Deconstruction of the American Dream in Mad Men: Women and a Woman's Place

Popović, Jelena

Sveučilište u Zadru

Odjel za anglistiku

Diplomski sveučilišni studij engleskog jezika i književnosti; smjer: nastavnički (dvopredmetni)

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Zadar, 12. listopada 2023.

Sadržaj

1. INTRODUCTION

Mad Men is a television series created by Matthew Weiner. Set in the 1960s, it offers a unique window into the life of the elusive Don Draper and his family and colleagues. Under the glossy surface of the picturesque 1960s, the show delves into themes of identity, authenticity, gender roles, consumerism, and the shifting American landscape during its most turbulent years. Through its storylines and characters, *Mad Men* examines the underlying currents of an era marked by social upheaval and evolving gender relations; and offers a poignant view of individuals that reflect their society.

Among the many themes, *Mad Men* explores the paradigm of the individual's identity in the context of the American Dream in the 1960s. The main character, Don Draper, is a successful advertising executive who hides his true past and has difficulties in finding his place in the world. Alongside him, the show also follows the lives of two women who challenge the traditional roles and expectations of their gender: Peggy Olson, a young secretary who rises to become a creative director, and Betty Draper, Don's first wife who suffers from the dissatisfaction and emptiness of her suburban lifestyle. The show depicts the historical and social changes that affect the characters and their relationships, such as the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War, the sexual revolution, and the rise of consumerism. Through the lens of advertising, the show examines how the American Dream is constructed, sold, and consumed by the characters and society.

In this thesis, I will argue that Mad Men portrays the limitations and challenges of the American Dream for women in the 1960s through the contrasting characters of Betty Draper and Peggy Olson. Firstly, I will provide context for the character analysis of Betty Draper/Francis and Peggy Olson. Secondly, I will use Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* to analyse Betty's dissatisfaction and struggle with her suburban lifestyle. Using Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic framework of "the Big Other", I will examine the advertising world,

consumerism, and the notion of the American Dream. Specifically, I will argue that for *Mad Men* characters. societal pressures and conformity to traditional roles serve as "the Big Other". Furthermore, using Slavoj Žižek's definition of reality constructed on fantasy, I will examine how the notion of the American Dream is built on the precarious foundations of inauthentic individuals of *Mad Men*.

2. MAD MEN

Mad Men is a television drama that develops over seven seasons, as it showcases the lives and careers within the prestigious advertising agency Sterling Cooper (and its many iterations) in New York City during the 1960s. The series delves into discussing the intricacies of societal norms, identity, and human behaviour. Given the line of work it follows, *Mad Men* discusses paradigms of identity, fulfilment and consumerism as a part of the American Dream, while also examining the workplace, forced domesticity, the second wave feminism, the civil rights movement and other social and political events that take place during the extent of the show. *Mad Men* is a masterclass in dialogue writing. It offers layers of hidden meanings behind the surface dialogue, similar to the copies written for advertised products. The writing of *Mad Men* provides a masterclass in character writing as it explores the deeper motivations, needs and desires of the characters.

The story follows the enigmatic Don Draper, a successful creative director who stole another man's identity and has been posing with his name for over a decade. Don Draper's name, cleverly suggestive of "wearing a disguise," provides Don (formerly known as Dick Whitman) with an opportunity to break free from his previous 'hobo' life and embark on a journey of self-reinvention. Over the course of the series, we observe Don striving to succeed in the advertising business among the competition and demanding clients, but also how his personal issues, relating to a problematic past and deeply rooted personal trauma, led to erratic and troublesome behaviour. The opening credits, which stayed the same throughout all seven seasons, offer a symbolic overview of many different themes *Mad Men* discusses. The first shot is of a dark silhouette of a man in an office, which slowly disintegrates, and the man begins to plummet from a skyscraper while images of advertising campaigns depicting families and sexualized women surround him. 'The falling man' dissolves into the same silhouette, now

sitting in a chair, back turned to the camera, with a cigarette in hand. The sequence discusses the displays the illusionary nature of the characters' lives and suggests the fragility of the supposed reality of the American culture, and subsequently the American Dream.

In the first episode, Don lives a fairly typical lifestyle for a businessman of the time: he lives in the suburbs with his wife and children and commutes to the city for work. As the story progresses, the picturesque image of a man on a train from suburbia unravels and viewers observe the desolation of the characters within a meticulously constructed reality of the mid-century America. Despite the carefully crafted facade of domesticity and enviable lifestyle, Don's wife Betty is unfulfilled in motherhood and her loveless marriage. Simultaneously, amidst the turmoil of Don's and Betty's lives, other characters grapple with their own identity crises. Peggy Olson, a newcomer at Sterling Cooper agency, initially works as Donald's secretary but soon demonstrates an aptitude for copywriting. Her professional growth is challenged by an unwanted pregnancy, yet Peggy makes an unexpected choice and chooses to continue working on her professional success and rejects motherhood. As Peggy gains confidence and success, we observe how Don's constant infidelities and treatment of Betty increase her dissatisfaction with their marriage, motherhood, and their overall lifestyle. Despite their several serious confrontations, Betty lacks the agency to end their marriage which is further complicated by an unplanned pregnancy. However, their marriage reaches a breaking point when Betty discovers Don's true identity after which she remarries. As Don begins a new chapter as a single guy in the city, Betty still lives a life of domesticity and faces the challenges of being Don's ex-wife. On the other hand, Peggy begins to explore the alternative subgroups of the city and begins different relationships in her personal life, while slowly gaining confidence in the workplace Ultimately, dissatisfied by Don's working conditions, Peggy joins a rival firm. Don's second marriage introduces a new phase in his life. The beginning of hippie counterculture introduces the sexual revolution and drug use and these storylines become more

prevalent in the show's narrative. As the show progressively shifts into the stereotypical ideas of the 60s, the notions of consumerism and ethical dilemmas of advertising are more openly discussed. Betty experiences a weight gain, which is mostly psychosomatic but also related to cancerous growth which prompts her to go back to school and rethink the purpose of her life. The show culminates with the creation of a new advertising agency, Sterling Cooper & Partners, as the characters undergo personal transformations, seeking redemption and growth. The final season closes with Don Draper experiencing an emotional breakthrough during a meditation retreat, leading to a profound realization and the creation of the iconic "Hilltop" Coca-Cola commercial.

Mad Men offers the viewers a riveting journey of its characters and America, as it discusses identity, materialism, and change. Change is both external and internal, and very often the significant shifts within characters or their relationships and careers, are linked to the external changes within the American society. "Never a documentary, *Mad Men* instead tells stories set in the 1960s that appeal to those who never actually lived through or remember that era, stories that illuminate our continuing political dilemmas of freedom, identity, inclusion, consumption, and authenticity" (Beail and Goren 4). Despite the extreme steps to make the show as realistic and historically accurate as possible, the show uses history primarily as the kaleidoscope of change. The 1960s were a time of significant technological advances, as well as the women's rights movements, civil rights movement and subsequently, the changes within the American values. "This decade—in which the entire arc of *Mad Men* unfolds—is important because of the way these changes contribute to the refounding myths of the United States, myths that are more inclusive and democratic, yet more violent and disruptive as well" (Beail and Goren 7). From its first season until its last, we observe how characters either completely reject the old values of the stereotypical American dream or embrace them. The show underscores

that those characters who resist learning and changing find themselves increasingly out of sync with the evolving world, ultimately unable to participate in shaping of the future.

