

## SIX

### *Mad Men's* Peggy Olson

*A Prefeminist Champion in a Postfeminist TV Landscape*

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*Mad Men* (2007–present), an AMC original television series, depicts a sleek Manhattan agency during the 1960s golden age of advertising. Upon the show's premiere, audiences and critics initially praised the stunning re-creation of a bygone era dominated by the overtly sexist, racist, xenophobic, and anti-Semitic Madison Avenue executives. Beyond the men's philandering, chain-smoking, and bourbon-indulging proclivities, *Mad Men* is very much about its female characters. Although protagonist Don Draper (Jon Hamm) always resides at the forefront of the storyline, his former secretary turned copywriter Peggy Olson (Elisabeth Moss) is the series' true heroine, and likely one of the greatest feminist characters in television history. Peggy's narrative evokes Second Wave feminism and challenges what postfeminist television often fails to show: a woman actively participating in the workplace who is chiefly identified as a professional, and does not suffer from not pursuing traditional gender roles.

This chapter explores how *Mad Men* portrays Peggy in a prefeminist culture from the perspective of a present-day, postfeminist television landscape. I will first briefly chronicle feminism and postfeminism. For the purposes of this chapter, *prefeminism* will refer to the 1960s era on the verge of Second Wave feminism, as illustrated in *Mad Men*. Considered a precursor to this movement, Betty Friedan's 1963 book *The Feminine Mystique* stated that college-educated suburban housewives required more in their lives to achieve fulfillment than their roles as mothers and wives.<sup>1</sup>

Praising the working women of the 1930s and 1940s who thrived in male-dominated professions, she writes that upon the end of World War II, women retreated to the domestic sphere or to jobs based on gender expectations instead of their potential.<sup>2</sup>

Feminism, therefore, relates here to a set of goals laid out in 1966 when Friedan wrote the National Organization for Women's Statement of Purpose, summarizing the goals to "take action to bring women into full participation in the mainstream of American society now, exercising all the privileges and responsibilities thereof in truly equal partnership with men."<sup>3</sup> Workplace equality was a strong pillar of the movement, and, as Friedan stated, "we do not accept the traditional assumption that a woman has to choose between marriage and motherhood, on the one hand, and serious participation in industry or the professions on the other."<sup>4</sup> She also claimed that the importance of childbearing and rearing was still "used to justify barring women from equal professional and economic participation in advance."<sup>5</sup> In this Second Wave context, this chapter emphasizes the obstacles women must tackle when striving for workplace equality.

I regard postfeminism as an era beginning in the 1980s when cautionary tales of Second Wave feminism emerged in the mainstream media and press, as it is best chronicled in Susan Faludi's 1992 book *Backlash: The Undeclared War against American Women*.<sup>6</sup> One of the biggest critiques of Second Wave feminism was its alleged "overlooking and denigrating [of] the primacy of motherhood in women's lives."<sup>7</sup> Reactions against the movement led to "the disturbing postfeminist retreat from sexual politics to a more conservative pro-family vision."<sup>8</sup> Faludi declared that postfeminism was first used in the popular press of the 1920s, which declared First Wave feminism was no longer necessary when women were granted suffrage.<sup>9</sup> Friedan claimed that while women could vote, they hardly attempted to actively participate in politics.<sup>10</sup> Despite subsequent (if too meager) advances in this realm, the current postfeminist climate still faces the same problems, revealing a continuous pattern within feminist movements.

In *Mad Men*, Peggy proudly rises from the steno pool to become the first female copywriter for the company since World War II. She is constantly contrasted with head secretary/office manager Joan Holloway (Christina Hendricks), and to a lesser extent suburban housewife Betty Draper (January Jones). As articulated in Mimi White's essay "Mad Women," Peggy suffered in seasons 1–3 when the other women of the series were "more sophisticated and calculating, and more apt to use feminine wiles to get what they want."<sup>11</sup> White concluded that although Peggy did not make any gains from her passive sexuality, Joan did not necessarily benefit from her active sexuality, as she is not treated seriously as a professional. Much to the chagrin of both the female secretaries and male advertising executives, Peggy breaks expectations by excelling

in advertising as a copywriter, eventually becoming a copy chief. When her professional success is on display, it often coincides with the disappointments of Betty, and particularly those of her co-worker Joan, due to their generation's reliance on traditional gender roles and dependency on men for fulfillment and purpose.

Seasons 4–6 of *Mad Men*, set in the mid to late 1960s right on the heels of Second Wave feminism, shifted from an emphasis on Betty to a detailed representation of the “mad women” within the workplace. Punctuated by the subsequent downfall of Don, these three seasons reflect a period in history that challenged the dominance of privileged white males. As a series in the “post-network era”<sup>12</sup> that heralded AMC's original programming success, *Mad Men* is also rare in the canon of feminist television criticism because it is not explicitly female centered or geared toward female audiences. *Mad Men* thus exposes feminist themes to an audience that may not be inherently interested in women's rights.

