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**Gendered Power: Looking at *Mad Men*, Power, and Its Limits**

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HONORS PROJECT

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Advertising, in a capitalist society, is inherently about power. As consumerism keeps the capitalist economy growing, advertising then becomes of the utmost importance as a powerful force that influences the actions of millions in a somewhat subtle, but entirely significant, way. Therefore, correspondingly, the Madison Avenue advertising agency at the heart of AMC's *Mad Men* set in the midst of America's post-war economic boom becomes a locus of power circulation and increasingly fluid notions of identity, as the characters work at the common goal of enticing people to buy their clients' wares, affecting the actions of each other within the office, as well as affecting the public in the bigger picture. Within the show, the advertising agency becomes a microcosm that represents the largely patriarchal, white, traditional, capitalist society at a high-growth economic period in America's history. The office becomes an arena in which the viewers watch power relations shift and move in fluid motions between those working within the office, displaying power in the way Michel Foucault describes it. Foucault explains that power is a "set of actions upon other actions" and these actions can "structure the possible field of actions of others" (Foucault 789-790). Because capitalism evolves and adapts to accommodate for shifts in the cultural and technological structure, the demands and interactions in the workplace change correspondingly; if employees within the system do not adapt in turn, they become expired and ineffective. Then, an influential advertising agency, being so closely linked with the success of capitalism, shaping the desires of the population, becomes a representative space for the changes capitalism wreaks on the culture, displaying the different gender expectations, new paths to being powerful, and the corresponding limitations. Thus, *Mad Men* uses the Madison Avenue advertising agency, a central workplace, as a stage on which to examine the ways in which hegemonic power is

structured and maintains control, how oppressed factions of the workplace (such as women, African Americans, homosexuals, etc.) access or are denied the ability to wield power, and how shifting cultural and economic expectations affect the ability of the characters to exert power over others and succeed in the shifting cultural atmosphere.

Matthew Weiner's constructed 1960s era of *Mad Men* is one so rich in visual and narrative detail that it entreats viewers to examine the complex web of relationships and character dimensions embedded in the narrative. While the main characters have interesting and demanding professional and personal lives, the main action circulates within the advertising agency concerning the ways in which power moves within it, specifically related to the genders of the characters and the manners in which they adhere to or confront the institutional, hegemonic power structures within the Madison Avenue advertising office setting. Having made it to the penultimate season of the series and into the late 1960s, it is clear that the show also addresses the shift from a manufacturing/production-centered society to a consumer/service-centered society and the parallel social shifts in relation to both gender and work expectations and opportunities. Through both the narrative and the visual elements of the show, which are at times at odds with one another, Matthew Weiner depicts the changing outlooks and requirements on the conventionally powerful position of masculinity, while simultaneously portraying the upward movement of some white women in the office, showing that their opportunities expand in the changing cultural climate and by their own actions. It is within the advertising space that the characters must employ, circumvent, or manipulate the effects of their genders (or the perceptions of them) in order to exercise power in the workplace; however, what is clear through these efforts is the complex nature of power



relations and the variables that affect them, as *Mad Men* displays the different components of identity that both liberate and restrict people within social situations, such as gender, sexual orientation, and race. None of these factors work independently of one another; in fact, they work concurrently to form the intricate lives of the characters and to illuminate the nuances of these identity categories and their affects on the ways in which the characters are able to have control over the events of their lives and affect the lives of others, i.e. exert power.

Because Western society is inherently patriarchal in nature, economic competition in a capitalist society is affected by gender correspondingly, giving preference to men. Accordingly, gender is a major factor involved in the interactions and problems of *Mad Men's* characters within the advertising agency workplace environment, a component of the show garnering much attention from feminist critics. Due to the representation of unchecked, demeaning patriarchy, and commonplace harassment in the office setting, many of the critiques focus on the ways in which women are limited in the commonplace unfettered patriarchy of the office milieu. One such critic, Tonya Krouse, argues that *Mad Men* allows the viewer to find pleasure in this manufactured world of the 1960s, which is problematic due to its backward trek in feminist history (Krouse 197-198). While she acknowledges places where the narrative displays hope for female characters from a feminist perspective, Krouse focuses much on the limitations the female characters face rather than what they overcome, as well as the problematic implications of the nostalgic longings the show invokes in modern viewers (201). Similarly, Meenasarani Murugan argues a cyclical notion of time and expresses concern that feminism might become an outdated concept with how it is mediated by popular culture texts such as *Mad Men*, which at the surface level, depicts women as objects and passive in nature (Murugan

182). These critics focus on the negatives and the disadvantages facing women in the show and read into the pleasure of watching the situations of the women in the office play out in the narrative, rather than focusing on the ways in which the leading female characters in the office access power, confront and/or manipulate patriarchy, and use the power they are able to attain to their benefit. These narratives also don't account for the visual components of the show that contradict some of the sexist portions of the show.

In the online critical realm, some *Slate* critics see the potential of a strong female narrative in the show. For example, Hanna Rosin comments on Joan's latest show of ambition in bucking the system and working her way onto the Avon account in an alternative, commenting that women like Peggy and Joan "have to take the jagged, unexpected path to the top instead of climbing the corporate ladder" and even goes so far as to say this might even be a lesson to modern women watching the show (Rosin), thus making an argument using the same logic as Krouse but turning it to the positive effects the shows female narratives could impart on the viewers. It is in these kinds of actions that women are able to find paths to prominence and power in the office that allow them to get ahead and get around the institutionalized preference to male power and gain a higher status in the office; sometimes they have to make their own promotions. Rosin offers a glimpse into the ways in which the female protagonists in the office setting work to supersede the expectations set for them by the time period.

In contrast to critics who read the show in terms of the female experience alone, Leslie Reagan looks at the way in which the show provides an accurate, if not empowering, look at the history of reproduction, focusing on feminine issues in the show, and examines what women

faced at the hands of doctors in regards to abortions, gynecological visits, etc.; importantly, Reagan suggests that the show's version of this history is primarily a white one, bringing in the idea that race compounded with gender changes the female experiences, thus highlighting a weakness of the white-focused narrative of *Mad Men* (Reagan 108-109). However, in this piece, Reagan does not go into detail about the ways in which race affects the gendered experience or how *Mad Men* addresses race in the show, which is an important limiter introduced to the viewers in the still-restrained role of Dawn Chambers, the only black secretary, who appears more in the sixth season of the show. While Kent Ono addresses more fully the way race appears and is handled within the narrative in his article, "*Mad Men's* Postracial Figuration," most critics of the show, like Ono, do not address how race and gender are complicit in limiting some characters' upward mobility, or how the factors work together to affect any characters' situation. Similarly, Alexander Doty in "The Homosexual and the Single Girl," argues that homosexuals in the show are resigned to "helper" status, moved to the periphery of the narrative; however, he neglects to examine the ways in which other factors affect the narratives of homosexuality that do exist through characters and how it either hinders or liberates them within their cultural setting in combination with their other characteristics, such as gender and age.

Noticeably less apparent in the web of criticism regarding *Mad Men* are explorations of masculinity and power within the show. Many mentions of masculinity in the body of analyses about the series fall within the realm of historical discussion, incorporating the hegemonic patriarchal power of the office into the historical analysis of the show, while other mentions of masculinity accompany and frame comments about the feminine narrative of the show to

indicate the climate in which the female characters exist. Nicky Falkof takes on the subject of masculinity in *Mad Men*, reading the show in a way as to suggest that *Mad Men* subtly breaks down the different white, masculine stereotypes by creating supporting narratives to Don Draper's that show that he is not truly the rugged, individual of American masculinity (Falkof 13). She claims that through Don's narrative the show makes "no claim to social change" in terms of masculinity and its composition (13). However, this view does not take into account the latest season, which illustrates the beginning of the economic shift from a production-driven society to a consumerist and service-driven society, with serious consequences for men in the advertising industry. While Don may not be one who adapts and falls in line with this trend, Bob Benson emerges and represents a new movement in the show connected to the incipient trends in capitalism; with this, his character brings a new incarnation of masculinity, one better suited to the evolving economy's demands, to the Madison Avenue office. In fact, on *Slate*, Paul Ford praises Bob Benson's character, highlighting him as a true type of American masculinity, highlighting him as the most "modern," character because he works to be in the right place at the right time and earn a place within the company (Ford). While Don represents the traditional faction of the hegemonic power structures, Bob brings in the shifting part of the male culture that adapts to the new economic surroundings and finds new ways to power.

While the current arguments regarding gender in *Mad Men* address to some extent the ways in which gender affects the experiences, agencies, and opportunities of the different types of characters on the show, the current critiques do not take the into account the more complete cultural picture, examining the way in which the capitalist economy shifts and causes corresponding changes in the requirements and expectations of the advertising industry.

Weiner sets *Mad Men* in the 1960s to capture the essence of the economic shift and the resultant changes in the workplace dynamic. While the shift is most concretely displayed in the male faction of the agency with the declining status of Don's conventional masculine traits and the rise of a newer masculine mode in Bob, Weiner provides a narrative of white female achievement and supersession of some of their previous oppression through the narrative (at points) and through visual components and choices in the filming of the show. Through the filmic choices, Weiner is able to portray gender relations and evolutions accurately, while directing the viewer through the way scenes are shot and arranged to transmit his overall message, and notably, the message is not one of wish fulfillment, as it introduces the limitations on these shifts and changes for the characters. Weiner tells the story of a changing world in which women, through different but complementary paths, can make headways in a male-dominated arena, an arena of shifting masculinity where the old begins to crumble to make way for the new type of man who is vastly different from Donald Draper.