The show prominently features the creative side of the advertising business and offers a glimpse of how reality affects advertising and how advertising affects reality. Therefore, advertising serves as the means of discussing the fast-growing consumer culture of the 1950s and 1960s which became prevalent after World War II and the mass-increased spending of the American people. The show frequently discusses the advertising agencies' significant manipulation of desires and subsequently, the shaping of societal values and aspirations. Furthermore, the show presents the complex ethical dilemmas faced by the characters as they seek to sell products and services while questioning the ethics of their profession.

3. MAD MEN AND MAD WOMEN

Given that *Mad Men* is primarily set in 1960s New York, it serves as an in-depth exploration of the broader societal changes that shaped America. With its provocative characters and storylines intertwined with significant American and world events, the show captures the complexities of an era marked by civil rights activism and the feminist movement, and it offers viewers a thought-provoking and immersive glimpse into the fast-changing cultural landscape of the time. "While politics and race are themes in the series, the most sustained and interesting social commentary to be found in *Mad Men* is around questions of gender (and broader aspects of sexual identity)" (Craig 11). *Mad Men* showcases the patriarchal reality of mid-century America and at first, does not read as a feminist show. The protagonist, Don Draper is a drinking, smoking serial cheater, who works in an extremely misogynistic environment. The viewer may initially be put off by the very present sexist language and the positioning of women in the office, who are a target group for a large portion of the products Sterling Cooper (and its many other iterations) advertises.

"The gender politics of the series offer nuanced examination, not only of men and women's changing power dynamics, but also of the very construction of femininity. Through the advertising agency, we see how products are used to construct very particular notions of femininity, challenging the ideology of a natural or essential womanhood" (Beail and Goren 10).

Nevertheless, some argue that despite a very realistic portrayal of the politically incorrect times, *Mad Men* offers an objective perspective of America's troubled past and gives the viewer a chance to observe it from a modern perspective. "Engaging directly with the complex interrelationship between post-war women's professional and sexual freedoms, Mad Men stages a dialogue between feminism and postfeminism that takes place in a pre-feminist world made glamorous by the postfeminist mystique." (Munford and Waters 55). While the title *Mad*

Men might imply a narrative predominantly revolving around male figures, the show features an intriguing presence of female characters with substantial narratives extending beyond the focal point of male protagonists.

"The various women in Don Draper's life—including his two wives, Betty and Megan; his daughter, Sally; those various women with whom he has transitory sexual relations, Midge, Rachel, Suzanne, Joy, Shelly, Allison, Alice, Doris, Bethany, Candace, Faye, Sylvia, Bobbie, and Diana; and his colleagues, Joan and Peggy—all speak to the place of women in American society and the profound changes affecting their place in the mid-twentieth century" (Craig 11).

The show offers a multifaceted portrayal of women that reflects the evolving roles, challenges, and aspirations of women of the period. In the show, we encounter female characters that are complex and diverse, such as Betty Draper, Joan Holloway, Peggy Olson, Sally and Megan Draper, and each of them navigates a society characterized by deeply ingrained gender norms, sexism, and limited opportunities. Marghitu argues that seasons four to six, which are set in the mid to late '60s, coinciding with the Second wave of feminism, shifted the narrative for female characters. The female experience is no longer centred on the idea of Betty's housewife experience but now it follows the female experience in the workplace. While Don's character is experiencing downfall, these stories reflect the times when white male privilege is challenged. "(…) *Mad Men* is also rare in the canon of feminist television criticism because it is not explicitly female-centred or geared toward female audiences. *Mad Men* thus exposes feminist themes to an audience that may not be inherently interested in women's rights" (Marghitu 91).

Joan Holloway' encapsulates the complexities of a woman navigating a career and societal expectations for women and explores the juxtaposition of power and objectification. Peggy serves as the viewer's proxy to the Sterling Cooper world explained by the irreplaceable and all-knowing Joan. She embodies feminine and masculine attitudes and combines her

sexuality and beauty with professionalism and firmness. Joan encapsulates the framework of masquerade proposed by Joan Reverie in her "Womanliness as a Masquerade" paper, where she displays a stereotypical model of femininity and uses her charm and flirtation as a means of succeeding. Through her introductory speech to Peggy, we begin to understand Joan's values and goals, which are probably a result of the period's expectations and social norms. Joan suggests to Peggy to get on the pill like her which informs viewers that the recent availability of birth control allowed women sexual liberty and to remain in the workforce. Furthermore, within Joan's storyline, we discuss the availability of abortion which she performed twice before becoming a mother. Despite initial traditional attitudes, Joan secretly strives to excel in her professional and private life. Furthermore, like Betty, Joan is very concerned about her appearance and projecting an enviable image to those around her. Even her last name (Holloway) suggests that Joan values superficial matters over intrinsic values and subsequently actual fulfilment. *Mad Men* often uses dialogue as a means of significant foreshadowing for the character's arc. When Peggy gets promoted to junior copywriter in "The Wheel" (44:14), Joan suggests that people only realise how limited their goals are after they get what they want. This sentence encapsulates many inspiring characters within the *Mad Men*, but coming from Joan herself it bears even more significance. As she marries and starts to understand that her married life is not as idyllic as she imagined, her attitude also changes (coincidentally, she also loses her maiden name). As Joan's power and position in the firm grow, she struggles to generate professional attitudes from clients and colleagues while maintaining a feminine look. She experiences sexism from men and women and her appearance is the topic of conversation among recurring characters and guests, despite Joan displaying great professionalism. Peggy suggests to Joan that she cannot look the way she does and expect people to take her seriously in "*Severance"*. However, Joan does not divorce from her body in the same manner as Peggy did in season 1, but rather chooses to embrace her physical appearance and her business savvy,

displaying that women can be both feminine and professional. During the company's attempt to gain Jaguar as their car, Joan is offered a partnership if she spends a night with the client. Joan is disgusted by the proposal but sees it as an opportunity as a unique opportunity for professional growth. This choice does secure Joan a partnership position but comes at a personal cost where other partners and colleagues consider her partnership less worthy. The show offers the viewers a satisfying end for Joan, as she opens a new business, and works as a single mom under her maiden and married name. Joan's story offers an interesting display of a woman who begins her story with an old-fashioned goal for her personal and professional life due to preconceived notions formed by society yet manages to change with the times and consider a significant life trajectory.

Following a tumultuous divorce from Betty, Don begins a relationship with his secretary Megan and quickly marries her, as the psychologist Doctor Faye Miller predicted. Megan is smart, beautiful, and most notably, young. Much like Betty, to Don she serves as the means of projecting a certain kind of image about himself. Whereas Betty was a part of the idyllic-suburban life with children and a beautiful wife, Megan is Don's way to stay young and relevant in the fast-evolving youth culture. Megan is modern and liberated, and she is Don's chance for a fresh start while adopting a contemporary mindset. She quickly gets promoted from his secretary to copywriter, which undermines Peggy's struggles to achieve the same position. Don and Megan are Sterling Cooper's power couple until Megan rejects advertising (and symbolically, Don) and delves into acting. However, Megan struggles in her new career and becomes more reliant on Don as the main provider which she abhors because she does not want a domestic role. Megan's character explores the complexities of ambition vs. capability, and how they affect her initial youthful idealism which Don fell in love with. Despite being an inspiring representation of the potential of youth culture, Megan ultimately becomes a bitter ex-wife with no real agency over her career.