The now infamous pilot episode illustrates the sexual harassment and ingrained misogyny that Peggy encounters on her first day at Sterling Cooper. Freshly graduated from secretarial school, Peggy is initially seen in an elevator while a group of twenty-something ad executives provide less than subtle commentary on her looks. As senior secretary, or as she coins it later in season 1, “office manager,” Joan gives her a welcoming tour, implying that the position functions as a step toward finding a husband, encouraging Peggy that “of course if you really make the right moves, you'll be out in the country, and you won't be going to work at all.” The secretary job is described as “something between a mother and a waitress, and the rest of the time, well,” and Joan gives a sly smile. She then unveils a typewriter, telling the new girl to not grow overwhelmed as the men who built it made it “simple enough for a woman to use.” Sexism is thus embedded not only in the men of the office, but also in its women who believe they are not equally capable or intelligent because of their gender. The secretary position is not deemed worthy of a viable career or chance to progress as a professional, but as a stepping-stone to marriage and motherhood. By season 1, episode 2, “Ladies Room,” Peggy renounces the junior ad men's relentless sexual advances and expresses her frustration to Joan, who responds, “You're the new girl, and you're not much, so you might as well enjoy it while it lasts.” From the onset of the series, Joan takes advantage of her sexuality and femininity in a male-dominated workplace, while Peggy is reluctant to follow suit.

Despite its attention to period details, *Mad Men* serves as more of a critique on contemporary culture, suggesting that feminism is buried in a postfeminist society. Feminist TV scholars have already excelled in identifying the most important issues, themes, and representations in contemporary programming. In her 2006 book *Redesigning Women: Television after the Network Era*, Amanda Lotz describes the two dominant narratives about working women displayed in postfeminist TV. The first portrays



Joan (Christina Hendricks, left) and Peggy (Elisabeth Moss, right) clash over their views of a woman's role in the office in season 1, episode 2, "Ladies Room."

women pursuing "a liberal feminist agenda" by assimilating into male-dominated work environments, yet these shows suggest "women are ill-suited for professional roles or could not be both mothers and career women."<sup>13</sup> The second narrative represents women who could handle this balance effortlessly, yet these series "rarely [tell] stories about women doing work, despite attempting to associate themselves with the progressive trend of depicting women as qualified to work outside the home."<sup>14</sup> Further, Elana Levine's chapter in the 2013 edited collection *How to Watch Television*, "Grey's Anatomy: Feminism," argues how a standard of glorifying traditional gender roles becomes problematic:

In this sort of "postfeminist" mindset, either feminism is identified as the cause of women's problems, in that the movement's embrace of women taking on greater professional roles purportedly failed to account for how to fit a personal life within such accomplishments, or feminism has succeeded so well that it no longer applies.<sup>15</sup>

The chapter goes on to describe how the hit medical series created by Shonda Rhimes, *Grey's Anatomy* (ABC, 2005–present), establishes a feminist fantasy of successful career women who often prioritize their professional goals over their romantic pursuits. This does not render them unfulfilled or undesirable by suitors. Within this fantasy, women and minorities hardly ever face prejudices or obstacles based on their societal limitations. Both Lotz and Levine cite *Ally McBeal* (Fox, 1997–2002) and

*Sex and the City* (HBO, 1998–2004) as popular series that depicted successful yet unfulfilled career women who were primarily concerned with their roles as girlfriends, potential wives, or consumers.

Peggy's narrative provides an unprecedented exploration of a career woman who rises through the ranks and achieves fulfillment through professional success. Although her love life is not as active the characters of *Grey's Anatomy*, *Ally McBeal*, or *Sex in the City*, she does not lament over her concerns as a girlfriend or potential wife and mother. In relation to negotiating work and traditional expectations, Joan's position is indicative of both prefeminist 1960s and early 2000s postfeminism. Historian Stephanie Coontz postulates that *Mad Men* is television's most feminist series because it reveals the abilities of its women characters, yet they never exceed beyond the parameters of the time.<sup>16</sup> She writes, "We should be glad that the writers are resisting the temptation to transform their female characters into contemporary heroines. They're not, and they cannot be."<sup>17</sup> *Mad Men* frequently exposes the state of modern-day women who still face inequality in the workplace. In 1966, women's average national salaries quantified to 60 percent of men's. In 2010, women earned 81.2 percent of men's wages.<sup>18</sup> The series asserts the blurred lines between the past and present when dealing with discrimination in the workplace, revealing how complicated it is for a woman to advance in a male-dominated setting.