### ***Mad Men's* Masculinity: Competition in the Agency**

Although the 1960s of *Mad Men* shows increasingly larger spaces made for women, the fabric of the show's time period is still very much defined by tightly-woven patriarchy. White men in the show live in a world of assumed and granted superiority with access to education, employment, and leisure. Appropriately then, the plot of *Mad Men* is constructed around the central male figure of Don Draper, a white, upper-middle class male who embodies the American Dream of starting with nothing and (quite literally) re-inventing himself into a successful, important, powerful male with a dismantled past, a successful present, and a

promising future. Don is the empowered male of Western culture: domineering, demanding, and defensive. He is powerful in the sense that Michel Foucault describes, “guiding the possibility of conduct and putting in order the possible outcome” (Foucault 789). Don’s actions guide the narrative of the show, and in an action-based, confrontational manner, he controls those around him, achieving a high level of clout, especially in the workplace setting. Being one of the few at the top of the pyramid-like power structure, Don clings to “the radical form of individualism” to which American males are prone due to the strong cultural value of independence (Rotundo 292); Don follows men, such as Roger Sterling and Bert Cooper, the office patriarchs, and becomes part of the next generation of controlling, solitary men like those who preceded him, governing others and rendering the office and the actions within it ones that are usually desirable to and ordained by him, ever influencing the movement of power in the agency. Because he exists in a very top-down type of structure, Don embodies the ideas of individualism, as those in charge are few. Throughout the series, Don exhibits control over others in a very active and often patronizing manner, showing his individual superiority in a multitude of ways, from the proliferation of extramarital affairs to his fundamental position in the advertising agency with his creative skill. Don embodies the hegemonic masculinity of the 1950s era, which is challenged by a shifting economic and cultural climate that breeds different expectations in the workplace. Accordingly, in season six, the most recent season, Bob Benson emerges in the accounts sector of the office as a new face at the agency who provides a fresh, young counterpoint to Don’s acquisition of power, demonstrating how to benefit and gain power from serving others, while the tradition-bound Don watches his power and influence wane in nearly all aspects of his life. Bob is a face for a new type of masculine persona in the

workforce, one who actively exists in the margins and refrains from confrontations, making a direct opposition to Don's forceful masculinity from the fading past. Through observing these two characters by the end of the most recent season, a dialogue about power struggle in terms of the status of male power, which permeates the structure of the advertising world, emerges. It is within the trajectories of these two characters, Don and Bob, that Weiner provides the audience with a commentary about the changing boundaries of masculinity in a Western capitalist society that still greatly reveres the ideal "American man" who is strong, solitary, and heterosexual, but allows the man who is malleable, relational, and with an unclear sexuality to better fit the demands of the changed economic demands. By better fitting the economic demands, capitalism would deem the malleable man as more successful in the current economic climate, creating a split between the perceived ideal American masculinity and the most successful form of masculinity.

### **Don Draper: Embodying Many Masculine Modes**

The premier episode, "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes," defines the expectations for the series in the sense that it is evident that Don is the main character in the narrative. Don is the hub to which all other characters are connected in some way, and this centrality speaks to Don's all-encompassing, traditional masculine persona. Throughout the show, Don is the "rock" of masculinity, representing the traditional modes of male power and dominance in Western culture and embodying the traditional male past that is historically characterized by power. Through many actions and moments of Don's experience in the show, the viewers see Don as chivalric, dominant, uncompromising, physically fit, heterosexist, misogynistic, and paternal—

encompassing many of the traditional masculine modes. Several of these characteristics are displayed in the just the opening episode of the series, making it apparent to the viewers that Don embodies and is deeply tied to these pillars of established Western masculinity. From these adherences to the conventional male roles, Don is both able to come to such power in the different facets of his life, but it is the same loyalty to these conventions that becomes the root of his loss of power, as his masculinity remains unchanged and unaffected in contrast to the events going on around him.

The masculinity Don most personifies is a distinctly American form of manhood. It is permeated and driven by capitalism and its corresponding ideals. Michael Kimmel describes this type of masculinity that Don exhibits as “Marketplace Masculinity,” which is characterized by the need for proof of masculinity and “the acquisition of tangible goods” to display success; this form of masculinity exists in a constant atmosphere of competition, as the “most manly” male is the one with the most items acquired (Kimmel 85). Therefore, Don’s form of masculinity is one that is not able to coexist with other incarnations of the masculine. Instead, the world which Don inhabits is one where there is the constant need for men to break the limits and achieve more to constantly be on top, emphasizing the solitary quality of American masculinity. Within the life of Don Draper, this translates to both success in the work environment, which is essential; however, it also is related to Don’s expert juggling of the different arenas of his life, such as his family, mistresses, friendships, etc. in order to maintain the balance that keeps all of these people and things a part of his life. Having all of these “things” keeps Don in an apparently masculine and empowered position due to the mentality of the “Marketplace Masculinity.” Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that while Don



continually commodifies and objectifies other people, relegating them to the world of the tangible and of that which can be owned<sup>1</sup>, his form of masculinity is based on the “the exclusion of ‘others’—women, nonwhite men, nonnative-born men, homosexual men” (85). Therefore, even with the highly “relational” quality of Don to the people/things in his life, he is still very much the solitary individual. Yet, in the latest season of the show, Don begins to lose his skill for managing all of the different spheres of his life, and the problems in each start to bear down on him, causing his influence to decline. This shift in Don’s ability to remain on top demonstrates that he has not adapted to the changing cultural climate, and it is this unwillingness or inability to bend, reconfigure, or adapt that makes his traditional type of masculinity begin to lose influence. When the economy shifts, favoring the malleable masculinity like that of Bob, having the accrument of tangible things (or objectified people) becomes a weight that is no longer prudent for keeping up with the demands of society and the workplace. Don’s decline signifies the struggle of conventional manhood in a changed economic backdrop that exhibits opposing values.

Throughout the majority of the series, Don commands control in almost every social encounter, especially when it involves an “othered” individual (i.e. woman, homosexual, non-white). Foucault defines the exercise of power as “government of men by other men” or “actions upon other actions,” thus determining the way things happen around the power-wielding individual (Foucault 789-790), and this, on many levels, is precisely how Don operates; he constantly acts upon and governs the different people in the different parts of his life so as to maintain control and continue to be an alpha male figure among his family, mistresses, clients, and colleagues. Clearly this is the case in the first episode when Don interacts with

Greta, one of Sterling Cooper's researchers, who explains to him the Freudian idea that people operate with a death wish; Greta explains that the death wish explains people's willingness to smoke, despite the evident health dangers of doing so that have become evident (1:1). Greta is the first female employee the viewers see who is not a secretary and who is there to advise men via her psychological expertise, making her a threat to the masculine-filled office power structure. During the conversation with Greta, there are several shots of Don's face, as the camera angle often aligns with Greta's point of view from the other side of the desk; from this angle, the viewer sees Don's disinterested reaction to Greta's research, making it clear that he does not take her or her work seriously because she is both a woman and because her ideas do not align with his (1:1). Don rejects Greta, treating her as an "other," because she is a woman who threatens the patriarchal power due to her performance of a more masculine gender, apparent in her drab, boxy attire, short hair, and husky voice. In the scene, Don lounges back with a lit cigarette while perfunctorily listening to Greta explain her research; his active smoking, facial expressions, and disinterested body language loudly convey his defiance to what she reports without him having to verbally articulate it. Don is unmistakably unimpressed with her Freudian-based research, and with his closeness to the American individualist ideal of masculinity, it is logical to assume his rejection of this school of thought is due to it being based on a philosophy of men being shaped by their attachment to and rejection of their parents at different stages of life, something that does not fit with Don's individualist nature. Throughout the conversation, his tone of voice is sarcastic, and his shifting gaze indicates that he decided not to listen to her findings before she even began talking. He also makes several comments about Greta's ideas to Sal Romano (who is also present in the room), calling upon him as a

fellow male to gang up on Greta, trivializing her work. Upon receiving the report, Don immediately tosses it in the waste bin, showing both Greta and Sal that he is in charge and does not need help from an inferior female; it is clear that he diminishes her achievements based on her gender, as he initially calls her “Ms.” Instead of “Dr.,” which she corrects banally, showing that this treatment from him is expected and commonplace (1:1). Here, Don is self-sufficient, uncompromising, and unaffected; he is the sole authority figure in this interaction and controls the actions in his office. Through the jokes, his disengaged and uncaring facial expressions, and his blatant dismissal of Greta’s work, it is apparent that he sees himself as superior and asserts his hegemonic power as a male boss over Greta without regard for her feelings, her work, etc. because she does not receive his respect. Weiner constructs this scene to show the viewers Don’s brash individualism and his rejection of those who he deems a threat to masculine authority; Weiner shows Don protecting his version of masculinity by denying Greta access to the power it holds, as he perceives her as a threat with her more masculine performance of gender.

The scene with Greta foreshadows Don’s interaction with Rachel Menken that comes later in the episode. When he attends the meeting for Menken’s, a Jewish-owned department store, he is caught off guard by the fact that the client is a woman and that he has to interact with and essentially “serve” her on a business level (1:1). When Rachel is not in awe of or receptive to Don’s idea for drawing business to the store, he rebukes her and patronizes her, saying, “I’m not going to let a woman talk to me like this” (1:1). The scene moves between reverse shots, mostly between Don’s and Rachel’s viewpoints, using medium close-ups, as they argue about their vision for Menken’s, and Don shows increasing annoyance with Rachel’s

noncompliance. The verbal disagreement is portrayed as a debate or physical match as each opponent attempts to gain control and the respect of the other, but in the end, Don rises from the table and ends the meeting, not deigning to even be part of it<sup>2</sup>; he operates on the assumption that without him, there is no meeting, and his assumption is proven correct, as the meeting is not continued or saved after Don leaves.

As he rises from the table, the viewer joins Rachel's point of view, as the camera takes on a low, upward angle, giving Don the height differential, signifying his power and status in this situation. Even though Rachel is the client, he does not acquiesce to her wishes, give credence to her desires, or treat her with respect; he is the alpha male and shows his ability to make decisions based on his pride and his standards, even if it is not in the best interest of the company. Through this scene in the first episode of the show, Matthew Weiner complicates the idea of the entirely passive female and the active male figures as described by Laura Mulvey (20). Mulvey explains that the main male characters control the events of the cinematic narrative and drive it forward (20); however, Weiner plays with this, as the audience watches Don control the *narrative* of the scene, in the sense that he determines what happens in regards to service with the Menken's account, but Rachel is an active and logical part of the conversation and does not accept Don's illogical attitude and actions. Therefore, due to the prominence of Rachel's responses and reactions, the viewers are not led to champion Don or agree with his choices; rather, by giving space and credence to Rachel's arguments, the viewers see Don's brash rejection of Rachel's ideas as negative, even though he remains in charge of the situation in the narrative. It is within instances like this one where Weiner is able to use the power of filming to his advantage in that he is able to give historical veracity to the narrative by

showing Don's ability to make strong choices and end a potentially lucrative meeting for his own pride and dominance, but the viewer sides with Rachel and sees the wrong done to her at Don's hands. While Don can control the diegetic events, the viewer is left with the camera in the conference room for a few moments with Rachel's lingering discomfort, as the scene ends not with Don's departure from the room, but rather with a shot of Rachel, Roger, and the token Jewish employee at the table in the aftermath of Don's dismissal. The disappointment is clear from both Roger as Don's boss and Rachel as the potential client, as both look downward and avert their eyes.