Peggy Olson is the show's female lead and serves as the deuteragonist or even a secret protagonist. The storyline and characters are introduced as we follow Peggy's first day at Sterling Cooper advertising agency. "The series' feminist potential is, nonetheless, explored through the characterization of Peggy, who exemplifies the changing figure of the working girl in the especially hostile environment of the advertising industry – both as a place of work and a site for articulating restrictive definitions of femininity" (Munford and Waters 57). Furthermore, Peggy's storyline is more dynamic than Don's since she experiences the most significant transformation in both her personal and professional life. In the realm of characters, Don emerges as the captivating antihero, drawing viewers into his flawed yet fascinating journey, while Peggy shines as an inspiration of success through hard work and despite initial setbacks. Her storyline encapsulates the shifts in the 1960s workplace gender roles and breakthrough advances for women's rights. However, Peggy should not be perceived as a black-and-white heroine of feminism but as a three-dimensional character who is finding herself in both her professional and personal life. Her feminist prowess is limited by her catholic upbringing, which is a significant storyline, especially in the first two seasons, as well as the lack of role models. She often imitates her colleagues, especially male colleagues, especially Don, which ultimately hinders her private and work life. Ultimately, her story aligns with the overall theme of identity exploration while also serving as a means of exploring significant shifts in mid-century gender roles and the experience of working women.

On the other hand, Betty Draper (later Francis) is often unfavourably perceived by viewers, usually perceived as a passive housewife with childish impulses and a complete lack of agency over her life. Don's first wife, Betty, is a stunning and icy blonde, a woman who seemingly has it all – beauty, a wealthy and successful husband, a house in the suburbs and two children – one of each. From the moment Betty's character is introduced in the last few minutes of the show's pilot "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes" as a shocking twist in Don's domestic life, the

viewer observes her tragic story. Betty's appearance comes as a shocking cliffhanger and an amazing storytelling device for both Don's character and Betty's. Despite the limited screen time, the viewer is immediately introduced to the significance Betty plays in Don's life, and, subsequently how her role in his life shapes her character. The character of the housewife Betty Draper seemingly serves as an opposition to the more postfeminist portrayals of other characters. "So much changes over the course of the 1960s, but Betty's life does not." (Spiro and Lawler 60). However, as previously mentioned, the show defies categorizing its characters in black-and-white, right-or-wrong, feminist-or-antifeminist stances but rather offers nuances portrayals of lifelike individuals shaped by different experiences. Betty's character explores the show's central theme of identity exploration while also discussing the consequences of illusions perpetuated by the advertising world.

4. BETTY DRAPER'S CHARACTER ANALYSIS

"You are a house cat. You're very important and have little to do." ("The Fog" 25:50).

Few characters in the history of TV created such odds among viewers as Betty Draper – a beautiful, cold, narcissistic housewife with an incline to maintain a perfect image of her life, similar to those her husband produces in advertisements. Portrayed by January Jones, Betty Draper is a study of contrasts, narcissism, femininity, and domesticity. "We all know from Betty Friedan and countless novels that the life of an educated housewife can be frustrating and even miserable, but *Mad Men* forced us to watch, season by season, Betty Draper/Francis get angrier and more sullen, more alienated from her children and difficult with her husband. (Spiro and Lawler 59). From the moment we are introduced to Betty we begin to understand her tragic faith – she serves as an amazing plot twist in the first episode of the show. After a day of living his bachelor life in the city, the mysterious Don sits on the train, enters a home, and sees his stunning blonde wife in bed who patiently waits for him. Her appearance serves as a poignant reminder that everything is not as it seems and ties to the show's theme of authenticity and deception.

Betty's character is the archetype of the 1950s and 1960s housewife, trapped within suburbia. She is a wife of a successful businessman who works in the city while she takes care of their children in their suburban home. Betty's beauty is often the subject of conversation in the show; she and Don are even compared to a wedding-topping couple. "Betty is the most substantial female character with whom Don has a sexual relationship through the first seasons of *Mad Men,* and she returns in a pivotal role at the end of the series. In some ways, Betty is a perfect analogue of Don. Beautiful and vain, she is a product of her time. Her horizons are circumscribed by the rules of gender" (Craig 16). However,

beneath the picture-perfect exterior, is a deeply unhappy woman. Betty struggles with the numbness in her fingers, which is a psychosomatic response to the dissatisfaction she feels in her life. Don suggests that Betty should seek psychological help because of the issue. "Women at that time were conceptualized by (male) doctors as purely emotional – as lacking the rational skills of men and hence descending into hysterical fits. That this is expressed through Betty's numb hands is no coincidence: it places the emotionality into women's bodies and emphasizes that women's primary means of expression is precisely through their bodies. At the same time, it pathologizes Betty and her emotionality as her body bears the medical signs of her unstable/unhappy mental state" (Weissmann 96). With Betty's sessions, we begin to understand the complexities of Betty's struggles. She had an extremely complex relationship with her mother, and despite her death, we understand that she still strongly influences Betty's self-image. Furthermore, Betty's relationship with her mother also influenced her own attitudes toward raising her own children, particularly her daughter Sally. Although Betty had a difficult relationship with her mother, she still appreciated her and considered her wise and beautiful. Betty has a form of an eating disorder, probably influenced by not only her mother but also the society and advertising of the time. The fact that Betty rarely eats is even referenced by children, especially during the early seasons. After she remarries, Betty experiences significant weight gain which affects her mental health and her self-image.

"Again, Betty seems trapped in her domestic setting, even if this is with a different husband, and she appears similarly unhappy and resentful, though much of her anger still seems directed at Don. Her means of regaining control is again through the body: she joins a Weight Watchers class and monitors her bodily functions obsessively" (Weissmann 96).

To Betty, losing her figure means losing an important part of her identity. In episode 9, season 1, titled "Shoot", during one of her psychotherapy sessions, Betty mentioned that

her mother wanted her to be beautiful so she could find a husband. This statement provides not only the background for Betty's character but also the reality of many women during the time period where their purpose in life was defined by prospects of marriage. Due to a lack of intrinsic validation and her upbringing, Betty seeks external validation, especially from men and her husband. Her dependence on male attention becomes the basis of her self-esteem. Her dependence highlights the dominant cultural message of the era—women's worth is directly related to men, more specifically to obtain and please a man who would in turn provide for her. The importance of male approval displays the dangers of societal norms which affect a woman's sense of self and subsequently, make her lose agency over her life.

An important aspect of Betty Draper's character is wrapped in her identity as a mother. Behind the carefully curated façade of a perfect mother is a woman who struggles to raise children. Betty visibly feels discontent with her children and lacks the warmth to truly connect with her children and nurture them. She constantly undermines their feelings and dismisses their emotions as unimportant. Her actions and attitudes are a subversion of the familiar image of the idealized perfect mother, which was often used as a marketing ploy for selling products. "(…) Betty is caught up in an inescapable tension as she lives the contradictions of her times, which situate her between first and second wave feminism and as both victim and victimizer. However, a deeper analysis reveals that what looks like a contradictory characterization is instead a coherent portrait of privilege." (Guillem 290) Constantly, Betty's actions reflect a disinterested mother who seemingly cares very little about her children's wellbeing and safety, like the time she is more concerned about Sally's possible scar than a serious injury because a scar would affect her prospects of finding a good husband. Furthermore, she continuously threatens her children with serious physical violence "I will cut your fingers off" ("The Chrysanthemum and the Sword" 22:26).