The series' predominantly female team of writers, which includes Lisa Albert, Marti Noxon, Katie Gordon, Cathryn Humphris, and Maria Jacquemetton, aim to show the lack of progression in equality for working women, suggesting copywriters in the golden age of advertising are not far from TV writers in the new golden age of TV.<sup>19</sup> While TV auteurs in the form of show runners such as *Mad Men*'s Matthew Weiner often receive critical praise, the writers uncover the parallels between male-dominated creative workplaces in the prefeminist 1960s and postfeminist 2000s. As executive story editor Robin Veith informed, "It's less a product of the decade than viewers might think. The truth is that a lot of these moments that seem period and horrible for women come directly from experiences that I and the other women writers have had in our lifetime."<sup>20</sup>

Peggy is first valued for her intellect and potential to serve as more than a secretary in season 1, episode 6, "Babylon." The women of the office participate in a focus group on lipsticks when the male creative team is at a loss for ideas. Middle-aged advertising executive Freddy Rumsen (Joel Murray) says he does not "speak moron" and suggests they "throw it to the chickens." Joan happily organizes the focus group as it reinforces her position as the alpha female amongst her inferiors. Peggy immediately stands out due to her lack of frivolity while the executives watch the women behind a one-way mirror. Joan, fully aware of her audience, flaunts her body for the men. When the group ends, Peggy

brings the tissues full of lipstick imprints to Freddy, stating, "Here's your basket of kisses." He later acknowledges that Peggy created the ad campaign, exclaiming that "it was like watching a dog play the piano." When Joan informs Peggy that Freddy wants her to write copy for the cosmetic account, she is stunned. Joan mocks this pseudo-promotion, offered without a raise but entailing "more work and more responsibility," though she notes there may be entitlement to dinner money. Earnest Peggy replies unsurprisingly, "That's swell." Freddy, Joan, and Peggy are all seemingly shocked over Peggy's ability, yet treat it as an anomaly of little consequence or impact.

By season 2, episode 6, "Maidenform," Peggy is no longer a secretary, but a copywriter, yet she lacks the privileges that her male colleagues enjoy. Not privy to the out-of-office client meetings and internal memos, she asks Joan why she is not included in these communications:

Joan: I don't have your job. I never wanted it. You're in their country. Learn to speak the language.

Peggy: You don't talk that way.

Joan: I don't need to. And honestly, you've never listened to a word I've said. You want to be taken seriously? Stop dressing like a little girl.



Peggy stands out from her fellow secretaries during a focus group in season 1, episode 6, "Babylon," and is soon "discovered" based on her creative talents.

Joan yet again believes that success primarily equates to obtaining an external image. While she grows to resent Peggy for abandoning her secretarial position for a "man's job," as Joan clearly wishes to carry on creative work. In season 2, episode 8, "A Night to Remember," she handles a brief assignment to evaluate a series of television scripts. Joan brings them home and exuberantly details her new assignment to her fiancé, who replies that he assumed her job consisted of walking around while the office stares at her. He is visibly disgruntled as her task leads the couple to eat Chinese takeout rather than a usual home-cooked meal. He discourages Joan's recent development because it implies her subsequent disregard for her duties as a wife, which will soon become her only job when she is married. Later, her new role is assigned to a less-qualified male worker, and she rarely attempts to step outside of her margins again. These instances that show Joan's eagerness toward creative rather than clerical work are significant, suggesting that she is fully capable and desires to partake in it, despite the restrictions imposed on her at work and at home.

The contrasts between Joan and Peggy escalate as the series progresses, in which Joan's secretarial position remains largely the same and Peggy breaks new ground in the creative department. In season 2, episode 12, "The Mountain King," Peggy asks leading partner Roger (John Slattery) for Freddy's vacated office. He agrees, commenting, "You young women are very aggressive." When Peggy apologizes for her impoliteness, he jokes, "No, it's cute. There are thirty men out there who didn't have the balls to ask me." Immediately after, Joan arrives to introduce her successful and good-looking fiancé. In one of the most devastating scenes in the entire series, her future husband rapes her in Don's office. The following morning, Peggy moves in to her new office next door to Don's and behind Joan's desk. Joan offers cordial congratulations to Peggy, who thanks her and comments on how handsome her fiancé is, and Joan describes his many accomplishments. Peggy asks when the wedding will take place, but their small talk is cut off as a group of copywriters arrive and become befuddled and envious of their female cohort's new office. As soon as they disperse, Joan tells her the wedding will be during Christmas, but Peggy has already lost interest. Joan eventually goes through with the marriage despite his brutal treatment. In the 1960s, rape was not illegal if it occurred between a cohabitated or married couple. Even with the necessary advancements since then, it remains the most underreported crime in the United States today.<sup>21</sup>