**Figure 1.1 Roger Sterling, Rachel Menken, and David Coen (the Jewish employee from the mailroom) sit in the office after Don's departure ("Smoke Gets In Your Eyes," 1.1).**

Hence, the viewer is not left with the impression that people truly do not cease to matter when Don exits the room; from this ending shot, it is evident that Roger, Don's superior, as well as Rachel, a reasonable potential client, are disappointed and unsatisfied with the altercation that just transpired. Therefore, through the visual components of the show, Weiner combats Laura

Mulvey's idea of the active male and the passive female (20); instead, he clearly shows the active quality of Rachel in this scene with the ability to face Don and still capture the interest of the camera, even if she does not maintain control of the narrative, as Don continues about his day after destroying the Menken's meeting. With this split between the narrative and the visual aspects of the scene, Weiner provides a commentary on the fluidity of power, alluding to Rachel's power even as a female client who is able to challenge Don, even in the office, and in a way, she is a threat to Don's unchallenged power, which is acknowledged by him becoming upset and terminating the meeting.

While Don can be incredibly guarded, commanding, and stoic in many public-sphere situations, causing modern viewers of the show to be uncomfortable with his kind of overt masculinity and disregard for others, particularly women, Don exhibits a more comfortable form of masculinity in his obvious paternal role toward his family. Even with Don's extramarital affairs and questionable behaviors at the office, he is still highly paternalistic and attached to his family unit as head of the Draper household, a more comfortable conventional male role for many modern viewers, as Weiner positions Don as the more intuitive parent when juxtaposed with Betty, fostering a more genuine connection with his children, even though he is not always present for them. At the end of "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes," Don goes to his suburban home after a day at the office and a rendezvous with his current mistress, and the ultimate image of the episode the viewer is left with is of Don sitting with his two children as they sleep, looking over them. The scene is shot in shadow, and focuses on Don's hands touching the heads of his children, Sally and Bobby. The camera zooms out to frame a family portrait of Betty, Don's wife, watching Don as he looks over their children who are asleep in bed.



**Figure 1.2 Betty watches as Don looks over the children as they sleep (“Smoke Gets In Your Eyes,” 1:1).**

Don is the center and focal point of this scene, and the room is set up in such a manner that he is able to encompass both Sally and Bobby in his “protective” attention. In this instance, Don is the protector and provider; he provides his family with a comfortable lifestyle and cares for his children, and the final image of the first episode symbolizes this role. Nevertheless, the paternal nature of Don’s role is complicated by the details of this scene as well. Even as he sits over his children, Don is not entirely attentive. While the scene is very dark overall, Don’s face is lit, and it is clear to the viewer, if not to Betty, that he is not looking at his children or watching them as they sleep. Instead, Don looks toward the wall in a seemingly ponderous and unfocused manner, giving the appearance that he is not entirely existing in that moment in an emotionally present manner. As the paternal figure, Don exercises power over his family by being their sole provider and the decision-maker; in this instance, Don’s paternal masculine

power is simply viewed benevolently by the viewer due to his portrayed commitment to his children. Yet there's an edge to even this seemingly benign familial component of the "marketplace man" (Kimmel 85) that Don Draper embodies because it is once again a measure in the accrument of objects in some ways, denigrating both his wife and children<sup>3</sup> to the status of things, a dimension by which his success is measured. Don is not entirely committed to his family, nor is he always concerned for their best interests, which makes it reasonable to assume that his family is just another form of possession that speaks to his "success" as a man, thereby giving way to his power as a male in the patriarchal culture of the show's narrative.

While Don provides for and protects his family, he is also notably chivalrous, an old and highly traditional form of masculinity. Shortly after the first episode, in "Marriage of Figaro," Rachel Menken gives Don cufflinks of medieval knights, providing a physical symbol of this facet of Don's persona (1:3). The chivalric notes of Don's personality are most clear in his relationships with Peggy Olson and Anna Draper. As knights were supposed to help those in need of assistance, the viewers see Don come to Peggy's aid when she gives birth to Pete's child ("The New Girl," 2:5). Don helps her through this, guiding her on how to cope and handle the situation of having the baby and giving it up, and he keeps her job open without ever betraying Peggy's trust, allowing her to maintain her dignity and handle things as she would like to in regards to the pregnancy. Even though the other men at the office have derogatory and degrading theories on Peggy's disappearance, Don does not weigh in or tell them the real reason of her absence; he notably refrains from partaking the homosocial activities with the men in discussing Peggy's disappearance and proves himself trustworthy and honorable in this situation. Likewise, he cares for Anna Draper, the widow of the man whose identity Don



assumed. Although Don often pursues women as mistresses, he does not go about this with Anna and consistently treats her with reverence. To care for her, he provides her with a house and helps her financially, so she is able to have a comfortable life; his connection to her is one of protection and respect, coming across as one of the most genuine connections the viewers see in terms of Don's relationships, as he is both open and consistently respectful with Anna in a way that is not the case with any other character on the show. However, by providing for her, he also ensures the safety of his biggest secret and maintains a sort of control over her by giving her what she needs to live contentedly. Both of these relationships put Don in a position of power because he is helping others and caring for them when they need it, and it gives him influence over the people who he helps in this manner; chivalry assumes a sort of male power in the sense that someone, particularly a woman, needs help and protection, and the chivalrous knight figure is able to provide that due to his strength and higher position, which for Don come from his financial stability, his ability to empathize, and his position as a white male.

Near the end of season three, the viewer becomes aware of one more component of Don's masculinity, one that may not be as easily digested from a modern standpoint: his blatant rejection of homosexuality. After Lee Garner Jr., the familial representative of Sterling Cooper's largest client Lucky Strike, comes onto Sal sexually and becomes embarrassed by Sal's rejection, he orders the agency to fire Sal without explanation ("Wee Small Hours," 3:9). When Lee says that he wants Sal fired and Roger fires him, Don does not stand up for Sal, even after finding out what actually happened that night, knowing that Sal only looked out for his personal interests; however, Don denies him this luxury based on his sexuality. During the conversation, Don and Sal are seated on opposite sides of the desk, showing them as equals, as men who can

openly converse with one another, recalling the ease of their interaction in the first season when Don bonded with Sal in their shared manhood to “gang up” on Greta; however, Don, forgetting these moments of connection, differentiates them and wholly “others” Sal when he utters, “You people,” in reference to homosexuals, and he refuses to be on Sal’s side with the situation with Lee (3:9); after hearing Don’s clear distaste for his sexual orientation, Sal simply looks on with a clear sense of dismay over this loss of respect; the camera focuses on him, as he conveys this shock and hurt with his mouth agape and his tense posture.



**Figure 1.3 Sal tries to explain what happened with Lee Garner Jr. (“Wee Small Hours,” 3:9).**

The scene is shot using reverse shots, and the viewer gets to see the decentering internal struggles Sal experiences, which are made apparent in his lost facial expressions when trying to justify his reaction to Lee sexually propositioning him. Instead of understanding, Don implies that Sal should not have rejected Lee’s advances<sup>4</sup> due to Lucky Strike’s importance to the agency. He offers Sal no apologies and says that Sal knows this is how it has to be (3:9). The camera focuses on Don from desk level as he stands, wielding his privileged, heterosexual male power and ending the interaction as well as Sal’s employment. When this circumstance is

paralleled with the proposition to Joan to ensure signing Jaguar in season five's "The Other Woman" (5:11) it is then even more reasonable to conclude that the reason Don treats Sal as he does is due to this sexuality and Don's perception of him due to that aspect of his person; Don acts in line with "[t]he century-old association of homosexuality and unmanliness" (Rotundo 291), stripping Sal of his white, male privilege that he would otherwise experience and downgrading him to the status of woman, or even lower. In "The Other Woman," Don tries to protect Joan and tells her that sleeping with a Jaguar employee, Herb, is not worth signing a car company, which would put the agency into financial stability (5:11). His chivalry and protection extends to Joan, a woman, in this case; nevertheless, due to Sal's sexuality and how Don perceives it, Sal is stripped of his power and his masculine privilege. He falls below the status of woman when Don treats him this way, using his power as a heterosexual male to strip Sal of his livelihood, while with Joan, Don is the one who tries to shield her from this same type of corporate prostitution/exploitation. Ironically, when Sal asks what Don would do if it were a woman in his situation, Don says, "That would depend on what kind of girl it was and what I knew about her" (3:9). Paradoxically, it is clear that this is not exactly true when Joan is in a similar position and Don knows that she is sexually active and forward, has had an affair with Roger, etc., and he does not encourage her or imply that she should go through with it; in fact, he tries to *prevent* her from doing so, making his implications to Sal regarding the actions of his body even more powerful. Sal is no longer treated as a male by Don, but has become the "other," that which is lower, less powerful, and more ostracized than a woman in a patriarchal society, and through this dismissal of Sal, the homosexual, Don confirms his heterosexuality and his masculinity.