Guillem further argues that throughout her storyline, Betty constantly embodies qualities that are childish, vindictive, and negligent while parenting her children or being around other children. Guillem believes that these behaviours and responses are used as a means of escaping the role of the victim that she is in the patriarchal society but also that the perception of her behaviour is the display of Don's privilege. Therefore, in the instances where her behaviour is considered bad or when she is considered a bad mother, Betty is essentially being critiqued from a patriarchal standpoint where the mother's parenting is judged more harshly due to the existing power dynamics between parents. (290). She finds challenging to bond with and understand her children and even complains to Don when he leaves, she is outnumbered. Don considers her job to be solely the financial responsibility, therefore Betty cannot share the struggles of raising children with anyone ("Three Sundays" 42:22). However, Betty understands the importance of motherhood for her identity and loves to use her children as a part of her social success despite her mixed feelings about them. Betty and the children are Don's accessories, much like Don and the children are to Betty. Her children are a part of the product she and Don were taught to aspire to, but ultimately it became a commodity which does not fulfil either of them. However, the difference is that Don manages to step away from the fantasized world of suburbia and fatherhood while Betty cannot.

4.1. Suburbia and the Feminine Mystique

"Betty is intertwined with the objects of the house and the car throughout the series' first two seasons. Women's associations with houses and the domestic realm is a well-established literary and cultural trope that represents a historical reality of women's space. Throughout *Mad Men*, the Drapers' house becomes synonymous and entwined with Bett y: the domestic realm is where Betty is both safe and entrapped" (Davidson 138).

Betty's role as a quintessential housewife and a mother does not leave room for personal growth and fulfilment. This is displayed in many sequences of mundane household chores she does when she and Don are distanced. Her days are filled but, unlike Don, she does not possess time, space, and agency to seek out self-expression. Her social circle consists of other housewives and mothers, which perpetuate the ideology of domestic femininity and subsequently, reject women who do participate in that lifestyle. When Helen Bishop comes to live in their neighbourhood, a divorced mom of a boy and a girl, Betty's friends reject and judge her. Betty's friend Francine considers her routine walks "selfish" ("Red in the Face" 38:24) and displays an antagonistic attitude toward her choices and lifestyle. She is considered a bad mother because she deprives her children of a two-parent home and works for a living. It is evident that women in Betty's circle only consider one form of motherhood as worthy, regardless of their shortcomings as parents. Helen Bishop contradicts the societal expectations of motherhood and serves as an example of a woman who decided to break the mould of a perfect housewife and mother and instead has agency over her own life, and it is suggested that Betty secretly envies her.

"According to Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique*, work is 'the key to the problem that has no name'. 'The identity crisis of American women', she argues, 'began a century ago, as more and more of the work important to the world, more and more of the work that used their human abilities and through which they were able to find self-realization, was taken from them' (291). Work, then, represents 'the right to a new, fully human identity' (292), puncturing the mystique of 'feminine fulfilment' that is predicated on a kind of forfeiting of self. Friedan laments that the 'daughters and granddaughters' of feminists have 'been deceived' or have 'deceived themselves, into clinging to the outgrown, childlike femininity of "Occupation: housewife" (Munford and Waters 42).

Betty Draper's character often displays traits which are considered childish and immature. Her wish to display a perfect image of herself and her lifestyle often hinders her understanding of reality, as well as a display of petty behaviour towards her children, husband, and friends. Her passive-aggressive behaviour, snide comments and lack of agency further add to her childlike mindset. There are several factors which stunted Betty's personal growth, but ultimately, Betty is a product of the societal conditions in which she was brought up. She came from a wealthy family and was raised to become a housewife; she had little time between living in her parents' home and living with Don. Furthermore, Betty's feelings and struggles were often dismissed, ultimately, leading to a lack of deeper understanding of complex human emotions and stunting her personal growth and maturing. Her childish behaviour is also perpetuated by the growth of consumer culture, which eternalized instant gratification among consumers, especially women. In the instances where Don senses Betty's dissatisfaction, he often "soothes" her with luxurious experiences or material gifts, which is similar to the ways children are soothed. Interestingly, Betty feels very sympathetic towards Glen Bishop, a neighbour's child, who she feels is neglected by those who are supposed to take care of him. It mirrors her frustrations and feelings of neglect by Don, who, she feels, needs to take care of her ("New Amsterdam 35:38).

Betty's experiences and struggles, prompted by various factors such as her upbringing, her marriage, and societal norms, greatly influenced her agency over her sexuality. Her character epitomizes the idea of a mother and a housewife. This role requires Betty to take care of her children, house, and husband, but leave a limited amount of time to pursue her own desires and explore her sexuality. Her identity of an ideal is so important to her that she is consumed by a requirement to project an image of elegance and control, and within this image, she develops a performed femininity. This is directly a product of the expectations of her husband, her mother and society of the 1960s. Performed femininity

does not directly imply that Betty is not a sexual person. During the course of the show, Betty often initiates sex with both of her husbands, fantasizes about the air conditioning salesman, and even has a one-night stand in the bar. However, Betty is often frustrated by the lack of sexual desire from Don. Despite being a very sexual person himself, Don often struggles to reciprocate sexual desires towards Betty. We could argue that Don's lack of desire is not only a consequence of his many extramarital affairs but also his internalized idea of Betty as a mother. Don's issues with Madonna-whore complex are a very prevalent issue in his sexual encounters. Because Betty is a mother of his two, and later three children, Don struggles to perceive her in a more sexual light, when he can seek out that role elsewhere. Due to a lack of sexual interest from her husband, Betty is very frustrated. She considers her beauty and her looks as her "job" because, as she reveals to Francine after her appointment with her therapists, "As long as men look at me like that, I'm earning my keep" ("Red in the Face" 39:49). This frustration manifests itself into day-drinking, smoking and general dissatisfaction with her life, while still maintaining an image of a desirable and enviable wife and mother to her friends and neighbours.

A substantial amount of Betty Draper's story is located within the confines of suburbia. Suburbia represents a special "The emphasis on producing a whole world of satisfaction, amusement, and inventiveness within the nuclear family had no precedents." (Coontz ch.2). Furthermore, Coontz argues that under the superficial resurgence of domesticity and traditional gender roles mirroring Victorian times, there is a profound reconfiguration of family values and the relationships between men and women. For women, this transformation entailed a shift away from the moral dimensions of domestic life towards a greater emphasis on personal service. In the 19th century, middle-class women readily delegated household chores to servants, whereas women of the 1950s, spanning various social classes, voluntarily generated more tasks at home and experienced

guilt if they didn't manage everything on their own. Surprisingly, despite the introduction of frozen food and pre-prepared meals and technology intended for minimising work women in the 1950s actually devoted more time to housework and childcare responsibilities nearly doubled compared to the 1920s. There was a trend among women in the mid to late 1950s that femininity could be displayed through practices of maintaining a household. (chapter 2). We could see the trends and imitatating of these traditional gender roles within the show when Sally is celebrating a birthday in "Marriage of Figaro" and the children are acting out adult conversations and mimicking their parents' dynamics. Helen Bishop, the neighbourhood divorcee, notes to Don that the parents of the children are "interesting" and Don points out to children playing house, revealing the hidden realities of these picture-perfect families and replies: "Same crowd out here", suggesting that their reality is a product of perpetuating wholesome suburban family values without actually living them. Lang argues that the suburban home appears virtually hyper-normal, and, juxtaposed with lives lived abnormally and where lying is the standard, it creates a contrast and heightens the dramatic effect. This subsequently evokes the associated ideas and regular tropes related to fiction and films located in suburbia, where suburbia offers a utopian vision, destroyed by the dysfunctionality of the family dynamics and ultimately becomes a dystopian image (70). According to Ream, *Mad Men* creator Matthew Weiner often credits Betty Friedan's framework in *The Feminine Mystique* as a major inspiration for her namesake Betty's arc. *The Feminine Mystique* is a seminal work that exposed the limitations and discontentment experienced by women in the mid-20th century due to societal expectations. It challenged the patriarchal ideas of the time and the concept of femininity according to which the women's fulfilment should be motherhood and homemaking and subsequently advocating for a serious change in the cultural landscape.

