporary. In “The Doability Doctrine,” Craig Sterling is central to the storyline in his new role as NSA, an appointment we learn Elizabeth does not support. Elizabeth struggles to find her voice with the President now that Craig Sterling is a part of every conversation.

In general, the reluctance of Elizabeth’s character to embrace her new power as a political figure echoes one of the findings in the literature review of political television dramas. As I discussed in chapter two, previous studies have found that television dramas about the White House typically portray women as accepting the role of the President only temporarily and only when men are not available or are in some way incapacitated. A similar plot line is used by the creators of *Madam Secretary* as well, which may be interpreted to suggest that the writers were not interested in presenting Elizabeth, and women in general, as being too ambitious or as presidential challengers in her own right.



Although she feels politically unstable in both of these episodes, Elizabeth takes a different approach in each. In the first episode, her character is shown as aiming to just make it through the day without getting comfortable in her new role. In the second episode, we see her reach out to Madeleine Albright for insight. Elizabeth then takes Albright's advice and leads the conversation around the best approach for rescuing the State Department worker in Afghanistan. Overall, I believe that the show is using Elizabeth's contrast in approach within these two episodes to show that, depending on the situation crises require different approaches. In that sense, the show doesn't make an endorsement of the particular qualities that a woman can bring to a high political office. At the same time, it acknowledges that there is gender dynamics at play in political life.

In the first episode, Elizabeth chooses not to have it all, as she has a new role as President of the United States and this takes precedence over her daughter's irresponsible relationship. She chooses to let Henry deal with the children as she rushes off to the Situation Room, showing her trust in his ability to manage the team (family) while she is away. She briefly thinks of her son when she signs her presidential pardon of Erica James, and lets him know when she gets home. Contrastingly, in the second episode, Elizabeth chooses to focus on all three roles. She leads the conversation in the Oval Office, as Madeleine Albright encourages her to do. She makes a point to speak with Stevie about her and Henry's concerns with her recent life choices. And, she promises Henry that they will take a vacation without their jobs and children soon. In conclusion, the show tells us that Elizabeth can have it all when she has time to get comfortable in her

new political environment. But when Elizabeth struggles to adjust to her new political role, she also struggles to fit in time for her roles as wife and mother.

#### HOW THE THEMES ALIGN AND/OR CONFLICT WITH EACH OTHER

Throughout the six episodes that I have analyzed, there are a few themes that we see in a majority of the episodes. One of these themes is teamwork, and specifically the concept of teamwork being a key factor in Elizabeth and Henry's relationship. Of all of Elizabeth's roles, being a wife is the role she that has held the longest. We see her and Henry's experience at managing their marriage through the theme of teamwork. By agreeing that they are both at fault, by being unselfish in letting each other pursue career goals, by standing together to support their children, by finding common goals when it means protecting someone they care for, by managing the family when the other parent is busy or by promising each other some alone time soon, Henry and Elizabeth remain a team and show each other that they together can make their hectic lives work.

A key point to make about the theme of teamwork, however, is that remaining as a team does not always mean doing what is best for Henry and Elizabeth. Sticking together as a team, at least for Henry and Elizabeth, means sacrifice. It means being unselfish and giving up your anniversary weekend celebration. It means taking on all of the terrible emotions that come when your husband goes to a dangerous cult to better his career and attempt to save many Americans. We learn through Henry and Elizabeth's relationship, that the key to keeping it altogether is supporting each other when the other half of the team is struggling to make it work.

Another theme that we see throughout these six episodes is Elizabeth's tendency to be drawn towards crises. Also, when there is a family and a political crisis, the political crisis takes precedence. Throughout the show, and these six episodes in particular, we see a sharp contrast between Henry and Elizabeth's three children. Stevie is depicted as the college student who is just trying to figure life out. She is in and out of college, in many romantic relationships with men her parents do not approve of, and occasionally making decisions, like taking the LSAT, that reassure her parents that her life is still on track.

Jason is only focused on when he is in trouble or unnecessarily creating drama at school. We see his issues with the school bully, his expulsion, and his C on a paper about his American hero – he wrote about a journalist who was jailed for not revealing her sources. We see that Jason is searching for something to stand up for (or against) and he has a tendency to get in trouble for his beliefs.