In the sixth season, Don's traditional paternalistic and chivalric masculine privileges begin to fall apart, culminating in the partners asking him to take a leave of absence from the office. Weiner ends the penultimate episode of season six in such a way that Don's apparent personal failures with Sally and Peggy are left for the viewers to consider in terms of his declining influence at home and at the office. The second to last scene in "The Quality of Mercy" speaks to Don's loss of paternal power with Sally, the child to whom he has always shown the strongest connection; recalling her rejection of Don due to finding him cheating on Megan with their friend, Sylvia, Sally tells Betty, "My father's never given me anything" in a way that reveals Sally's disappointment and newfound detachment concerning Don (6:12). Without a genuine connection to Sally, Don appears as a parent who has become entirely removed and superfluous, with his once closest child renouncing their bond, trusting mainly in her once-loathed mother, and moving away to school to escape him and the emotional damage he has caused her. Similarly, Peggy has given up on Don as well, even though she was once a trusted, right-hand employee. Right after the scene with Sally talking to Betty, the episode cuts to the office where Peggy seeks out Ted, only to find out that he went home, and she knows that Don has intervened in her romantic connection with Ted (6:12). She then storms into Don's office and accuses him of being involved; he responds by saying, "I saved both of you," presumably from making the mistake of becoming physically and romantically involved, a mistake Don is notorious for making. In this scene, Don tries to take on the chivalric role once again with Peggy, telling her that he was looking out for her; however, she denies him this power, telling him that he "killed everything" and calling him a "monster" as she leaves the office (6:12). Throughout this telling scene, Peggy stands before Don, who sits on the couch, and the viewer

watches the reverse shots as the two converse with each other. When looking at Don, the viewer looks at him straight on from the level of Peggy's hip, emphasizing him looking up at her, as she has the power differential in this instance. He looks up at her, his mouth slightly agape and his brow beginning to furrow in an expression not unlike Sal's when Don fired him, and his facial expression suggests he is incredulous due to Peggy's strong, negative, and harsh reaction to his "benevolent" actions. Throughout the scene, it becomes increasingly clear that Peggy has the upper hand in the interaction, indicting Don as hypocrite, and she berates him for his meddling in her personal life, denying him the satisfaction of being right and "helping" her. At the end of the scene, the final image of the episode, Don is curled up in the fetal position on his couch.



**Figure 1.4 Don curls up in the fetal position on his office couch ("The Quality of Mercy," 6:12).**

Weiner leaves the viewer with Don in a diminished, infantile position, emphasizing the faded power of his situation. The camera looks from above, providing an image of Don, where

instead of taking up as much space as possible and dominating the area, he makes himself smaller, taking up only two thirds of the couch. Therefore, the episode ends with the distinct feeling that Don is slowly shrinking away from these conventional masculine privileges and encounters resistance from those who were previously captured under his influence, as his expiring traditional masculinity does not adapt to the changing cultural climate. The change in the era creates a world in which women have become a force both in the advertising agency and at home, where Don's dominating masculine persona no longer achieves the desired effects. Don has not yet accounted for these changes and sees the fruitlessness of his personal stagnancy; Sally refuses to be told what she should believe about Don's actions with Sylvia, and Peggy condemns Don for passing judgment on and making decisions regarding her personal life. From Don's recent fallouts with these two female characters, it becomes clear that his former masculine persona where he was always in charge and rarely questioned is no longer functional in the new climate to which he has not yet adapted.

Although Don's type of masculinity is one that still permeates patriarchal American culture, Don's traditionally-sanctioned and institutionalized scope of power has limitations, and the extent of these limitations is realized by the end of the sixth season of the show. As Don moves through *Mad Men's* 1960s, he does not experience the transformations that the other characters do. His office, his attire, and his attitude remain stagnant in a decade of constant flux that even Roger, an older conventional male character, obviously responds to in his office décor and personal appearance. He does not alter his worldviews or bend to accommodate new modes of action and/or thinking, and as such, his place and importance in the show's world begins to shrink, beginning to render him and his types of masculinity as increasingly

diminished and outdated. While at the end of season six, the partners decide to make Bob Benson one of the account executives for Chevrolet to replace Ken Cosgrove, Don Draper is asked by the same men to take a leave of absence due to his recent questionable professional decisions ("In Care Of," 6:13). His power has greatly faded, and that becomes clear as the viewers see him losing control of himself, his work, his family, and his extramarital affairs, having his once undisputed decisions questioned by those with whom he used to hold sway. In this scene, Don meets with Roger, Bert, Jim, and Joan, thinking they are meeting to discuss who is going to California; he stands before them, and the camera is angled from his hip, a low angle that gives the sensation of looking up at the men and woman confronting him. The angle of the shot speaks to the loss of power; the camera is not above Don's shoulder looking down, but rather the angle associated with Don's view is a diminished one, even though he stands. The partner sits together, and the camera frames them as a solid force, as all are shown, and it is immediately evident that Don will not break this united front. He is both physically and metaphorically separated from the group. Also, the entire shot is filmed in shadow. Even though the natural lighting from the windows is not bright, no lights are on, even with the nearby lamp visible. Correspondingly, this is a dark moment for the show's main character. Throughout the scene, every character's face is half in shadow, suggesting that there are powers at play that are not entirely apparent and of which Don is not a part, nor is he privy to accessing the information; no one is being entirely forthcoming, and Don is unable to talk his way out of this decision that was made without his consent. Don's self-made power ebbs away in this scene, almost visibly, from the way it is constructed and filmed. When the viewer is able to see Don's reaction, it is a medium long shot of Don framed by Jim, Bert, and Roger; the

viewer sees the backs of the other partners, recognizing that they have, in effect, turned their back on Don and lost faith in him, and he is now pushed out.



**Figure 1.5** The partners confront Don and insist he take a leave of absence ("In Care Of," 6:13).

The camera is placed in a spot where Don himself might have stood when addressing issues with another employee, but now this "spot" is vacant and used as a frame through which the viewer watches Don's descent. It is clear that he is, in many ways, powerless in the location where he was able to build his own career and enact his own fabricated identity. The camera tracks Don as he leaves the office, and there is an extended shot watching the elevator doors close on him alone, signifying the end of Don's reign at the top of the agency that now does not even bear his name.



## The Rise of Bob and the Fall of Don

At the same point at which Don clearly spirals downward, Bob Benson climbs the corporate ladder. Although the two characters have little direct interaction on the show, both Don and Bob have assumed identities, self-made selves, making them viable points of comparison in the show's office realm. In fact, in "The Quality of Mercy," after Pete Campbell finds out from Duck Phillips that Bob is not who he has claimed to be, Pete says that he has seen this type of issue before, recalling when he found out about Don's assumed identity early on in the series. The shot then abruptly cuts to Don, making the parallel between the two characters indubitable (6:12). Having hidden pasts and self-made identities is a point of connection for the characters that otherwise use entirely different means to assert and attain power; their similar reinvention draws attention to the profound differences in the characters.

Unlike Don's domineering, attention-demanding persona, Bob's character moves through the office being virtually unnoticed in many ways due to his different kind of masculinity, influenced by the shifting economy and social culture. With the shift in the 1960s from a producer society to a consumer society, businesses in the United States placed a greater emphasis on service work and consumer orientation, changing the focus and desired skill sets of employees and affecting workplace masculinity expectations. In fact, due to this shift in expectations, "Madison Avenue has found that 'emotional liability and soft receptivity to what's new and exciting' are more appropriate to a consumer-oriented society than 'hardness and emotional distance,'" showing that a different shade of masculinity, as the office is a mainly masculine space, becomes appropriate during the show's time period (Donaldson 9). Bob displays these traits of receptivity and emotional awareness in the office through his ability to

be useful and helpful within the margins of the company, and these kinds of traits are more prone to a more subordinate type of masculine position than a domineering one that the viewers see in Don. Zygmunt Bauman<sup>5</sup>, a sociologist, explains that an entirely consumerist society seeks an employee who has “no previous bonds, commitments or emotional attachments...a person ready to take on any task that comes by and prepared to instantly readjust and refocus their own inclinations” (Bauman 10). These shifting employment expectations and, correspondingly, perceptions of masculinity allow for someone like Bob to be able to come to a position of power in a different manner than Don. These shifts also speak as to why Don may no longer be able to exert the same amount of power as he did in earlier seasons, as Bob is the transition into this new type of employee with his willingness to fill whatever gaps arise and to “readjust and refocus” in order to adapt and succeed in a changing work environment. He displays a back-grounded, malleable masculinity, being able to find and adapt to different situations to best gain from them. Unlike Bob, Don does not exhibit the same sort of flexibility and does not bend with the shifting expectations that come with a new economic era.

Distinct from Don’s confrontational and commanding actions in the office, Bob has a more subtle and relational approach to accessing power in the workplace. In “The Quality of Mercy” episode, it is interesting to note that the viewer sees two different portraits of Bob, one defined by his pervasive accommodation for others while the other is defined by his active maneuvering of situations to his benefit. Acquainting the viewer with both of these depictions of Bob provides some insight into how Bob is able to manipulate his malleable masculine persona to gain power; both images of Bob, however, are distinct from Don’s patriarchal

version of masculinity. For example, Bob is present in the meeting about Ken Cosgrove resigning from Chevrolet and passing it onto Pete; however, while Pete thinks this meeting will be a smooth and complete transfer, he shows up at the meeting with Bob already there, and when he tries to gracefully push Bob out, Jim, Roger, Bert, and Ken stick to keeping Bob on the account (6:12). In this scene, it becomes evident that Bob has slowly come to a position of power by being the person who is simply liked and valued at the office. In fact, Jim denies Pete the opportunity to remove Bob by saying, "Pete, there's nothing to discuss. I like Bob. Chevy likes Bob, and if you don't like Bob, we can find someone who does," blatantly communicating that Bob is more important than Pete, a partner in the firm, for this account (6:12). Bob did not gain this position through impressive displays of ingenuity or leadership; rather, Bob secured his place by being likable and available to do whatever needed to be done, indeed by *not* displaying powerful masculine authority. As Paul Ford explained, to do what Bob does in the show, "You gotta be in the right place *all* the time" (Ford). While Don and those of his ilk would *create* the "right" places, Bob is always figuring them out and finding them, meaning that he is necessarily more relational and less focused on individualism in the office. He sees the benefits and opportunities of working with others and finding the people he can benefit from associating with, such as Joan, and he actively seeks out these possibilities. Throughout the meeting, Bob is rarely the sole focus of any shot; he is always paired with another character, making the effect one of him being on the periphery and still not a dominant figure, even though he is being defended as essential to Sterling Cooper and Partners' most important new client.