For her work carried out in seasons 1 and 2, Peggy is enlisted to take on campaigns for women's products for her insight into feminine subjects, yet these accounts are never for the high-profile clients. In most cases, those clients only wish to deal with fellow men. As the series begins to highlight single working women in the city in season 4, the reformed agency of Sterling Cooper Draper Pryce (SCDP) also explores

this demographic. Just as Betty's role diminishes after season 3, the agency deemphasizes the role of the housewife consumer who purchases cleaning products, groceries, and other basic family amenities. Therefore, a "new woman" figure emerges, yet she is not yet separated from traditional gender expectations. Season 4, episode 4, "The Rejected," represents the various workplace shifts since the first focus group in season 1, episode 6, "Babylon," as well as the differences in new career women and traditional secretaries.

In season 4, episode 2, "Christmas Comes but Once a Year," Peggy argues with Freddy, who returns to the company for the first time since season 2, over how to sell Pond's Cold Cream. She favors an approach that enhances "the experience of putting it on, looking in the mirror" and "indulging yourself." Freddy counters that "if young girls started using it, maybe they could find a husband and stop being so angry." An infuriated and offended Peggy calls the man who first discovered her talent "old-fashioned." The company continues with her indulgence proposal by conducting a new focus group. As a sharp contrast to the previous group held in season 1, Peggy is accepted as a leader of the creative team, and her ideas are valued and put forth over Freddy's seemingly antiquated suggestion.

New psychologist and marketing expert Faye Miller (Cara Buono) directs the group to study the eighteen- to twenty-five-year-old single women demographic of the cream, testing Peggy's hypothesis on the office secretaries. Faye is depicted as educated and successful as well as blonde and beautiful, as she is involved in a secret affair with the series' prime Lothario, Don. In "Babylon," a middle-aged German female psychologist served as a company consultant, and the male ad executives compared her to a man. This transition reveals that the revamped company, SCDP, is now confronted with attractive, feminine women who are also intelligent and can excel in male-dominated areas. Faye, who only appears in season 4, represents a career woman depicted in television whose struggles are rarely shown. However, her extreme professionalism suggests a lack of empathy that Peggy still values along with her ambitions. For example, when Peggy asks Faye about a secretary, Dottie, who sobs during the focus group, the psychologist is only concerned with the experiment's results, not the possible emotional repercussions it triggered. In season 4, episode 9, "Beautiful Girls," Faye shows a rare vulnerability when she reveals that her difficulty with children is rooted in her choice to have both a career and an advanced degree.

During the group, Faye attempts to decode the beauty rituals of the secretaries while Peggy, Freddy, and Don watch the experiment from another one-way mirror. She evokes a response from Dottie, the most susceptible focus group member, who laments over how she was never beautiful enough for her ex-boyfriend. Peggy's indulgence approach ultimately fails, as the secretaries are generally not concerned with how



beauty products make them feel about their own self-worth, but how they can help them keep a man. As the focus group concludes, Freddy smirks, victoriously boasting, "My strategy was right. All they want to do is get married, and they'll buy anything to help." Dottie becomes the embodiment of the insecure female consumer unable to find fulfillment outside of male approval. Although a small percentage of women like Peggy and Faye stand outside the standard secretary/consumer, the majority's compliance with Freddy's hypothesis shows how progress can be limited by traditional expectations based on beauty and relationships. Furthermore, the advertising agency setting also reveals how little has changed in contemporary postfeminist marketing strategies, and how the pleasures of consumerism often denote women's self-fulfillment.

Despite the failure of Peggy's innovative strategy rooted in individual gratification, she is ahead of her time for suggesting this tactic. As a young professional with her own income and no marital ambitions, she suggests the company pitch a product in correlation to the immediate benefits for a woman. This refers to the concept of being satisfied as a woman without having to consider how a man could control her self-perception. By stressing women's own gratification with Pond's, Peggy's strategy prefigures Second Wave feminist ideology privileging a woman's independence; it implies a desire to disregard the reliance on a feminine identity defined by men.