Alison, on the other hand, is seldom the topic of the conversation. She never draws attention to herself for being in trouble, but rather tends to avoid controversy. In terms of her relationship to her three children, Elizabeth is definitely much more involved in Stevie and Jason's lives. We see Elizabeth interact with her children the most when they are in trouble or the need guidance. Alison is typically ignored, and we learn from Stevie that Elizabeth has been ignoring Alison for a while. Elizabeth tends to focus on her children when they have a crisis they need help solving because that is what she does.

Similarly, we see Elizabeth choose to ignore or delay dealing with her children when a political crisis arises. She stops listening to Alison when Anton Gorev sends her

an urgent message. She chooses to delay the conversation with Stevie about her inappropriate relationship with Harrison because she has duties in the Situation Room as acting President. When Jason is talking about his bully in the kitchen, she encourages Henry not to get involved in “middle-school politics.” And, on her 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration, she leaves to handle a political crisis in Texas instead of staying to make up the failed weekend with her husband.

Rather than looking at these situations as failed attempts by Elizabeth to maintain all of her roles, I believe we are supposed to realize as viewers that in order to do her job, Elizabeth has to choose her priorities. When there is a political crisis, which is most of the time in Elizabeth’s world that is what becomes her priority. It would be unfair to say she is choosing her job over her family. She is simply choosing the biggest crisis, the one that needs to be solved most urgently.

Lastly, a theme we see in a couple of these episodes is patriarchal attitudes in the Oval Office. When Elizabeth proposes her solution for rescuing the body of a fallen American CIA agent in Turkey to the President, he refers to her approach as a “soft touch.” He then goes on to describe Russell’s approach as “bringing out the hammer.” We do not see Elizabeth make a stand in support of her abilities to create a successful approach as a woman; however, after the President approves her approach, she proceeds to make it successful. Additionally, in “The Show Must Go On,” Elizabeth and Russell have a final conversation in the Oval Office, Elizabeth’s last moments as the acting President. Elizabeth disagrees with the President’s choice of a person to serve as the NSA

and she voices her concern to Russell. Russell tells Elizabeth that the President can do “whatever the hell he wants.” Russell stomps out of the Oval Office, and Elizabeth proceeds to sign a presidential pardon, telling Russell that the President can do “whatever the hell she wants.” This exertion of her power in the Oval Office and the deliberate use of the pronoun “she” is the stance against patriarchy in the Oval Office that we as viewers were looking for in the first situation as well.

#### THEMES FROM THE LITERATURE REVIEW AND “CAN WOMEN HAVE IT ALL”?

Overall, there were six themes in my literature review that I believe impact the conclusion that I have drawn in my textual analysis. First, in my literature review, I found that postfeminist women are typically represented in the media as being sexually empowered (Duits & van Zoonen, 2011, p.491). However, *Madam Secretary* did not focus on Elizabeth and Henry’s sexual relationship or lack thereof. There are only a few comments exchanged between the two about sex. Briefly, Elizabeth focuses on her style (her hair, makeup and clothing), but this is solely a ploy designed by her office to distract the media. In conclusion, the show tends to focus on Elizabeth and Henry’s relationship and how they make it work, rather than focusing on Elizabeth’s sexual empowerment. This is in contrast to the theme outlined in my literature review.

Additionally, as outlined in the literature review, feminism is typically represented as a lifestyle on television shows, rather than being represented as a political movement (Dow, 1996, p.32). Although my analysis does not come to a conclusion with regards to

this finding, we only see Elizabeth make comments about her status as a woman in politics. These situations are with Madeleine Albright and when she signs the presidential pardon. Therefore, I do not believe that the show aligns or conflicts with this theme. Rather, *Madam Secretary* never explicitly mentions Elizabeth's status as a feminist. The show presents a postfeminist message in the way that it represents subtle gender tensions. We consistently observe a patriarchal climate in the Oval Office. For most of the series, Elizabeth does not seem to act in resistance to this fact. The only time that we see her actually voice this concern is with Madeleine Albright.