**Figure 1.6 Bob reacts to the conversation about moving the Chevrolet account and him being part of the Chevy team ("The Quality of Mercy," 6:12).**

During the time that Bob is present in the meeting, he does not take an active role in conversation, although he is clearly engaged, as his face reacts to the conversation in an appropriate manner. The only comments Bob contributes convey that he is willing to do whatever is best for the company and the account, never seeking to self-aggrandize or deprecate Pete, who implies Bob's inadequacy quite clearly. In fact, in his most assertive moment, Bob removes himself from the meeting, and by leaving, gains in his absence because Jim is free to bluntly state how he feels about Bob being on the account. Bob takes into account the dynamics of the group, both facilitating and accounting for the need for discussion about him. From this interaction, it is obvious that Bob knows how to manipulate these dealings to his benefit by knowing when to leave, when to be available, and when to speak; in short, he gains power from knowing when to be submissive.

Just as Bob is portrayed as being able to work the system and make his way onto the Chevrolet account, the viewers begin to see that he is truly not as one-dimensional or entirely

forthcoming as his upbeat, altar-boy persona would imply. Bob is not inherently or entirely submissive and servile; in one scene, Bob is in his office speaking to (presumably) Manolo about Pete, using harsh language and explaining that he knows Pete is out to get him removed from the office, showing that Bob is both aware of how he is perceived by Pete and of how to navigate his place in the office. The shot of Bob on the phone is less than one minute in length, but it shows that Bob is fully aware of what Pete is doing and that he puts on an act when with others in the office in order to navigate the power structures at play and mold them to his benefit. Whereas Don is very active and confrontational in nature, Bob moves in the background and does not usually address things directly with others; however, he still exerts power and controls aspects of situations in the office without the “top down” approach Don uses. Within this scene, it becomes clear that there is a lot about Bob that is entirely unknown to the viewer and that he is not attending to situations directly; yet, he is very aware of the cultural climate of the office and how to find an essential place within it. The camera in this brief shot starts out coming up from behind Bob in his office and rotating around him until the viewer can see his agitated face; the smooth rotation of the shot suggests that this quick view of Bob in a personal moment gives a more well-rounded understanding of him as a character and of the level to which he controls and manipulates the situation around him in order to succeed at Sterling Cooper and Partners. While the visual effect of the circular pan focusing on Bob gives the sensation of better understanding Bob, it is apparent to the viewers that much remains unclear regarding his motives and interests, both personally and professionally. Therefore, the viewers are not convinced to entirely trust or empathize with Bob by the end of season six.

While viewers watch Don's power disintegrate, they simultaneously see Bob rise in the esteem of the partners and the company; it is evident that different forms of masculinity are then vying for control in the office. Because the existing power structure from the producer-driven economic climate is male-dominated, certain types of males have more access to controlling the actions of others; therefore, when one masculine power procurement technique prevails or succeeds, the other suffers a loss. However due to the laws of competition, especially in a capitalism-dominated environment, only one can be the best, and if one type of masculinity exhibits some power, that translates to less for the other. For example, as Bob is able to gain an indispensable position with Chevy, Don is not able to maintain his place at the firm and is put at the mercy of the other partners regarding when or if he can return; while these two events are not causally related, they are situationally significant. Already existing in a position of power, there is not room enough for both types of white masculinity presented in *Mad Men* to flourish in one patriarchal and highly competitive space.

Because Sterling Cooper and Partners is an advertising agency, the office moves and bends to the whims of the economy, which in and of itself is a locus of ever-shifting power. This transfer of the ability to affectively influence others displays the ever-fluid quality of power that Foucault describes as "a set of actions upon other actions" (Foucault 789). When the actions of Don no longer achieve their intended purpose of affecting or shaping others, it becomes clear that his actions are outmoded, just as Bob's "actions" and choices are coming to a point of effectiveness. Although Bob seems to end up "ahead" in the agency by the end of season six, Weiner does not provide cues visually or within the narrative to lead the viewers in feeling

comfortable with Bob, even though he represents the more “modern” version of masculinity. Hence, the viewers are left with conflicting feelings of discomfort over Don’s failures and Bob’s growing successes, reflecting a current cultural anxiety over the components of American masculinity. While the individualistic, domineering male remains the cultural icon of masculinity, the economic demands for the malleable man in business associations, thus gaining economic power, becomes a source of unresolved cultural tension.

### **Feminine Power on *Mad Men*’s Madison Avenue: Two Paths Disrupting the Status Quo**

Patriarchal power is built into the physical structure of the office at Sterling Cooper, the first incarnation of the advertising agency in the show. Michel Foucault explains that the “disposal of...space” in an institution caters to the ways in which power moves within it (Foucault 787). At Sterling Cooper, the offices line the perimeter of the building with the secretaries corralled into the center. Due to this set-up, the women in the firm are constantly on display regardless of what activities they perform. Throughout the time the show spends in that office, there are camera shots of the female secretaries while they are filing, typing, talking on the phone, and generally going about their day. Meanwhile, the men at the agency are granted privacy in their offices, and by the very layout and formation of the agency, are able to ogle and look at the attractive women as they move from one office to the next. This set-up puts the secretaries in a constant place of exploitation, as they are left open to the scrutiny of any and all who pass by throughout the day. This objectification of women is especially evident in the “Maidenform” episode, when Paul Kinsey opens Don’s door to the office in order to point out that the secretaries are all either a “Jackie Kennedy”-type or a “Marilyn Monroe”-type of

woman. The doorways of each office serve as portals by which the men are able to gaze upon the women in the center of the office; therefore, it allows the men to be the active onlookers and puts the women in the place of the objects available to be viewed/desired, exemplifying the active and passive roles assigned to men and women respectively that Laura Mulvey describes in terms of cinema's visual construction (Mulvey 20). The way the men look at the women is often echoed in the way the camera shots and angles set up the frame for the viewer at the first office.



**Figure Figure 2.1 Paul Kinsey leads the men and Peggy in looking out Don's office door to see the women as Jackie Kennedy or Marilyn Monroe types ("Maidenform," 2:6).**

This scene is shot mainly from the point of view of the men in the office and switches from woman to woman, each posed attractively in a way that might be enticing or pleasing to a male onlooker, showing that the women are always free game to be subject to the scrutiny of the men; in this moment, the viewer participates in that experience with the men in the office,



seeing the women as aesthetic objects upon whom the men impress their fantasies, and the doorway makes a perfect frame through which the men look out actively upon the passive women, demonstrating the classic Mulvey-esque set-up. The women then are in existence purely for the use, visually and physically, of men or the perceived male viewer.

As the show moves forward on the historical timeline, the design of the office changes dramatically as the partners form a new agency, Sterling Cooper Draper Pryce. Because power, as Foucault describes it, is fluid, never possessed by anyone, but circulating depending upon who is exercising control at any given moment (Foucault 788), ostensibly the new office's layout had some powerful feminine input, with both Joan and Peggy being intricately involved in its creation. Sterling Cooper Draper Pryce is a much more segmented office, providing at least some level of privacy to nearly all of its employees; the secretaries, although still exploited at times by the men in the office, are not made a central visual focal point in the office, and the viewers do not constantly see them as simply adornments during the sweeping shots of the office, as the secretaries have spaces outside of the individual offices and are no longer grouped together as a visual smorgasbord for male passersby. Also notable is that in the new office, Peggy and Joan both have their own spaces, not shared with others or the copier, showing that designated spaces are slowly being made for women even in a world still strongly dominated by men.

Just as Joan and Peggy are essential forces in establishing the new agency of the later seasons, signified by Joan physically marking the new barren office with the beginnings of a layout and Peggy signing the first new business contract, it is through Joan and Peggy that the feminine power narrative of the show is made rather apparent to the viewers. They are the

women who navigate the workplace and take advantages of opportunities for different paths and roles than were previously presented to them when they started. Both characters also are confronted with and make choices about relationships and motherhood in such a way as to maintain their careers, giving preference to non-traditional female roles. By offering these two paradigms for femininity, Matthew Weiner provides two differing modes by which women attain power in a male-dominated, hyper-masculine setting, such as (currently) *Sterling Cooper and Partners* and its earlier incarnations; two parallel modes are represented with Joan and Peggy's storylines. They are historically and generationally representational in many ways, as one works subversively within the patriarchal system, while the other paves an entirely new path, making a new place for women in the agency that demands an equal status with men.

### **Joan's Subversive Manipulation of Patriarchy**

From the pilot episode of the series and onward, it is clear that Joan is a force in the office, and she exercises power over how things operate; she has the knowledge of the way the office functions, who has access to power, and how to benefit from certain aspects of the office's makeup. With this knowledge, Joan has the ability to manipulate the flow of office life to some extent, especially in regards to whom she helps and provides this knowledge. As she guides Peggy through the motions of getting the essential parts of the office on her good side, interacting with office men, and being prepared for all the "duties" of a secretary, the viewer is acutely aware that Joan has worked her way to a place of recognition and importance in the office that would not be available to many women, and she did so in a non-threatening manner that used the existing gender roles and expectations to her advantage.

Equally apparent in the show is Joan’s hyper-feminine, bold, “bombshell” quality that is seductive and noticeable to everyone looking at her. In fact, in the second season of the show during the “Maidenform” episode, one of the creative team members, Paul Kinsey, says that Marilyn Monroe is actually a “Joan-”type woman, bestowing Joan the status of idealized American sex-symbol. Her looks and her employment of them give her a cultural capital, in terms of sexuality and the desire she engenders, that Peggy does not experience and that other women in the office seem to envy. This “beyond Marilyn” identity is one that Joan structures in her appearance. She always wears bright, commanding colors and clothes that are structured to show off her waist, breasts, hips, and legs, signifying that she is to be looked at and appreciated in all the “right,” or traditionally female, ways.<sup>6</sup> Throughout “Maidenform,” Joan dons jewel-toned colors symbolizing power and designed to attract male attention.



**Figures 2.1-2.2 Joan wears bright, attention-grabbing colors (“Maidenform,” 2:6).**

Also, through her posture and bodily movements, Joan performs the ideal femininity in motion with swaying hips and thrust-out chest, which present her figure in the most noticeable way.