> "In the fifteen years after World War II, this mystique of feminine fulfillment became the cherished and self-perpetuating core of contemporary American culture. Millions of women lived their lives in the image of those pretty pictures of the American suburban housewife, kissing their husbands goodbye in front of the picture window, depositing their stationwagons full of children at school, and smiling as they ran the new electric waxer over the spotless kitchen floor." (Friedan, chapter 2).

The publication of the book coincides with prosperity in the 1960s after World War 2 when America glorified traditional gender roles and confined women to the role of homemakers. In her groundbreaking work, Friedan discusses "the problem that has no name" in which she describes the occurrences among countless women in the 1950s and early 1960s. The women experienced a deep sense of discontent and emptiness in their lives, despite having achieved success by societal expectations, which at the time entailed becoming a mother and devoting time to being good wife and housewife. The issue with "the problem that has no name" was that it was vague and difficult to define because it was not linked to any external and tangible factors like financial difficulties or health issues, but it was a pervasive feeling of discontent. Friedan highlighted the factors of cultural and societal pressures on women to adhere to their roles as homemakers; mothers and wives and achieve the peak of feminine achievement with their "feminine mystique". Whereas the deviation from this path was seen as insubordinate and ungrateful. Friedan points out the importance of the American culture and the significant contribution of advertising in creating the societal standard for women that was shallow and unfulfilling for women, especially for women whose education and aspirations did not align. Furthermore, Friedan discusses the significant idealization of suburban life and the common portrayal of suburbia as the epitome of American life, and subsequently, a significant part of the Dream. The suburbia, therefore, offers a picturesque setting for families but has a strong sense of conformity and leads to a cult of domesticity. Domesticity and preconceived

roles for women ultimately lead to a sense of emptiness, dissatisfaction, isolation, and a lack of intellectual and emotional stimulation. The focus on maintaining the perfect home and family left little room for personal growth or self-discovery. Finally, Friedan calls for a change within the society which strongly pushes the imagery of the feminine mystique. “We need a drastic reshaping of the cultural image of femininity that will permit women to reach maturity, identity, completeness of self, without conflict with sexual fulfilment” (Friedan ch. 14).

Betty Draper, later Francis, is one of the most tragic storylines of *Mad Men.* Deeply flawed, sometimes cruel and childish, Betty is a character whose story is a reminder of Friedan’s call to action. As her namesake discussed in her framework, Betty is a deeply unhappy person, who succumbed to societal expectations and messaging about what her purpose and ambitions should be. Betty is a product of her time; she has grown up with parents who only saw her value within her beauty. This ideology has persisted with Betty, and we can see the results of her ideology through her constant insecurity about her appearance and need for validation from men.

5.PEGGY OLSON'S CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Peggy Olson is a central figure of *Mad Men,* and her character arc could be examined through multiple lenses; professional growth and gender identity within the evolving socio-cultural backdrop of the 1960s. From the perspective of feminism, we can observe how Peggy's story exhibits themes of gender, ambition, and societal change, making her one of the most compelling and interesting characters in television history. Portrayed by actress Elisabeth Moss, Peggy is a character with the most transformative journeys within the show. Goren argues that while Don Draper and Jay Gatsby share so many similarities, the role of the hero of *Mad Men,* in terms of the great American novel, would more probably be given to Peggy Olson. Her rise from the secretarial pool into the creative position of a copywriter was an essential part of understanding the themes of the series, similar to Nick Caraway's part in understanding the themes and ideas of *The Great Gatsby*. While Don is obviously the centre of the dramatic story, the viewers are inclined to engage with Peggy's storyline because she is a character who manages to acclimate to social, political, and cultural changes. Moreover, while Don and Peggy both have big secrets in their past, Peggy is much more successful at letting go, while her mentor Don is riddled with guilt (39).

Through the story of Peggy Olson, the show explores the complex dynamic of working women during the fast-changing 1960s in America and presents the challenges for women in the workplace. Peggy Olson's journey is emblematic of the era's changing dynamics for women in the workplace. In the beginning, Peggy starts a job as Donald Draper's secretary, and through her point of view, we observe the inner workings of Sterling Cooper's advertising agency." With Peggy's move from the secretarial pool to a position as a copywriter, and finally as a "creative" in her own right, Olson's storyline and her own trajectory pull at the audience, as we watch her negotiate both her professional and her personal lives in the context of changing gender roles within American society in the 1960s." (Beail and Goren 21) Peggy is a fast learner but initially

struggles to adjust to life in a male-dominated and extremely sexist workplace. She unintentionally displays a talent for copywriting and slowly begins to display ambition and capacity for something more than just secretarial duties. This transition is a pivotal moment not only in her career but also in her personal life and begins her journey of breaking societal norms and expectations. When Peggy Olson enters the workplace, she is initially bombarded by traditional ideologies and expectations for women and herself. On her first day, during her tour around the office, Joan suggests that Peggy's ultimate goal is to find a husband and move to the suburbs ("Smoke Gets in Your Eyes" 8:40). The campaigning for women to consider marriage and family in the suburbs as the ultimate purpose is surrounding her through the advertising in her workplace. A significant amount of advertising was promoting products as the means of becoming the perfect traditional housewife. "Ironically, Peggy excels at creating and tapping into representations of femininity, "woman," and motherhood that contribute to the gender division, sexism, and parental roles of post-war/pre-feminist America" (Davidson 149). However, the constant messaging from her female and male colleagues about her appearance and life purpose greatly affects Peggy. However, instead of conforming to those ideologies, Peggy seeks out a path of her own. She focuses on excelling in her job and showcases her talent as a copywriter. However, her male colleagues consider her success as not of her own merit, but as a product of a sexual relationship with her boss, Don. She struggles with unwanted attention and sexually abusive colleagues. She completely detaches from her body when she experiences advances and sexist comments and begins to gain weight. The weight gain is actually related to her pregnancy, and the baby fathered by her colleague Pete is given away. Peggy's choice to give away the baby and not become a single mother (or force Pete to marry here) ultimately signifies that she values her professional life and success and does not want to jeopardise it, given that she was just promoted to a copywriter when she went into labour in "The Wheel".

In the context of the show's era, Peggy's rejection of motherhood serves as a powerful representation of the struggle women face when choosing between motherhood and career. These issues are still very common today, but especially during the 1950s and 1960s when societal norms and gender expectations often showcased being a mother as an impediment to a woman's professional success. "Peggy Olson, the professional, city-dwelling working girl has assumed a definite and defining position in the postfeminist landscape, suggesting that a 'woman's place' is no longer in the home but, rather, in the midst of the multifarious consumer pleasures of the public sphere" (Munford and Waters 14). Throughout Peggy's rise from the secretarial pool to a junior copywriter, we can see that Peggy enjoys working and finds true fulfilment in growing creatively and professionally, whereas other characters struggle to find fulfilment despite achieving professional and personal success by societal standards. "Individuality is constrained by social identity which includes sexuality, but women can create elements of their identities as well, as Peggy Olson does, and in *Mad Men* this self-construction gives women greater control, freedom, and power " (Josephson 266).

"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." (Marghitu 93).