There were also two themes in my literature review specific to the office of the President. The first is that the President is typically represented in television dramas as being militaristic and running a patriarchic office (Engelstad, 2008, p. 314). The second is that women who hold the office of President typically receive that office through secondary means, not through election (Hungerford, 2010, p. 71). We see both of these themes in *Madam Secretary*. The President is shown calling Elizabeth's approach in one episode a "soft touch" as compared to Russell's approach of "bringing down the hammer." Additionally, in *The Show Must Go On*, Russell deliberately uses the pronoun "he" when referring to the President. Because she is still acting President when this occurs, Elizabeth responds by saying "she" when she refers to the President. Also, the only female President we see in *Madam Secretary* is Elizabeth for one day, and this is through secondary means.

A fifth theme in my literature review that is also described in my conclusions is the central focus on Elizabeth's family, both her husband and children. It was outlined in my literature review that scholars believe the focus on family in post-feminist television shows may be for one of two reasons: 1) to show a woman who has it all (Hollows, 2006, p. 107-108) or 2) to show a woman who has a choice (Probyn, 1996, p. 134). Another theme involving the representation of women who have it all is the argument that women only have it all if they do it all (Genz, 2009, p. 32). These two themes impact my study greatly. We see that Elizabeth almost always makes the choice whether to have it all or not. Typically, if Elizabeth chooses not to have it all, this is because her political duty (or the political crisis at hand) is too great to be ignored and she must choose to ignore or delay the needs of her other roles.

I believe that the show is saying that Elizabeth always has a choice. There are only a few moments that Elizabeth blames herself for not being able to do it all. But, as I argue in my textual analysis, I do not believe that we are meant to blame her as viewers. Rather, we are meant to understand the guilt that comes from being unable to fulfill all of her roles all the time. In making this choice, however, Elizabeth is choosing not to do it all (in contrast to the conclusion outlined by Genz, 2009). The subtle message to women is that if you try hard enough and you have a supportive partner you can successfully juggle marriage, career and parenthood, even though you may feel some discomfort along the way. In other words, the responsibility is on individual women to work hard, make the right choices, and know how to stand up for them.

Elizabeth does not seem to be searching for more in her life throughout the series. And, for this reason, I believe Elizabeth does have it all. She has everything she wants, a career she admits she loves, three great children who seem to make the right choices, and a supportive husband. Elizabeth is not a politician because she is trying to advance her career. She is a politician to serve her country and out of respect to President Dalton. Elizabeth has it all, everything that she wants and needs, reaffirming the postfeminist notion that women can “have it all.”



## CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In this concluding section, I discuss the broader cultural implications of my findings in this study. Specifically, I return to the question of whether or not the show *Madam Secretary* presents its audience with a female political character that is in some ways liberated from patriarchal ideals or whether she finds herself constrained by those ideals. I also address the way in which the representations in the show may have a larger significance for how women running for political office are viewed and judged by American society at large. Lastly, I also outline some directions for future research.

### CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS

I begin by discussing the significance of the analysis in this story, specifically its significance on our society's views of female politicians. As mentioned in the problem statement of this paper, television representations of women have an impact on the way the public views women as potential political leaders. This is important as we try to understand the lack of female politicians in the United States. Currently, there are only 21 women out of 100 Senate members. Additionally, there are only 83 women out of 435 seats in the House of Representatives (Center for American Women and Politics, 2017). And finally, out of the 44 people who have served as President of the United States, zero have been female. Until recently, the fictional world of television has been quite similar.

Therefore, the hope is that a surge in the representation of fictional female politicians on television will result in more people believing that women should and can be politicians.

A key example of this representation in the show *Madam Secretary* is that the show repeatedly portrays Elizabeth as accepting power only reluctantly. In this way, the show is suggesting that women should not strive for a political office; rather if a man believes that a woman is competent enough he would assign her a political role or appoint her to a political office. Elizabeth's reactions in the show also suggest that, even if the woman does not want this position, she should take it out of respect. In other words, when it comes to women, having a political post is about service, not about ambition or power. Additionally, although the show has chosen to focus on the office of the Secretary of State, this is arguably the least controversial office the show's creators could have placed Elizabeth in. This was a safe choice by the creators of the show because the general public is already used to seeing a woman in this office (Madeleine Albright, Condoleezza Rice, and Hillary Clinton). As noted earlier, CBS is a conservative network, so the writers of the show have chosen to stay close to the conservative and mainstream ideas about gender roles, specifically regarding political offices that women can hold.