With feminism slowly ascending to the mainstream by the 1970s, companies began to target a new demographic of single working women with disposable incomes, with an example being the viewers of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (1970–1977). Centered on one of the first career women on American television, the series' pilot sees its protagonist starting a promising job as a producer at a television news station after breaking off her engagement. It details the benefits of Mary's professional choices and her rewarding life in the city with her cantankerous new family at her workplace, yet she does not struggle with explicit sexism or inequalities. Mary is depicted as happily single, social, and professionally successful. She also uses birth control and enjoys the company of men. Peggy, the first female copywriter for SCDP since World War II, represents the working women of the 1930s and 1940s, who retreated to the home once their male counterparts returned from combat. These are the women that Friedan commends in *The Feminine Mystique* for their capabilities, and Peggy's professional trajectory also foreshadows the career woman model that Mary Tyler Moore first personified, and was later prevailed in series such as *Cagney and Lacey* (1981–1988), *Designing Women* (1986–1993), and *Murphy Brown* (1988–1998).

It is highly important that the series shows Peggy as attractive to many men around her, as she is a part of several romantic flirtations, flings, and partnerships. Although her workaholic nature can interfere with her relationships, her position does not prohibit her from intimacy.

In season 4, Peggy meets a potential love interest, Abe (Charlie Hofheimer), a handsome yet fumbling left-leaning journalist who refers to the African American civil rights movement as "an inequality the world has its eyes on." Peggy replies that she is not a political person. She insists that she is frequently denied the same rights as African Americans, citing that she cannot be a member of the private men's clubs where most advertising executives hold their meetings. Abe condescendingly replies, "All right Peggy, we'll have a civil rights march for women." She soon leaves their first date, realizing his ignorance to her situation. *Mad Men* has frequently revealed that even the most liberal individuals of the 1960s retained a sexist attitude, as Abe only mockingly predicts the imminent women's liberation movement. As the only female copywriter she knows of, Peggy remains unaware that her situation is not what Ellen Riordan describes as "the unique responsibility of each individual woman, rather than a basic social dilemma which society must solve."<sup>22</sup> In a prefeminist era, Peggy is oblivious to the larger political implications of her seemingly personal situation.

Season 5, episode 11, "The Other Woman," focuses on the options women have in advancing their careers. It also represents how "Woman" functions as "The Other." This episode demonstrates Peggy as the most triumphant of *Mad Men's* leading women for demanding to be taken seriously based on her mind rather than relying on using her body or men to advance. As it centers on the newly downsized ad firm striving to land a big client, the prospect of securing the lucrative car company Jaguar is much more about the women of SCDP than its men. "The Other Woman" begins while the entire creative team (without its second in command to Don, Peggy) continues to slack in their preparation for the Jaguar pitch, accomplishing no actual work. Don has placed Peggy in control of all the other accounts as he spearheads the sought-after campaign. Despite her consistent success with products geared toward both men and women, her superiors attest that clients such as Jaguar and Mohawk Airlines do not wish to hire a female copywriter, even if she is the most experienced of the group. We see over Peggy's shoulder as she gazes at the male copywriters through the clear glass surrounding of the conference room; they are provided a sumptuous lunch of lobsters and caviar for their mere participation in the high-profile car campaign. Then in an eye-line match, we see Peggy on the outside looking in, with Don's silhouette reflected on Peggy. She is now visibly "in his shadows," unable to step out on her own in this environment. She is also literally and figuratively unable to break down the "glass ceiling," a term coined in 1987 to describe the invisible barriers women in corporate America face in terms of advancement and equal pay.<sup>23</sup>

She later saves a campaign by proposing a new commercial idea on the spot. When Don suggests her male inferior fly to Paris for the filming instead of her, she exposes the injustice: "I guess I'm not in charge of

everything." Her responsibilities are not high priority. She organizes various small-scale campaigns and is never rewarded financially or with respect commensurate to her male colleagues. When Peggy struggles to be assertive and ambitious, the office views her as "pushy," while her male colleagues' aggression is construed as ambition. In psychological studies of contemporary workplaces, women who step outside of typically female-oriented fields or positions encounter similar struggles when it comes to assertiveness and success.<sup>24</sup> This demeaning situation ultimately leads Peggy to pursue a new career outside of SCDP.

Throughout the professional developments of Peggy and Joan in season 4, Peggy succeeds due to her intellect while Joan advances due to her attractiveness. Peggy's romantic life evolves while Joan's marriage ends, as she finally rejects her husband's cruelty. When Peggy first meets with a rival agency in "The Other Woman," she curls her hair, wears bright pink lipstick, and pairs a blue and orange scarf with a matching, color-coordinated dress with a plunging V-neck. Yet her future boss is only interested in her talent, stating that other potential employers will first ask if she will soon become married or pregnant, knowing this will end a woman's career. At this point, she is living with her now boyfriend Abe, yet the episode does not include him, choosing to stress the importance of her professional advancement over her romantic progression. In season 5, episode 5, "Far Away Places," the introductory scene opens with Peggy and Abe's dispute over her workaholic tendencies; her boyfriend states most men would leave when they are placed second. In the following episode, "At the Codfish Ball," she fears he might end their relationship, but Joan suggests he will propose. He instead hopes they will move in together, to the disappointment of her conservative Catholic mother. When Peggy returns to tell Joan, she states that marriage is just a piece of paper, and Joan agrees to its banality when she remarks on her husband's newfound loyalty to the military above their marriage. Joan suffers as a divorced single mother. For Peggy, living with her mate is less of a sacrifice than the potential consequences of marriage, and further indicates how her modern take on work and relationships benefits both her personal and professional life. In *Mad Men*, Betty's and Joan's marriages are revealed as both personal and professional entrapments, as they must first adhere to their duties as wives. Betty quits her lucrative modeling career upon marrying Don, and Joan quits her job when she is first wed, but she eventually returns when her husband cannot fully provide for the both of them.