5.1 The new girl

Peggy's ambition is a central driving force in her character. While initially shy and timid, Peggy grows significantly as a character and begins to discover her value in her personal and professional life. Peggy's ambition is a source of conflict between her and her male colleagues and supervisors, who struggle with accepting her prowess and capability. Her perseverance in pursuing her professional goals reflects the broader cultural shifts of the 1960s, as women began

to challenge traditional gender roles and demand greater autonomy in their careers. We understand that Peggy greatly benefits from changes in the cultural landscape and learns how to use them to her own benefit. During her rise from Don's secretary to a copywriter, Peggy faces sexism, harassment, and dismissive attitudes from her male counterparts. Her journey highlights the endemic gender bias that permeated workplaces during the 1960s and serves as a microcosm of the larger struggles faced by women seeking to break into male-dominated industries. Peggy's experiences shed light on the societal barriers women had to confront and dismantle during this period. Olson's character embodies feminist themes that resonate with the evolving feminist movement of the 1960s. Her ambition, independence and personal agency parallel the changes within the cultural landscape for women which was significantly asserting an opposite ideology for women. Her character highlights the tension between conservative and traditional gender roles and the new feminist ideas, which made Peggy a symbolic figure of the feminist movement of the 1960s. According to White, Peggy's professional rise in her workplace is a result of a mixture of luck and the intention of her colleagues and her boss, Don. In other words, some could argue that her promotion to the junior copywriter could have been only because Don wanted to show his power over Pete. Even some other memorable feminist moments could have been a result of interference of male figures, such as her entrance into McCann Ericson with Cooper's sensual and explicit art ("Lost Horizon, 44:22) Roger Sterling gives Peggy a push when she considers making men feel at ease, and suggests that showing her confidence and bringing the art would be a very powerful move, cementing her status in the office. Therefore, White argues that considering Peggy a (post)feminist character greatly excludes important plot points, (White 81)

Olson's relationship with other women provides an interesting insight into women and the multifaceted female experiences of the era. Her relationship with Joan Holloway, who initially possesses a more traditionalist mindset, showcases the tension between different

attitudes to navigating the patriarchal world and sexist workplace. Despite differences in their approaches, Joan and Peggy are under the same oppressive structure, and they learn to grapple with them in varied ways. Showing their relationship and different dynamics introduces broader feminist discourse about the challenges of being a woman in a male-dominated workplace, and how a woman can achieve her goals in that environment. During the early seasons, Peggy struggled to gain respect and opportunity when working with male copywriters. The meetings took place in establishments where women were not welcome, and she would often times be left out of conversation. When working on an account for Playtex (2.6.), Joan suggests that Peggy's is not feminine enough, therefor she "refashions herself in a low-cut blue dress and bright red lipstick, and goes to the strip club where the account executives and Playtex clients are meeting" (Munford and Waters 60). This masquerade, similar to that often fashioned by Joan, gives Peggy an opportunity to become a part of the conversation but the real prowess is contingent on the male gaze, therefore there is no real agency over herself.

Symbolically nicknamed "the new girl" during the early first season, Peggy is truly a pioneer for a new path for women in the *Mad Men* world. When the copywriters are trying to come up with a new campaign for a brassiere client Maidenform Peggy's male colleagues pitch an idea that the female garment is for male pleasure and that every woman fits into two existing archetypes: a Jackie or a Marylin. "Playing with the age-old virgin/whore dichotomy" (Munford and Waters 57) the men believe that women desperately want to be both despite being one or the other. However, when Peggy asks them which one is she, the men cannot position her. "Peggy becomes a figure of anxiety for both the ad men and the female secretaries because she refuses to submit herself to the designated scripts of femininity authorized by Madison Avenue (..)" (Munford and Waters 58). Peggy represents a woman who broke out of the mould society wanted her to fit in; to become domesticated, silent, and probably unhappy within her role, or to become a woman masquerading hyper femininity to get what she wants. Her rejection of

motherhood, hyper-femininity and social expectations greatly helped her in her self-realization journey and becoming a businesswoman. Peggy Olson serves as a character who truly represents modernity. Unlike other characters who are set in their ways and struggle to keep up with the cultural changes, she manages to seek new opportunities for personal and professional growth. *Flamarique* believes that the show portrays the campaigners of modernity as those who have successfully separated from their origins and who could dedicate themselves to their professional lives. *Flamarique* argues that Peggy's ability to adapt to a new professional environment has enabled her to acquire a job that is appropriate to her ability and ambition (104). We could also argue that, whereas Don is riddled with emotional trauma and the feeling of an impostor, Peggy has not completely rejected her personal identity. She has learned to adapt and improve and let go of things that have obstructed her and does not fully reject her catholic upbringing but learns to embrace it in her work, e.g., when she is working on the popsicle account in season 2, episode 12, titled "The Mountain King". The success of the religious ad gives Peggy leverage to obtain her own office. We could argue that Peggy's growth and development, learning to overcome obstacles and create a new space for herself within the American Dream, confirms that Peggy is a secret protagonist of *Mad Men*. Her acceptance of modernity and traditional gender values serves as a s reminder of the need to challenge the existing ideologies and limitations placed by society.

6. *MAD MEN* AND REFRAMING OF THE AMERICAN DREAM

The concept of the American Dream has been a part of the American culture since it was popularized by James Truslow Adams in 1931. Since then, it has served as a principle for the American people, denoting that every man or woman will have equal opportunity for success and prosperity through hard work. (Wills, 2015). *Mad Men* offers an exploration of the concept, and it discusses how it transformed and changed through time. The show explored the transformative nature of American society and the complexity of the notion of the American Dream. With its historical setting in the 1960s, the show initially presents an idyllic time in American history, where its characters embody the traditional sense of the Dream. Don Draper epitomizes this ideal, because he is a successful ad executive, and is a part of the affluent suburban family man, which was the vision of the Dream in post-war culture. The reframing of the Dream coincided with the growing suburban culture and consumerism, so the American Dream, especially in the early 1960s, entailed upward mobility, material accumulation and conformity. Even Pete references the notion while talking to the elevator operator; "The idea is that everyone is going to have a house, a car, a television—the American Dream." ("The Fog"). Therefore, it was suggested that happiness and fulfilment could be achieved through adherence to societal norms and obtaining wealth. The advances in technology and advertising further amplified the mass consumerism of the American people which is an important aspect of the American Dream.

The two of the most important women in Don's life, Betty and Peggy, hold two extremely juxtaposing positions of female identity. Betty's idea of femininity is greatly shaped by the ideals passed on by her mother and fossilized by neighbours, friends, and advertisements. Betty is a product of a time when the idea of domesticated femininity was sold like a product to young women. This domestic femininity involved having children, maintaining physical

appearance, keeping a perfect household, and pleasing their husbands. This concept pushed the ideal of perfect femininity as an aspiration all women should strive for if they want to be happy. During his famous Carousel pitch, Don says that advertising is based solely on the idea of happiness, therefore the idea of domestic femineity has been presented as a Dream for women and the fulfilment of the Dream the woman would be happy. However, Betty Draper's story is a portrayal of the limitations of the American Dream targeted at women. Through Betty's psychosomatic numbing of the hands, struggles with raising children, and discussions with her friends and therapist, we see the disillusionment of the American Dream. Through her character, the sense of emptiness and discontent described in Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* is reflected. Her life is filled with material comfort, but she lacks emotional satisfaction. During a visit to her psychiatrist in season 1, episode 2 ("Ladies room" 40:36), Betty discusses the Bomb, which she notes is a common nightmare because not only does it represent fear of death but also the fear of Communism and the American way of life. Then she links it to her own feelings of dismissal from her mother. However, then, like a personal mantra that will bring her back to the delusions of the Dream, she utters "We're so lucky to be here". As the series progresses and as Betty is more challenged by her domestic environment, Don's gaslighting and infidelities, Betty displays more obvious signs of anger and discomfort with her situation which is juxtaposed with her incline for keeping appearances. In season 1, episode 9 titled "Shoot", she talks about meeting Don, marrying and moving to suburbia, with obvious discomfort with her life. "She wanted me to be beautiful so I could find a man. There's nothing wrong with that. But then what? Just sit and… smoke and…let it go till you're in the box?" ("Shoot" 13:25). She questions the concept of the Dream that is being sold to women and the lack of emotional fulfilment it entails. Despite embodying an idealized version of the American Dream, Betty's journey illustrates the challenges and discontent that can arise when individuals are pressured

to follow societal norms and expectations, subsequently becoming emotionally suppressed and not living authentically.