Her femininity is hyperbolic with exaggerated breasts and hips, which Joan actively animates further, drawing attention to these distinctly feminine features. Through the combination of these visual cues and actions, the viewer knows that Joan's choices are deliberate and carefully structured in terms of how she presents herself to others, especially men, to provoke their interests and earn their admiration.

While American culture often condemns women for open expression of sexuality, finding them to be either pure or sullied in terms of sexual experience, Joan exhibits the idea of actively using sexuality and the seductive quality of femininity, in which Western women have been acculturated and schooled, to gain power in a male-dominated arena. In this sense, Joan recognizes the masculine power structures and ideologies at play and the spaces that are allotted to females; through choosing to embody the ideal male sexual fantasy, she takes ownership of her body and is able to manipulate and use this part of femininity in order to gain respect and higher placement from the male population. It is important to note that Joan actively *performs* a hyper-feminine appearance in order to manipulate the patriarchal system at play. Through Joan, Weiner complicates the ideas of Laura Mulvey in the sense that Joan is not the *passive* female who is looked upon by the *active* male (Mulvey 19); rather, she purposefully acts in such a way that she becomes the one in control of the male gaze, enticing and eliciting it from her male bosses and co-workers, reaping the benefits of this attention. When Paul Kinsey leads the men in looking out of the office door at Joan, the camera from his point of view pans to follow Joan across the office; when following her, she is the clear focal point despite all of the other attractive women dotting the office floor who Paul was just pointing out. From this momentary shot, it is evident that Joan's physical appearance and performed femininity

demands attention. While it seems that Joan is simply preyed upon by the eyes of the office men or the desires of her male boss, it becomes clear throughout the show that she is an active participant in this “relationship” as during Paul’s voyeuristic tour of the office women, the viewer sees Joan quickly flick up her eyes up, showing her recognition that she is being watched; she continues her walk across the office in an unhurried fashion, showcasing her body as the camera, as well as the eyes of the on-looking men, follow (2:6). Thus, Joan does not simply become the object of the male gaze, as she takes hold of and redefines this objectified position to her own advantage, making her an equally active participant in the experience.

By accruing power in her workplace, Joan is able to reach a position with which she seems quite content. Thus, with this, she subverts the capitalistic, patriarchal norms that are already in place by utilizing the existing oppressive structures and reclaiming them to her benefit (but at times to her detriment as well). Audre Lorde explains, “The principal horror of any system which defines the good in terms of profit rather than in terms of human need...is that it robs our work of its erotic value,” and “[s]uch a system reduces work to a travesty of necessities” (Lorde 3). Joan rejects this notion, and she works to find a place in the office where she enjoys her work and gains from it intrinsically as well as financially; she is not looking for her ticket out of the workforce through marriage, as she implies early on that Peggy could do. However, Joan is punished for this and for her actions when she is raped by her fiancée, Greg, after hours at the office. However, Matthew Weiner does not align the viewer with Greg, as through the prolonged close-up shot focused on Joan’s face during the rape, the viewer gains a clear understanding that this removal of her decision and of her power in this space, which gives her the portal to a form of independence and liberation from the feminine norm. From

the filming of the scene, the viewer knows that Greg's actions are appalling from the clearly deadpan expression on Joan's face and the lack of visual connection with Greg ("The Mountain King," 2:12). It is clear that the viewer sympathizes with her and does not find this sort of action or "punishment" just or appropriate. From the way it is filmed, with the straight shot of Joan's face from floor level, making the complete identification with Joan, Greg's actions are condemned. Notably, in the instance of this rape, an action where victim's power is infringed upon by nature of the transgression, Joan is the one who is the focus of the scene, not Greg, the transgressor. The one committing the action in the narrative, the male, does not control the visual emphasis of the scene, giving a power to Joan in a subtle way allotted only by the visual narrative that is constructed in addition to the main narrative of the plot. Lorde notes that "women so empowered are dangerous" (3); therefore, when Greg rapes Joan he is punishing her, while asserting his dominance and power, for her sexual forwardness, her happiness and desire in the workplace, and her intimate past in a place where she finds personal worth and contentment, the office. Greg comments about this in a direct manner when he mentions Roger's knowledge of Joan and says this sexual foray in the office is what *she* wants, showing that this force of sexual power is one that is directly connected to her place at the office. He asserts himself over her and violates her in a way that is entirely connected to her sex; before marrying her, he is displaying his power as a man and as her future husband and trying to fit her back into the more traditional role he envisions for women, but Joan does not fit this mold or allow this, as she eventually divorces Greg and continues to work and move up in the office. The way this is constructed visually, making Joan the character with whom the viewer identifies and with whom he/she sides, works to display both Joan's ability to attain

power as she does and the dangers that accompany it. It is through sex that she is both liberated and limited, receiving Greg's attempted punishment.

Although Joan is able to wield considerable power over men in the workplace due to her utilization of the current power structures to her benefit, she does experience limitations, such as the issues with Greg, as well as limitations in the workplace. By the end of season six, Joan is trying to work her way onto an account that she brought to the company; however, she is denied the opportunity and has to take alternative routes to try to get this position. Unlike Peggy, she is not given access into the male-dominated side of the office, even with her powerful connections; instead, her place is essential, but distinctly different from the male arena. Joan, as a partner in the company, is still treated differently and with less deference by the other male employees. This leaves the viewers with mixed feelings about the success of Joan's approach, even though her ability to wield power is apparent throughout the show in terms of the knowledge of her work, her relationships with important men, and her ability to smartly reconfigure a form of oppressive objectification into an implement through which power is gained and exercised. Although Joan is a sort of mentor and confidante to Peggy, she represents a path to feminine power that is born of an earlier time period and generation that gives way to the cultural circumstances for Peggy to be able to build a newer version of office womanhood. From comments about her age to her subversive "adherence" to the patriarchal norms and expectations of women, it is evident that Joan placed in a later time most certainly could have experienced Peggy's success in the male sector of the office. Nevertheless, it is through the struggles that the "Joans" overcame that gives way to the new type of woman, the "Peggys." Due to this strength and more subtle influence apparent in Joan, Weiner provides a

visual and subtextual narrative that displays Joan in a powerful manner, making her exist in the same circle as Peggy, the candidly feminist protagonist.

### **Peggy Is... Not a “Joan”**

In “Maidenform,” the evident contrast between Peggy and Joan is stark. Throughout the episode, Peggy is always visually unlike Joan, wearing clothing that is more masculine in style; she wears earth tones and neutral colors, and her clothes often have elements that resemble traditional male attire. For example, she wears longer skirts and a shirt that has what looks to be a mock tie at the collar. Another time, during this episode, she wears a dress that is made of a coarse woolen material, resembling male suits or coats, not one that works to set off a feminine figure or readily draws attention, as it is not as expertly fitted or attention-hailing as Joan’s outfits.



**Figures 2.3-2.4 Examples of Peggy’s hybridized attire (“Maidenform,” 2:6).**

While Joan wears bright, commanding colors associated with power, Peggy wears less notable colors to blend in and more successfully masquerade in the male arena. She does not draw



attention to her feminine form and chooses outfits that do not draw the emphasis to her breasts, hips, waist, or legs, yet it is important to note that while Peggy's clothing refers to masculine trends in many of its characteristics, she decidedly does not abandon traditionally feminine attire. It is not until season six that the viewers see her in pants, and only in the final episode of that season does Peggy wear pants into the office<sup>7</sup>; therefore, she chooses to retain signifiers of femininity, but reclaims and restructures them to give them a masculine aura, making her clothing an outward symbol of the new path she paves in the agency for women, one that is not decidedly masculine or feminine in its entirety.

In line with her different, hybridized clothing, Peggy's movements are more abrupt and perfunctory than Joan's sleek, smooth, gliding walks across the office, and Peggy often stands so as to remove attention from herself, rather than attract it. She does not utilize or enhance her feminine characteristics to assume or control the "male gaze;" in fact, she actively rejects it by not playing up her physical characteristics and keeping the focus on her work and its merits. In "Maidenform," when the men categorize the women in the office, Peggy participates in the watching, gaining acknowledgement that she is decidedly not like the other women and certainly is not like Joan, but this is by her choice in how she presents herself and performs her unique feminine gender within the office setting (2:6). In fact, at the end of "Maidenform," Peggy shows the men (and the viewers) that she has the ability to be like Joan when she joins the men at the strip club dressed in a revealing, form-fitting dress (2:6). She, through her appearance, commands attention from the men, and the one client even has her come sit on his lap; after being basically ignored and shoved out of the account by the others throughout the creation of the work for Maidenform, she is finally the center of attention (2:6). Although

Peggy can perform the ultra-feminine gender and garner attention similar to Joan's, she chooses to not do this on a regular basis, as it does not achieve her goals. Needing to be part of the men, and not the object of their desires, Peggy rejects the way of Joan and goes on to find a more subdued femininity that allows her to work within the world of men, have personal heterosexual relationships, and not be defined entirely by her gender simultaneously.

While Peggy and Joan exist on different, but parallel, planes, they share the commonality of finding intrinsic satisfaction in their jobs and the independence that comes with them. When Peggy begins to write copy after the popularity of the Belle Jolie slogan she helped to create in season one, Peggy feels the connection and internal satisfaction from work that did not previously exist for her. In fact, she starts working on writing copy outside of her secretarial duties for awhile until Don officially promotes her and gets a new secretary to take her place; her dedication and willingness to do the extra work makes it clear that the work she does is something in which she finds worth and pride. However, unlike Joan, Peggy does not go about securing her place in the office through employing her femininity directly, enticing her co-workers, or seducing those above her; she progresses on the merit of her work and her dedication, even though she gets the opportunity to write copy due to her feminine insight for pitching products aimed at women. Nevertheless, this becomes simply a starting-off point for Peggy, as later in the series, she is working on nearly all of the clients, not just ones that desire female input. Instead of being steeped in femininity as Joan is, she creates an amalgamated persona in which she is neither entirely masculine nor traditionally feminine. She then uses this new liminal space as a way for her to shift between female and male spheres in order to move

throughout the workplace. Within this new realm, Peggy is able to interact with both men and women, but does not entirely fit into either predetermined category.