During the meeting, Peggy's future employer offers her a salary of \$19,000 for her position as copy chief, approximately \$133,000 by today's standard according to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics Inflation Calculator.<sup>25</sup> With her new salary, she is not only a minority in the 1960s, but also in the twenty-first century. Peggy previously mentions the Equal Pay Act of 1963 (season 3, episode 5, "The Fog") when she asks for

a raise to match the salary of her male peers. Don rejects the request, aware that he does not have to legally abide by the act, which is still the case today with the gender pay income gap.

In Jennifer Allyn's editorial for *Forbes Woman* online, the corporate managing director for PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP urges the next generation of women to view Peggy's success as an inspiration to "break new ground, only this time instead of leaping from the steno pool to junior copywriter as Peggy did, they need to ascend from middle management to the executive suite."<sup>26</sup> According to Allyn, the Second Wave goal of not accepting the "token appointment of a few women to high-level positions in government and industry as a substitute for serious continuing effort to recruit and advance women according to their individual abilities" has yet to be accomplished in American society.<sup>27</sup>

In her closing scenes at SCDP, Peggy reaches for a handshake after she gives Don her formal resignation. This leads to a close-up of Don's farewell through a prolonged, passionate kiss on her hand. This gesture represents that for Don, Peggy is first and foremost a woman who was initially his secretary, and only secondly a professional. With this departure, her success is no longer contingent upon her association with Don. In season 4, episode 7, "The Suitcase," she revealed to Don that her male peers accuse her of sleeping with him to advance her career. Peggy personifies the rise of both women and youth, and her absence will be a difficult loss for her former company, which previously devalued a woman's creative input. In this same episode, Joan also advances, becoming the only female partner at SCDP. However, she does not reach this position for her intellect or talent, but rather for agreeing to have sex with a Jaguar employee who told the company it was the only way they could do business together. Once again, the contrast between Joan advancing due to her sexuality and Peggy for her intellect is illuminated.

Peggy is also most emblematic of Second Wave feminist ideology through her drive for women's solidarity. In season 5, episode 4, "Mystery Date," she even attempts to transcend racial borders when she invites co-worker Dawn to stay with her upon discovering that the African American secretary has been sleeping in the office due to fear of race riots in the city. The two engage in an honest and friendly conversation:

Dawn: I was gonna say, I hope you won't tell Mr. Draper about me sleeping there. You two talk sometimes.

Peggy: Nah. We 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.

Dawn: I appreciate that.

Peggy: Do you want to be a copywriter?

Dawn: No, I like my job.

Peggy: Yep. You're right. Copywriter's tough. Especially for a woman. . . . Do you think I act like a man?

Dawn: I guess you have to, a little . . .

Peggy: I try, but . . . I don't know if I have it in me. I don't know if I want to.

Peggy is uncertain of how to succeed in her career without "acting like a man" because of the lack of precedent of successful career women she encounters in her profession. Her attempt at female unity is tainted by bad judgment on her part as she says good night. She pauses at the thought of leaving Dawn alone in her living room with her purse on the coffee table, after rejoicing earlier that she was recently given a large sum of cash. The only thing more casual than the sexism in *Mad Men* is racism, and Peggy's attempt at solidarity ultimately fails because of this unconscious attitude. Dawn becomes noticeably aware of her potential confidante's actions, and Peggy cannot hide it when she uses the excuse of throwing away empty bottles. In the morning, she discovers Dawn's note placed on top of her purse, in which she curtly thanks her for her hospitality and apologizes for the inconvenience. Peggy's undeniable guilt and regret still makes her an anomaly for her time, understanding the need to make connections between other women in her workplace, and not wishing to have made such a foolish prejudice based on race.