On the other hand, Peggy Olson's character offers the chance to redefine the American Dream for women in the 1960s. Despite the definition of the Dream offered by Adams in 1931, the Dream is attainable to a selected group of privileged individuals, and during the early 1960s professional success and personal and career development were only attainable to male Americans. Peggy's initial professional progress is hindered by the sexist attitudes of her colleagues and the lack of opportunities due to her sex. Despite her talent and dedication to her work, Peggy is constantly diminished at work and frequently left out of business meetings because they take place in clubs where she is not allowed to enter. Therefore, the ethos of the American Dream as imagined by Adams, is proven to be almost unattainable for women, because of the lack of equal opportunity for success. Furthermore, Peggy Olson's character challenges the performative nature of femininity to achieve success. When Peggy Olson enters the Sterling Cooper advertising agency she is immediately confronted by sexist comments and traditional aspirations for her. Joan suggests that "the right moves" will take her to suburbia where she will be married and happy and the viewer may be initially convinced that she will, like Betty, spend her days dissatisfied and performing domesticity. Peggy tries to mimic the single working girl, copying Joan's approach to femininity. Joan's character manages to use her appearance and sexuality as power, whereas Peggy struggles with the morality of weaponizing her physical appearance. Hansen argues that Joan's marriage is far from the fairytale she has told herself and others and that the brutal nature of her husband and power dynamics contradict the carefree personality and confidence she projects with her femininity. Furthermore, Joan considers her femininity as the means of acquiring her happiness. Although she has proven herself a professional, successful, and enthusiastic worker. "However ambivalent Joan is herself, the show puts us squarely on the side of women at work. And while

the women achingly imagine themselves in successful careers, Don Draper gives us ample time to consider the feelings of purposelessness, alienation, and emptiness that come from career success divorced from other, more personal kinds of satisfaction" (Hansen 146).

Peggy's attempts to perform like Joan's and Betty's of the world are unsuccessful and she begins to discover her own aspirations, discovering and creating a new path for herself that is more centred around professional success rather than obtaining a husband and family. She begins to emulate male figures, especially Don and becomes more assertive in the workplace, while also seeking a more authentic self. Peggy Olson's character demonstrates the challenges women faced in the 1960s in the workplace, where conforming to gender norms was usually required for career advancement. The initial performative nature reflects the societal constraints and expectations placed on women during that era, which was ultimately an important factor in her personal growth and empowerment as she slowly asserted her own identity and ambitions in the world of advertising. Ultimately, Peggy's authenticity and strong sense of self make her a better version of her male counterpart – Don. The modernity of her character and ability to be more open to the changes within the American cultural landscape aligns her more with the evolving and nuanced ideals of the modern American Dream, which prioritize personal fulfilment, authenticity, ethical values, and work-life balance.

6.1. Happiness as a commodity – fantasy and consumerism

Mad Men discusses the darker aspects of the characters' lives and offers an unpleasant reality of internal struggles, such as dysfunctional relationships, morality, inner demons, addictions and unfulfilled desires and lives. All the characters, and especially the anti-hero Don Draper, grapple with existential crises, which emphasizes the detachment between the promises of the consumer-reframed American Dream and the emotional emptiness it ultimately entails.

We could argue that Lacan's concept of the "big Other" could be used to analyse society and advertising in *Mad Men.* According to May-Hobbs the "Big Other" serves as a hypothetical model citizen, which makes individuals showcase or hide certain behaviours. "The big Other is part of Lacan's answer to a cluster of questions orbiting the psychoanalytic patient's desire, frustration, and guilt" (May-Hobbs). Therefore, we could argue that the concept of the „big Other" in Mad Men could represent society, that is, individuals are presenting themselves in a particular manner to please society. Each individual uses specific language and appearance to project the most desirable traits which are pleasing to others. It could be argued that, in a hyper-consumerist culture, everything is perceived as a commodity. Don and Betty's marriage could be perceived as a mutual means of becoming successful in the 1960s and achieving the ideal. Furthermore, the entire conceptualization of Don's copywriting position could be viewed as the „Big Other" which dictates the aspirations of individuals, as it simultaneously mirrors societal values and dictates them. We could argue that societal conformity requires the *Mad Men* characters to live out a fantasy discussed by Žižek. „Ideology is not a dreamlike illusion that we build to escape insupportable reality; in its basic dimension it is a fantasy-construction which serves as a support for our 'reality' itself: an 'illusion' which structures our effective, real social relations and thereby masks some insupportable, real, impossible kernel" (Žižek 45). We could argue that the characters perform a reality constructed on a fantasy created by society and advertising. The aesthetically appealing 1960s hide the repressed turmoil of individuals and American society as a whole. However, French argues that, despite living out a fantasy, Don's life is real, he has got tangible experiences and real commodities. "The fact that this fantasy/reality is essentially illusory does not render it any less "real". Indeed it is imperative that the fantasy construction does feel "real", for without a belief in his reality, Don's ontological security would fall apart" (French 562). Furthermore, French argues that The combined construction of fantasy, depicted in *Mad Men* presents the American Dream as a

middle-class existence based on patriarchal ideology and capitalism (563). The collective experience of such fantasy is perpetuated by dream-like advertisements linking emotions of love and happiness as a commodity sold with a tangible product. However, we could argue, given Betty and Don's dissatisfaction with their American Dream, that, the product does not meet the marketed standards. The notion of the American Dream at the beginning of the 1960s represents a constructed reality, based on the material fantasy that does not offer real satisfaction and fulfilling lives for individuals or the collective society.

As the series progresses more into the 1960s, the show portrays the shifting landscape of the American culture and subsequently the reframing of the Dream. It showcases the traditional ideals, advertised on television and billboards challenged by societal upheaval; the second wave of feminism, the civil rights movement, and the hippie counterculture. Peggy Olson, rising from the secretarial pool, struggles to gain a seat at the table among male colleagues who often blatantly disregard her work with sexist comments. The challenges of professional growth for a woman are explored despite the illusion of equal opportunity for all individuals. Furthermore, characters like Betty Draper, and later Francis, struggle to feel fulfilled in the roles society assigned to them. struggle to find a place within the changing world. The identity of a housewife no longer holds power as it previously did because American society greatly changed the individuals' aspirations. In the evolving cultural landscape, the notion of the American Dream evolved into a more complex concept entailing identity and the ability to change and grow with the times.. Josephson argues that *Mad Men* explores the idea that both men and women gain agency by becoming aware of the private aspects of their lives that are often considered taboo in public, such as sexuality and emotional vulnerability. Women must navigate societal expectations surrounding sexual identity, while men must learn to express their emotions despite the pressure to appear invulnerable. The show also suggests that masculinity is evolving, but the media still often portrays "real men" as physically powerful and

incapable of deep emotional reflection. Josephson also argues that emotional agency does not entail simply accepting or rejecting societal expectations, but that every decision reflects identity. Therefore, even the most personal decisions politicize individuals. Josephson argues that the show suggests that the feminist movement of the 60s is not a sudden reversal, but a continued development of values." In the examination of individual characters engaged in particular, private choices, we see the roots of new directions for women and men, and in contemporary society, we see the continued shifting of individual identity and agency within the context of the society" (Josephson 267). The limitations of the Dream are exposed throughout the show's story as characters grapple with the reality of cynicism, delusion, and inauthenticity. Don's personal journey, in particular, serves as a microcosm of the collective journey of the American people. As Don embarks on a journey with the intent of finding himself, he encounters numerous individuals with their dreams and struggles. It could be argued that this journey is a poignant revelation that the pursuit of the American Dream has often been a futile quest for external validation and that true fulfilment lies within oneself.