To arrive at this new “gender” performance, Peggy tries both sides of active womanhood presented in the show. In the earlier seasons, such as in the majority of the “Maidenform” episode, Peggy takes on a sort of masculine quality in her appearance; she wears little to no make-up, wears masculine-inspired clothing, and does not present herself in a manner that would clearly invite the gazes of her male co-workers. When the camera focuses on Peggy, the viewer does not receive images that use her as spectacle; instead, she is shot similarly to the male characters in the sense that there is no feminine posturing or lingering moments on her breasts or posterior.



**Figures 2.5-2.6 Peggy is shot from a straight-forward angle from the chest up, not showcasing her feminine features, and Don sits in the same meeting and actually has more of his body shown in the shot than Peggy (“Maidenform,” 2:6).**

When the men discuss the Jackie/Marilyn pitch in the office, Peggy is positioned the same as the men. When comparing her and Don in the scene, Peggy is shot using a medium shot, while Don is shot with a medium long shot, showing more of his body than Peggy’s. The angle of the camera is straight on and even has a slightly upward trajectory, giving the viewer the sensation

of looking up to Peggy, transmitting a feeling of respect that is often given to the men as well. Even in a scene filled with men who are overtly looking at women and making them objects, it is clear that Peggy is not the object of this gaze; this is carried through to the positioning for the viewers as well. The above shot of Peggy when compared with the shot the men see when looking out of the office door, provides a stark comparison of the intended difference between Peggy and the other women.



**Figure 2.7 The women in the office sit/stand in ways as to show off their figure, always ready to be looked at (“Maidenform,” 2:6).**

In the frame when the viewer looks out of the office with the men, it becomes clear that traditionally feminine women position themselves in sexually appealing poses. In this scene alone, all the women are on display as sex objects, showing almost their entire bodies, pushing out their breasts, cocking their hips in preparation to be looked at; this is not so with Peggy, who often stands naturally and does not align her body in such a way that it would make her breasts or hips noticeable.

The contrast of the “normal” Peggy to the traditional office woman becomes clearer by the end of the “Maidenform” episode when Peggy tries to follow Joan’s advice that she should

“stop dressing like a little girl” (2:6). She enters the all-male Maidenform celebration at the strip club by dressing in a manner that reveals her feminine figure, and the men *insist* she stay instead of excluding her as they had done previously; nevertheless, this is not the type of attention Peggy seeks, as she is treated like an object and is not valued in the same ways as the men. These performed feminine actions are not in Peggy’s nature, nor is it Peggy’s desire to act in this manner, which is evidenced through shots that show her face in a form of discomfort with no smile or pleasure when other characters in the scene are not paying particular attention to her (2:6). The way she is treated exemplifies the limitations of the path that Joan seems to represent, and due to Peggy’s actions in the rest of the series, the viewers see that she rejects this path and the baggage that accompanies it. Although the clothes she wears in this scene become her in form and fit, the persona, limitations, and implications they bring with them are as ill-fitting as Joan’s borrowed outfit that Peggy donned earlier in the series out of necessity to be able to remain at work (“Shoot,” 1:9).

By the fifth season of the show, Peggy is in full swing with her career and with the person she has become over the course of the show, showing a definite success of her new path in the office. In fact, other copywriters see her as being somewhat in charge of creative due to her close relationship with Don. Gone is the shy, timid Peggy of the early seasons, giving way to an assured woman who has created and continues to create a new path for herself that is both a mixture of femininity and masculinity, giving her a newly created space in the office where she can succeed in her career. Peggy fulfills her life, even though, as Audre Lorde explains, “[i]t is never easy to demand the most from our selves, and from our lives, and from our work. To go beyond the encouraged mediocrity of our society is to encourage excellence”

(Lorde 2); Peggy is able to go beyond the limitations and expectations for women in order to pursue that which satisfies her in her work, but also in her personal life as well. In the fourth episode of the fifth season, "Mystery Date," the viewers see how strong and comfortable Peggy is. She has her own office in a firm she was central in the creation of, and she is able to hold her own and negotiate with the men in the office. In this episode, there is a pivotal scene that displays Peggy in all her earned glory, as she negotiates with Roger Sterling about working up a secret advertising campaign over the weekend. The scene is shot with Peggy sitting comfortably at her desk (even with her feet up), and she confidently takes her drink while talking with Roger. The camera angle largely associates the viewer with Peggy's point of view, as it is often positioned behind her head or from behind her desk, looking up at the frantic Roger; throughout the encounter, Peggy's voice stays even in tone, portraying her comfort and confidence in how to play this request out to her benefit. She sits relaxed in her chair behind the desks and drinks intermittently while Roger talks; throughout the scene, the viewer sees Peggy in full light, implying that the viewer sees Peggy fully, and the images of her are shot in medium close-ups, focusing more on her face than other aspects of her body, which might lead to spectacle. After Roger's outrageous request for an entire campaign in one weekend, Peggy counters telling him that the lie (that he asked her to do the work the preceding week) is extra, extorting her boss for money for personal gain out of the deal. After Roger leaves the office, Peggy's face lights up, and she excitedly counts the money, showing that she sees the power she has gained, a power entirely different from Joan's in many ways because she is able to exist in the men's office world and negotiate it without resorting to using her gender to do so; she has succeeded in moving beyond the "mediocrity" that Lorde mentions, as she moves beyond

the previous prescriptions for women. In the end, she walks away with \$400 for the work, which is equivalent to around \$2,800 in 2013 (“CPI”).

Through a sort of “tutelage” from Joan and by finding her way around the male-dominated office under Don’s wing, Peggy is able to form a new sort of womanhood, one aligning most with second-wave feminist thought. Through merit of her work, she is able to make a place in the company that allows her to experience internal satisfaction and have “internal directives” (Lorde 6), thus empowering her in a way that many other women do not experience. Peggy’s appearance supports this change visually as well. In the aforementioned episode, Peggy wears clothing that is both feminine and masculine, representing the way in which she has molded the two culturally traditional gender roles into something new that serves her desires and purposes as a human being. While she wears her hair in an attractive, styled manner and wears make-up, she still does not dress to be the object of the male gaze and male desires. In fact, Peggy does not often appear or come up in terms of a relationship; she is clearly her own independent person, which is not something many other female figures on the show are able to (or desire to) accomplish. This new role she embodies comes with many challenges when confronting the rigid regimes of patriarchy; however, Peggy is able to keep on pushing through that and maintains her status at Sterling Cooper Draper Pryce, where she is able to train others at her trade, make a good salary, be a management/authority figure, and be independent in personal life.

It is through both Peggy and Joan, two dominant female figures in the office setting, that Weiner provides the main feminist narrative within *Mad Men*, showing different manners

of attaining and implementing power as the woman “other” in the man’s world.<sup>8</sup> By the end of the fifth season, in “The Other Woman,” both Peggy and Joan have defining moments considering these paths they have chosen. Joan gains financial security through a business deal requiring her to sleep with a key client, which gains her partnership in the agency. Peggy finally rejects the way Don controls her, stifles her, and takes her for granted; she leaves Sterling Cooper Draper Pryce to work for a competitor as Copy Chief, with a big pay raise that exceeds her expectations, which serves to highlight how undervalued she was by Don, who was always reluctant to give her a raise even when it was due (5:11). Thus, heading into the penultimate season of the show, the viewers are provided with the female protagonists making it to a powerful place of decisive personhood and independence through the channels they chose and used to succeed in an oppositional world. However, in both seasons five and six, it becomes clear that the power these two women symbolize is finite and not able to be generalized to the female population as a whole.

### **Dawn and the Marginalizing Factor of Race**

On the margins of Sterling Cooper Draper Pryce/Sterling Cooper and Partners, Dawn Chambers resides, reminding viewers that the feminist narrative of the show is not an all-encompassing one. As the only African American on the secretarial staff (and the only non-service black staff member at the agency), Dawn runs into racial limitations that characters such as Peggy and Joan never experience. She experiences what Frances Beal called “Double jeopardy,” where she is both female, thus below black males, and black, thus forced into the margins of a white society (Beal 166-174); Beal explains that black women do not share the



same burden as white women who seek better positions in society, as white movements focus predominantly on male chauvinism, while African American women face double issues in both gender and race. Dawn is bound by both of these issues within the show. In “Mystery Date,” Peggy brings Dawn to stay at her apartment, and she talks to Dawn about work, saying, “We [women] have to stick together. I know we’re not really in the same situation, but I was the only one like me there for a long time. I know it’s hard” (5:4). During this scene, the camera focuses on Peggy with some of Dawn’s face coming in on the right-hand edge; Dawn is cut off and not in focus.



**Figure 2.8** Peggy talks to Dawn about them needing to stick together and understanding Dawn’s situation (“Mystery Date,” 5:3).

Even when Peggy tries to build this connection with Dawn, it is clear that she does not and cannot genuinely understand the limitations and difficulties Dawn faces, as right after this conversation, Peggy shifts the conversation, asking if Dawn thinks she acts like a man, showing her concern for how she is perceived at the office and for the gendered power norms in existence. This concern is not something that Dawn would consider, as she has to worry about simply fitting in with white women and their culture, which is still oppressed. Unlike Peggy,

Dawn is not given the opportunity to be a copywriter, to achieve more than secretarial work, or to have the freedoms Peggy has earned. Similarly, she is not really provided the ability to use her femininity as Joan had, as no one shows interest in her at the office due to her race. If she were to try to act like Joan or Peggy, it would not be tolerated or viewed in the same manner. Although Peggy reaches out to Dawn to try to forge a feminine bond, the divider of race is not overcome by the commonality of womanhood. The filmic structure of the scene places Dawn in a position that is unclear and visually incomplete; while Peggy extends her “empathy” for Dawn’s situation in the narrative, the visual aspect of the scene conveys that Dawn’s plight is still out of the focus of the viewers, as well as the other characters, who are without knowledge of her struggles and challenges.