Peggy is able to succeed in a man's world when it comes to her career, but the pre-Second Wave era, along with contemporary postfeminism, proves to be a difficult environment for women to unite as minorities in a patriarchal society. Therefore the connection between Peggy and Joan not only shows the subtle differences in generations when it comes to career opportunities, but also a complicated relationship between them as the women negotiate their patriarchal surroundings. Peggy fails in one of her most feminist actions at the office in taking on sexual harassment and showing support for Joan. In season 4, episode 8, "The Summer Man," a freelance copywriter continually makes lewd jokes at Joan's expense, showing no remorse. Peggy is given permission by Don to fire him, and she is both surprised by her own authority and determined to reprimand the wrongdoer. Peggy hopes Joan will appreciate her efforts, but Joan tells Peggy, "No matter how powerful we get around here, it doesn't matter because they can still draw a cartoon. So you just proved I'm another meaningless secretary and you're a humorless bitch." Joan also suggests that a dinner date with a client could have produced the same

results with less dramatics, showing once again how she handles situations through her own strengths. Joan's strategy shows how her individual charm can solve her own problems, while Peggy's stance hopes to make an example and set a precedent for unacceptable and inappropriate behavior. This represents a strong generational divide between Joan in her early thirties and the twenty-something Peggy, who will benefit from, and also perhaps contribute the most to, the forthcoming Second Wave feminist movement. She actively acknowledges the copywriter's act as a punishable offense in the workplace, preceding Second Wave feminism's attempt to define and convict sexual harassment.

By the latter part of season 4 and up to season 6, Joan and Peggy begin to form a friendship and a sense of mutual respect, exemplified in the season 4 finale, "Tomorrowland," as they discuss how Don's engagement overshadowed Joan's recent promotion that does not include any financial benefits, as well as Peggy's victory of landing the first new account for the agency in several months. By season 6, Joan attempts to spearhead an Avon campaign with Peggy as her creative partner, signaling a potential new era of women in command of their own careers as well as expressing the desires of women consumers. However, Joan suffers when she endeavors to bypass the systematic rules of business in order to gain control of the account. When Peggy saves her from a fatal error in the process, Joan's humble appreciation further ushers in a chance for cooperation between the former adversaries. Despite the abundance of obstacles she faces, Peggy never retreats and rarely compromises. With her new position as copy chief, she finally achieves the career advancement that her talents should have earned her long before.<sup>28</sup> The feminist goal of the series is further divulged when Joan is a cautionary tale in the narrative of social limitations that result in a reliance of traditional gender roles.

Season 5 ends with series protagonist Don Draper coming to terms with women on the verge of Second Wave feminism, although the movement has yet to be discussed in the series. We first see what SCDP is like without Peggy in the season 5 finale, "The Phantom." A group of pantyhose clients express dissatisfaction with a new pitch and protest that they initially signed on with the company for a woman's point of view, which is now clearly absent. The men of SCDP are now no longer able to articulate the needs of female consumers through campaigns based on traditional expectations. The next scene shows Peggy as the new copy chief of an agency, yelling at a young team of male copywriters. Throughout the series, Peggy aims to emulate Don and "act like a man" to survive in the workplace, as there is no precedent for being an assertive woman and leader without a "masculine mindset." She later runs into Don at a cinema and expresses her satisfaction of a future business trip to Virginia, even though it is not Paris. Although she earned a substantial promotion, Peggy's new position shows the everyday struggles that both career men

and women encounter. She has also yet to develop her own identity as a new leader. Yet for the first time, Don and Peggy are equals, meeting as two creative directors from rivaling advertising agencies.

Season 6 begins with Peggy as the creative head with a new boss who values her talent. By episode 6, "For Immediate Release," her former and current superiors decide to merge agencies. Her new boss, Ted, proclaims, "You are the copy chief at one of the top twenty-five ad agencies in the country, and you're not even thirty. I'm jealous!" Don and Ted ask Peggy to write the press release announcing the new company, as she is the only nonpartner who is informed of the news. She returns to clerical tasks and the former work environment that limited her abilities, yet this time she is more equipped to negotiate her role as a valued employee. *Mad Men* illustrates the experiences of contemporary women who must make difficult choices in their personal and professional lives at the expense of understanding the struggles of Second Wave feminism in terms of workplace equality. In her 2012 cover story for the *Atlantic*, "Why Women Still Can't Have It All," Anne-Marie Slaughter's only television/pop culture reference is as follows:

I owe my own freedoms and opportunities to the pioneering generation of women ahead of me—the women now in their 60s, 70s, and 80s who faced overt sexism of a kind I only see when watching *Mad Men*, and who knew that the only way to make it as a woman was to act exactly like a man.<sup>29</sup>

Slaughter writes that both women and men cannot "have it all" during this critical juncture in American history, and a close viewing of *Mad Men* makes clear how much of the past is present within the today's postfeminist society.