"Advertising creates and naturalizes desires. We watch as the SCDP team begins to market products based on effect and the feelings they evoke in consumers—the love associated with the chocolate of a Hershey bar, or the nostalgia of traveling back home again to a place we are loved via Kodak's slide carousel—not by showing literal pictures or attributes of a product. Don Draper and his colleagues are inventing our contemporary world, a world of hyper-consumer culture" (Beail and Goren 9).

The growing ambition for success, money, and status as the idea of fulfilment for American people is intricately discussed and offers commentary on the previously mentioned themes of change, identity, and others. The discontent Betty, Don and Peggy feel reflects a broader critique of consumer culture, where the relentless pursuit of materialism and conformity, and the perception of happiness as a commodity, often leads to spiritual emptiness.

In the backdrop of the 1960s, marked by cultural upheaval and societal change, *Mad Men* offers a poignant commentary on the hollowness of the American Dream, that is, a reality based on fantasies. The show offers a poignant reminder of the still strongly embedded consumerist culture and commodification of the American Dream which seem to be attainable only for the few. Heyman argues that the ads presented in Sterling Cooper's boardrooms reflect the important historical events which influenced the national identity during the Cold War and other significant historical events. Therefore, Heyman argues that these patriotic concepts were marketed and sold as products themselves (133). We could argue that such "products" directly increased the prevalence of the idea that consumerism was a part of American life. The show masterfully showcases that the notion of the Dream advertised with carefully crafted pitches and images, is frequently extremely unattainable for marginalised groups of society, i.e., everyone who is not white, American, and male. The limitations and consequences of the concepts are reflected in the storylines of characters and their paths of self-discovery and finding their place in the changing cultural landscape. As the series progresses, historical events and societal shifts, such as the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and the rise of the countercultural movement, serve as a backdrop for the characters' personal and professional challenges. These events provide context and authenticity to the era, shaping the characters' experiences and choices.

7. CONCLUSION

The story of *Mad Men* follows a time of tumultuous change in the American cultural landscape and its characters serve as a microorganism of the changing values and ideologies. The characters reflect the timeless human pursuit of identity and purpose. In the examination of two contrasting women of *Mad Men*, Betty and Peggy, we observe the reality and the complexity of the American Dream. Betty's conformity to societal expectations and lack of authenticity make her a tragic figure in the *Mad Men* world. Her struggles with motherhood and household in suburbia reflect a broader issue many women faced during the 1960s, where the idea of a suburban lifestyle and feminine ideals were sold as a commodity to American women. Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* examines the unspoken problems women faced: deep dissatisfaction, lack of fulfilment while the society reassured them otherwise. Betty Draper's characters encapsulate the issues of forced domesticity and femininity catering to the patriarchy sold as a product of the American Dream. On the other hand, Peggy Olson represents the societal shift for women and the second wave of feminism, while uncovering the limitations of the American Dream for marginalised groups. Peggy's character is a compelling figure who successfully changes and grows as an authentic individual. She serves as a champion of modernity as she challenges the expectations for women of the time. Her journey reflects the broader shifts in gender dynamics, feminism, and societal values in the 1960s.

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9.DECONSTRUCTION OF THE AMERICAN DREAM IN MAD MEN: WOMEN AND WOMEN'S PLACE: SUMMARY AND KEYWORDS

This master's thesis delves into the female experience in the television series *Mad Men* with a particular focus on the characters of Betty Draper and Peggy Olson. Their contrasting narratives provide a lens through which to view the evolving societal roles of women during the 1960s. This analysis examines societal conformity, patriarchial structures and traditional gender roles as the basis of the constructed reality of the American Dream. Using Betty Friedan's work in *The Feminine Mystique,* the character of Betty Draper is analysed. To her, the character of Peggy Olson is juxtaposed, as a symbol of the cultural shifts and the second wave of feminism. Using Žižek's notion of reality constructed on fantasy, the concept of the American Dream was examined as a fragile fabricated reality. Furthermore, using Lacan's framework for „big Other", this thesis examined the perpetuation of the existing ideological structures through advertising. In this exploration, the study revealed how Betty's dissatisfaction with forced domesticity and infantilization encapsulates the collective female experience of 1960s America and it deconstructs the fantasy of traditional gender roles. Furthermore, Peggy Olson's character arc explores the changing societal expectations and deconstructs the fantasies of the American Dream. This paper reached the conclusion that *Mad Men* offers an examination of the collective American identity, as it explores the hyper-consumerist society, the commodification of happiness and the female experience in the era that shaped the American cultural landscape.

Key words: mad men, American dream, consumerism, feminine mystique, American society, 1960s, second-wave feminism, constructed reality

9. DEKONSTRUKCIJA AMERIČKOG SNA U "MOMCI S MADISONA": ŽENE I ŽENINO MJESTO: SAŽETAK I KLJUČNE RIJEČI

Ovaj diplomski i rad bavi se ženskim iskustvom u televizijskoj seriji *Momci s Madisona*, s posebnim fokusom na likove Betty Draper i Peggy Olson. Njihovi kontrastni narativi pružaju leću kroz koju se može promatrati razvoj društvenih uloga žena tijekom 1960-ih. Ova analiza ispituje društveni konformizam, patrijarhalne strukture i tradicionalne rodne uloge kao osnovu konstruirane stvarnosti američkog sna. Koristeći rad Betty Friedan u *Ženska mistika,* analizira se lik Betty Draper. Njoj je suprotstavljen lik Peggy Olson, kao simbol kulturoloških pomaka i drugog vala feminizma. Koristeći Žižekov pojam stvarnosti konstruiran na fantaziji, koncept izražena je krha izmišljena stvarnost američkog sna. Nadalje, koristeći Lacanov okvir za „velikog Drugog", ova je teza ispitivala promicanje postojećih ideoloških struktura kroz oglašavanje. Ovim radom pregledalo se Bettyno nezadovoljstvo, prisilno domesticiranje i infantilizacija i kako njezino iskustvo sažima kolektivno žensko iskustvo Amerike 1960-ih te dekonstruira fantaziju tradicionalnih rodnih uloga. Nadalje, u liku Peggy Olson simbolično su sažete promjene u društvenim očekivanjima i dekonstrukciji fantazije američkog sna. Ovaj rad je došao do zaključka da serija *Momci s Madisona* pruža pregled kolektivnog američkog identiteta, jer istražuje hiperkonzumerističko društvo, komodifikaciju sreće i žensko iskustvo u eri koja je oblikovala američki kulturološki pejzaž.

Ključne riječi: momci s Madisona, američki san, konzumerizam, ženska mistika, američko društvo, 1960-e, drugi val feminizma, konstruirana stvarnost