One unfortunate characteristic of the character of Elizabeth McCord throughout the series is her lack of flaws. Elizabeth and her family are very difficult to relate to because of their ability to resolve any issues by the end of the television hour. Because of this, it is difficult to see Elizabeth as a role model and it is difficult to see a real-life female politician as being able to live up to the expectations that the show has set. If the

only women that we see on television are flawless, we are likely to hold actual female candidates for political posts to similarly unrealistic standards. One clear example in recent history is that of Hillary Clinton's run for the US presidency. Before Hillary Clinton had even decided to run for a political office, she was seen as flawed. Her husband had cheated on her in front of the whole world. Throughout the rest of her political career, she has been subjected to media coverage that has judged her on the basis of how she looks, what she wears and how her relationship with her husband and daughter is going – all themes that are consistent with the postfeminist idea that women should be able to have it all and do it all, while making it look easy. This is just one real-world example of the impact of media representations on the way we view a person as fit to be a politician or not.

When I set out to conduct this textual analysis, I aimed to confirm whether the show represents Elizabeth as a woman bound and constricted by patriarchal ideals or as a woman fighting and defeating patriarchal ideals. Elizabeth is portrayed as competent and being able to handle everything; however, she is constrained within a type of empowerment that is sanctioned by patriarchy. We see her as being bound and constricted by a patriarchal Oval Office, whereas at home we see that she and Henry have a relationship based on equality and teamwork. Therefore, the show is suggesting that women can be equal to men in some settings, but the office of the President of the United States is not one of those settings.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In this study, I was limited to my own opinions and analysis regarding the show's comments on whether women can have it all. Future studies using interviews, survey research and content analysis of online chat rooms and blogs can help to better understand other viewers' opinions of the show's comments on women having it all. I focused on Elizabeth as the character for representing the show's comments on this topic. For future studies pertaining to the notion of women having it all in *Madam Secretary*, it is important to explore how other female characters are represented. Rather than exploring this question as a role-perspective, one could explore it as a character-perspective.

We, as viewers, are presented with many female political characters over the course of the first two seasons; Admiral Ellen Hill, Elizabeth's CIA colleagues (Isabelle and Juliet), Maria Ostrov, Nadine Tolliver and Daisy Grant are just a few. Additionally, the show gives us glimpses of female social activism through Stevie McCord and high school student council responsibilities through Alison McCord. All of these characters and their interactions with one another can be analyzed deeper to provide additional insight into the show's view of women being able to have it all.

Also, through conducting this study, I was able to focus on the relationship between Elizabeth and her husband Henry. I have analyzed and commented on the recurring theme of teamwork when it comes to making their relationship work. We see only a few other romantic relationships in the first two seasons, most revolving around

Nadine Tolliver, Daisy Grant and Stevie McCord. However, it would be beneficial to explore the romantic relationships among these characters as a compare and contrast study. Then connect if there are themes among these women having it all politically and romantically.

Lastly, another key aspect concerns the show's comments on whether women can have it all are the show's comments on if men can have it all. We repeatedly see the male entourage surrounding the President with Elizabeth typically having the outcast opinion. However, we rarely see these men's lives outside of this familiar scene. Exploring what little we do see, specifically the President's occasional patriarchal comments and his life with his son, could help to better explain the show's comments on whether women can have it all. Future studies on these specific topics and similar topics on other female political dramas, such as *Scandal*, *House of Cards*, *The Good Wife*, *Commander in Chief*, *State of Affairs* and *Veep*, will help to define the area of study and television's comments on women having it all.

More broadly, this show has revealed that the postfeminist notion that "women can have it all" is reflected in the current media landscape. The cultural implications of this finding are that many women can relate to Elizabeth's struggle of maintaining her roles to succeed in "having it all." We know from the literature review and through watching Elizabeth that having it all means doing it all. Elizabeth runs non-stop, every day. Most of the time when she finally reaches home the President or Russell calls her in

again. This study informs future feminist media studies by providing the framework of studying the postfeminist notion of “women having it all” in a political environment.

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