Throughout the series, Peggy has been compared to other women, but another strong contrast is between her and Don. When he is aloof and absent, Peggy often takes control of a campaign and shines. Season 6 ends with Don's professional and personal downfall, when his fellow partners ask that he take a leave of absence and his wife threatens to leave him. However, he begins to show honesty with his children, leading to a hopeful conclusion for the series' principal protagonist and anti-hero. Peggy is heartbroken by her former boss, who moves to California to repair his marriage, yet as a consequence, she is given Don's position. In essence, this demonstrates that during the 1960s, while women like Peggy achieved success against the odds, men like Don often crumbled amidst a tumultuous and altering era. We last see her sitting in Don's office chair, clearly foreshadowing her next step as a leader.

With *Mad Men's* final season beginning in 2014 and concluding in 2015, the series finale will likely prove that both men and women cannot have it all by the end of the 1960s, just as Slaughter suggested they cannot in the 2000s. Yet the series also claims that for women, "having it all" can

be more than marriage and motherhood, and retreating from university or workplace to the home should not be once again a glorified path. It decries that the Peggys, Joans, and Bettys of today all have the capability to thrive professionally. In the 2013 series finale of the NBC workplace sitcom *30 Rock*, show runner and star Tina Fey predicts that *Mad Men's* grand conclusion will bring the show's long-term role reversal to fruition: a chastened Don begins to work for Peggy. Her humorous enthusiasm and prediction of simple gender reversal is of course not the solution to workplace equality, but it indicates that narrative closure and audience satisfaction would come from Peggy's career triumph.<sup>30</sup>

## NOTES

1. Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (London: Penguin Books, 1963), 5–20.
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3. Betty Friedan, "The National Organization for Women's 1966 Statement of Purpose," National Organization for Women official website, 29 October 1966, <http://www.now.org/history/purpos66.html> (accessed 21 May 2012).
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6. Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War against American Women* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1992).
7. Faludi, *Backlash*, 87.
8. Faludi, *Backlash*, 81.
9. Faludi, *Backlash*, 50.
10. Friedan, *Feminine Mystique*, 35.
11. Mimi White, "Mad Women," in *Mad Men: Dream Come True TV*, ed. Gary R. Edgerton (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 152.
12. *Post-network era*, as defined by Amanda Lotz in her 2009 book *Beyond Prime Time: Television in the Post-network Era*, indicates a shift away from the dominance of US networks ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox and onto newer programming from HBO, Showtime, AMC, FX, and online outlets.
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15. Elana Levine, "Grey's Anatomy: Feminism," *How to Watch Television*, ed. Ethan Thompson and Jason Mittell (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 139.
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23. Ann M. Morrison, Randall P. White, and Ellen Van Velsor, *Breaking the Glass Ceiling: Can Women Reach the Top of America's Largest Corporations?* (Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, 1987).

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27. Friedan, "Statement of Purpose."

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29. Ann-Marie Slaughter, "Why Women Still Can't Have It All," *Atlantic*, July/August 2012, 89.

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# SMART CHICKS ON SCREEN

REPRESENTING WOMEN'S  
INTELLECT IN FILM AND TELEVISION



EDITED BY  
LAURA MATTOON D'AMORE

While women have long been featured in leading roles in film and television, the intellectual depictions of female characters in these media are out of line with reality. Women continue to be marginalized for their choices, overshadowed by men, and judged by their bodies. In fact, the intelligence of women is rarely the focus of television or film narratives, and on the rare occasion when smart women are showcased, their portrayals are undermined by socially awkward behavior or their intimate relationships are doomed to perpetual failure. While Hollywood claims to offer a different, more evolved look at women, these movies and shows often just repackage old character types that still downplay the intelligence and savvy of women.

In *Smart Chicks on Screen: Representing Women's Intellect in Film and Television*, Laura Mattoon D'Amore brings together an impressive array of scholarship that interrogates the portrayal of females on television and in movies. Among the questions that the volume seeks to answer are: In what ways are women in film and television limited, or ostracized, by their intelligence? How do female roles emphasize standards of beauty, submissiveness, and silence over intellect, problem solving, and leadership? Are there women in film and television who are intelligent without also being objectified?

The thirteen essays by international, interdisciplinary scholars offer a wide range of perspectives, examining the connections—and disconnections—between beauty and brains in film and television. *Smart Chicks on Screen* will be of interest to scholars not only of film and television but of women's studies, reception studies, and cultural history, as well.

**LAURA MATTOON D'AMORE** is assistant professor of American studies at Roger Williams University. She is the editor of *Bound by Love: Familial Bonding in Film and Television Since 1950* (2009) and coeditor of *We Are What We Remember: The American Past through Commemoration* (2012).

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