The character of Dawn reminds the viewer of the invisibility of African American women in the mainstream, white feminist narrative that exists in the show. Her race complicates, and trumps, her gender in many ways, as she would have to climb up the power ladder to even be where Peggy and Joan began. She is doubly subjugated due to race compounded with gender by being a black female, and it is all the more apparent in the overwhelmingly white narrative of *Mad Men*, especially when one considers the filming of Dawn and Peggy together and Peggy’s apparent inability to understand Dawn’s full situation. Weiner positions Dawn within the storyline to be just visible and memorable enough to viewers that it is clear her story, her struggles, and her feelings are unknown. For example, in “To Have and To Hold,” the fourth episode of the sixth season, Dawn appears in a scene that makes it apparent to the viewers that they are not privy to the African American, female experience when Dawn visits with a friend after a hard day at work. The conversation Dawn has with her friend about her experience at

the office and what she sees therein is brief, but it is poignant enough to make the viewers achingly aware that they do not know what goes through Dawn's mind, and the other characters within the show are in the same ignorant position as the viewers. In this moment, Dawn also clearly positions herself as both a female and an African American, taking on both positions' burdens, as she tells her friend about getting caught punching out a fellow secretary after she had left; her friend reminds her that the other secretaries (all of them white) are not Dawn's friends. Even though she is an outsider at the office, she must keep the job because that is what is available to her for making a life for herself. As a black woman, her options are limited, as she faces the double oppressions of race and gender with no apparent or feasible way to overcome them both and experience Peggy's level of success in the company. These issues that affect Dawn are ones that create a block on feminine power, one for which *Mad Men* does not offer a solution.

### **Problematic Picture**

*Mad Men* leaves its viewers with a problematic picture of American society, using the advertising agency as a microcosm for the larger corporate America; Weiner highlights issues both in the narrative and in the visual logic of the show that feel quite at home with the modern viewer, who still sees the struggles of locating appropriate masculinity, existing in an ever-enlarging consumer-driven service economy, as well as the familiar difficulties of women who try to emerge in a male-dominated field through the means they can access. Weiner utilizes the transparency of the issues regarding gender, sexuality, and race in the historical time period of the show to display the issues, and he complicates the issues brought forth in

the narrative with the visual components that sometimes portray a different message than the plot might convey. Unsettling to consider is that the images set within the 1960s era of the series are not far enough removed from the experiences of non-fictitious people in 2013.

Weiner displays the power relations within the show in a realistic, Foucauldian manner, showcasing the plethora of ways in which power can be brandished and thwarted, as well as the means by which race and sexuality limit some characters' ability to exert power. Gender is often the key component within these struggles, as the traditional Western society is undeniably patriarchal, and the series provides intriguing tensions between males and females with varying degrees of traditional and aberrant gender performance.

What is brilliant about the series, though, is that the complex message does not stop there. *Mad Men* focuses attention on the importance of intersectional analysis when analyzing the movements of power and the evaluation of "progress" in a society. This emphasis on the multitude of factors influencing the lives of the different characters makes the show three dimensional and noteworthy in the realm of power analysis. As Anne McClintock explains in addressing the need for intersectional analysis, factors such as race, gender, sexuality, etc. "are not distinct realms of experience, existing in splendid isolation from each other...they come into existence *in and through* relation to each other" (McClintock 5). Matthew Weiner provides rich characters that demonstrate this categorical interrelation through each of his characters; most notably, the younger, adapted characters, such as Bob and Peggy, who do not owe their success solely to one of their traits. Bob finds success with his method of communication befitting the emerging economic situation, which is influenced by his age, his race, his unclear sexuality, and his gender, all of which contribute to his ability to access and exert power in the work setting.

Without being a male, he would not be able to work on Chevy, yet without his ability to see the benefit of fostering group dynamics and code-switching in communicative situations (which could be attributed to his age and the experiences his sexuality creates), he would not have been able to reach this status either. Notably, however, in different social settings, his sexuality could prove to be a limiter in terms of his agency, as it does with Pete. Similarly, Peggy is affected by her race, her age, and her gender, as these components allow her to find a mix where she is able to utilize her feminine insight, but also find ways of communicating that allow her to enter the male sectors of the office and successfully work a traditionally male job. Nevertheless, evident is the fact that her race is a factor, as these options are not at any level available to Dawn, the African American female in the office.

It is in these details that *Mad Men* indicts its viewers to think in these terms and examine power in this manner from the series' example. From the show, the question emerges of what it means to still have a predominantly male, predominantly white corporate America that controls the day-to-day existence for the population and how that might be changed. Simultaneously, the show's intersectional approach problematizes the methods by which society measures its progress and success; looking at the advancements of "women" or the changes in "men" separately from race or sexuality, does a disservice to the measurements and paints an incomplete and biased picture. By examining the successes and failures in the drama, the viewers can choose to see the ways in which progress has been made and measured and simultaneously be uncomfortable with the familiarity of the exclusionary world of *Mad Men*.

While Weiner addresses the interrelated categorical nature of his characters, he imparts an intriguing message about gender. Within the world of *Mad Men*, Weiner displays the paths

to success in the workplace, i.e. power, for Joan, Peggy, Don, and Bob, and it is evident how those differ with the different approaches each of the characters take. From examining the way power is exerted in a masculine and feminine manner, a trend emerges in the show.

Within the feminine realm, Peggy and Joan both coexist and are able to wield power in the same office at the same time, highlighting the fact that, as women, they are able to each gain in their status without threatening the other; they are able to take different paths to prominence in the office and enjoy the fruits of their endeavors without any form of competition among the two. This is not the case when considering the flow of power in the masculine setting with Bob and Don. Although these two characters are not actively opposing each other in the narrative, their coordinating success and failure at the end of season six speaks to the nature of competition inherent in the motion of power for men in the corporate setting. This inherent competitive quality when studying masculine power in the show reveals a possible anxiety within American culture, beginning with the economic shift in the capitalist economy and still existing in modern America. This competition illuminates the incongruity between the ideal American manhood with the rugged, individual, strong, solitary man (Don) and the man who is able to mold himself and accommodate for any work situation, making him the more successful employee in a service-driven economy (Bob). This tension caused by the competitive and incongruous versions of masculinity presented in the show is something worthy of note and further analysis in the ultimate season of *Mad Men*, American media, and Western culture.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In conjunction with the idea of owning people as “things,” it is also interesting to note that Don backs the slogan the company uses for the Jaguar pitch in episode 11 of season five: “At Last. Something Beautiful You Can Truly Own.” This concept of ownership, including the people in his life, is one that the viewer is introduced to countless times throughout the narrative. Don often uses money in his personal exchanges, with helping out mistresses, paying off his brother, taking care of Anna Draper, trying to placate Peggy, etc. This not only speaks to Don’s ties to the capitalist nature of the time period, but it speaks to the nature of Don’s accrument of people as objects in his life, as the money transaction equates to ownership in the capitalist society.

<sup>2</sup> After the meeting, Don is sent to “charm” Rachel back to the company; however, he does not stop with getting the business back for Sterling Cooper. He actively pursues Rachel romantically, even when she protests due to him being married. Don does not cease until they are lovers. This relationship could be read as a kind of procuring of Rachel as an object Don wants to possess because she is out of his control in the beginning. While at first, he rebukes her presence even in the office, he then sets out to attain her for both the business and personally.

<sup>3</sup> In keeping with the attaining of objects, it is clear in other areas of the show as well that Don “pays off” his children at times in order to stay in their good favor. Most notably, in “Marriage of Figaro,” only two episodes after the one mentioned in the paper, Don disappears during Sally’s birthday party, leaving her with no cake. In order to make things right, Don offers

no explanation or apologies; instead, he returns home with a dog, making the young Sally forget all about any issue at the party. Thus, he literally “buys” her connection to him in this scene, wanting only her loyalty and not working to maintain the relationship in a “normal,” open manner.

<sup>4</sup> The situation Sal encounters with Lee is noteworthy, as the way Lee interacts with Sal also plays into the way in which Sal is stripped of his power in “Wee Small Hours.” The scene is shot in shadow, symbolizing the “unknown” and that which is coming to light in terms of Sal’s “hidden” sexuality, of which many of the other characters on the show are unaware. The focus of the shot is Sal, and it captures the way in which Lee Garner Jr. approaches him from above, asserting the power differential both in height and in status. Because Lee Garner Jr. has such power within the advertising agency due to the amount of *revenue* Lucky Strike brings, Sal is being pushed from an authority figure with the agency’s largest client and is put into a subordinate and subjugated position where Lee’s actions dictate how Sal should act and feel. This scene reveals that Sal no longer holds the power over his personal life, which has, without his consent, leaked into his work environment where he needs to be a powerful male, yet in this situation, it is clear that Sal is in the subject position.

<sup>5</sup> For more on Zygmunt Bauman’s work see *Consuming Life* and/or *Liquid Modernity*. Bauman focuses on the shift from a “producer” society to a “consumer” society and how that affects the experience of time, work relationships, etc.

<sup>6</sup> An interesting point to consider when looking at Joan and her version of femininity is how much is really her choice with the effects of her upbringing. How much was she affected



by her mother's gender-shaping, cultural influences, etc. A related article to consider is "Reading Woman: Displacing the Foundations of Femininity" by Wendy Burns- Ardolino that addresses the ways in which culturally-accepted feminine attire "works" on the body to create aspects of womanhood and femininity.

<sup>7</sup> Peggy is one of the most dynamic characters in the office setting. She provides the largest noticeable change throughout the series, serving as a foil to her male counterpart, Don. Perhaps this speaks to the large changes in feminine experience that are taking place and further highlights the stagnancy of Don's experience and his form of traditional masculinity. However, like with her clothing, Peggy undergoes many different transformations in terms of job, personal life, work expectations, etc.

<sup>8</sup> Another place where the viewer is introduced to feminine power is through lesbianism in the character, Joyce. Unfortunately, however, Joyce does not work in the office and does not get a very large role in the show. With open signals about her sexual orientation, Joyce is still able to move freely throughout the restrictive world of *Mad Men*; the viewers never see her get hassled or singled out due to her sexuality the way that might be expected due to the historical context of the show, nor does Joyce face the condemnation and threats to her monetary livelihood that Sal does from others knowing her sexuality. In fact, she openly flirts with women and hits on Peggy, but nothing negative comes from it.

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