A Rhetorical Analysis of Modern Day Retro-Sexism:

Misogyny Masked by Glamour in *Mad Men*

By

Hannah Noelle Caton

A Thesis Presented to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Findlay in Partial

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Master of Rhetoric and Writing

Approved by:

_________________________________
Christine Tulley

_________________________________
Christine Denecker

_________________________________
Mark Polelle

_________________________________
Date
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ABSTRACT

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AMC’s original series Mad Men portrays American culture during the 1960s and 1970s, focusing on the negative behaviors that were prominent during the time depicted. The main themes throughout the seven season series is smoking, alcoholism, chauvinism, homophobia, infidelity, bigotry, anti-Semitism, the development of feminism, and the home lives that were kept so private during this time period. Mad Men emphasizes isolation, societal movement and heartlessness as minor developmental points throughout the show, entertaining the idea that retro-sexism is achievable through the dedication of viewers to allowing the mindset of the 1950s and 1960s into their homes. Even though the theme has negative undertones through its plot, and poor character behavior, the show cultivates a feeling of nostalgia among viewers through the careful attention to the costumes and set. The series works hard to remain disconnected from current society by setting the show in a different time period and not incorporating any modern day elements, while the show uses retro-sexism in order to hold a strong attachment to the decades being portrayed. In short, Man Men serves as a rhetorical outlet to discuss issues that still concern society, such as sexism. Through an analysis of gender inequality, corruption of marriage and the time period portrayed, this analysis will use costumes, character behavior and sets, in order to prove that Mad Men strives to accurately depict the decades it aims to represent through hidden messages of nostalgia within the show.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

The postwar boom and growing prosperity of the 1950s sparked demand for new cars, as well as countless household products and consumer goods. There were massive cultural changes in the arts with the Beat movement, the jazz scene of the 1950s and Andy Warhol's Factory in the early '60s; while the newly emerging influence of the youth and women's movements became stepping stones for women’s equality. The first three years of the decade would serve as a "catching up" period that started after World War II ended, marking the post-depression advancements in both consumerism and lifestyle. Upon the war’s end, young American servicemen returned home to pick up their lives where they left off, as well as start new families in new homes with new jobs; these new advancements caused the American industry to push forward expansion to meet peacetime needs of the newly promoted merchandise.

Due to the rapid surplus of population, there was an increase in economic growth, specifically while the Baby Boom was underway; parents were now being influenced by advertisements for products that would benefit their new families, and spending money as a result. Advertising companies, such as the fictional company shown on Mad Men, were also feeling the positive effects from the end of the war, with total U.S. billings for advertising more than doubling during the 1950s, from $5.7 billion in 1950 to $12 billion in 1960 (Marcovitch and Batty 5). The number of agencies thrived as well, mainly due to the growth of TV (5), pushing advertisers to rely on television product demonstrations to differentiate their brands from those within print. The late 1950s, and early 1960s, marked a new expansion for the advertising business, and benefitting them with an experienced wave of young art directors and writers from the Bronx and Brooklyn areas of New York. These artistic minds represented a diverse range of
backgrounds, nationalities and religions. This new style of advertising had energy, style, wit and youth and it is this time period that is captured through the television show *Mad Men*.

This study is centered on AMC’s original series, *Mad Men*, which is set in a Madison Avenue advertising agency during the 1960s. The show focuses on historical events such as “the civil rights movement, social bohemianism, working women, the Kennedy assassination and ever-increasing consumer sophistication” (Falkof 31). *Mad Men* takes a made for television centralized stance through the use of television as a medium in order to show white male privilege in a corrupt corporate world, unworried about creating equality for the female gender, but instead only focusing on the advancement of men in a non-progressive era. *Mad Men* serves as a rhetorical outlet of post-feminism to discuss issues that still concern society, but are not openly addressed. The female audiences’ welcoming reception of many ideals instilled into the storyline of the show, seem to disparate the idea of postfeminist subculture, and promote the ideology of women reverting back to being purely homemakers, which can be recognized as a form of retro sexism. When today’s viewers are watching programming made to reminisce about the past, “We can deal with and even aesthetically enjoy the gender injustices of the early 1960s because we are at the same time reminded that such sexism is something from the past” (Agirre 635). It seems apparent from that statement that viewers enjoy television shows no matter the isolationist or antifeminist message they send, as long as there is an aesthetically pleasing characteristic to the show.

Similarly, the show primarily portrays the ideas of greed, suburbia and the sexual double standard instead of the sexual revolution (Falkof 32), due to the cultural lifestyle being depicted, most notably by creating a fantasy depiction of women in main characters such as Betty Draper and Megan Draper. Nevertheless, it becomes apparent that “After the shock, comes
contextualization, and after that, a feeling of reassurance that nowadays certain attitudes would be punished, and therefore we are safe now. This is a clear postfeminist response: sexism is a past problem, the situation is under control now… so we can just enjoy the show without questioning the state of affairs” (Agirre 636). Thus the show is proving, that viewers are willing to overlook the radical sexism portrayed by denying that chauvinism in such extremes can still be prevalent today.

The purpose of this study is to examine the way in which *Mad Men* deliberately uses the concept of glamourizing the perception of women in the workplace and as housewives in order to portray the period as more appealing than it actually was. *Mad Men* was rhetorically analyzed by using the theoretical approach of resistance theory, which maintains that audiences can find decline in a television shows dominant pressures of a cultural difference within the home, while still seeking pleasure from the show, regardless of the contradictory messages the show is sending. These contradictions are most prevalent within the character of Betty Draper and her connection to mothers; while she is a stay at home wife/mom who knows her husband cheats on her, today’s audiences might find her to be a weaker character, while at the same time female audiences can relate with the frustrations of being an overworked housewife and caretaker to his children. “Misogyny has been an integral part of Mad Men since its first episode. [...] Mad Men lets us imagine that it [sexism] is just one of those things that we don’t Do Any More” (Hordyniec 114). While many might not have the same life or situational events that Betty faces, they can relate to being a woman that has challenges to overcome, thus resisting the shows’ effort to push that being a house wife was glamourous, through the use of glamourous costumes; but instead allowing viewers to see what happened behind closed doors in a 1960s household.
In relation to resistance theory, an aspect of political thought, centered on a basis of propaganda, which constituted authority has the ability to be resisted, by individuals or groups. Though I am using resistance theory to analyze *Mad Men* and the way the show can be rhetorically read to deliberately resist the surface message of nostalgia, it is necessary to point out that television shows are analyzed differently than printed works; the way in which the program is developed involves dissecting the way that characters use dialogue. Non-verbal actions by the characters, how the story unfolds through the script and the visual medium that is chosen. Television has a language that is unique to its specific development incorporating specific methods and principles that have been continually developing since the first television programs were released. However, this study further develops the way in which the show was written in order to establish how the director, Matthew Weiner, intended for the show to portray the “housewife” or the “working woman” that is subtly incorporated into each episode. An analysis of the way each season was received by both viewers and critics was used in order to determine the heavy influence the show truly has on the way in which women now are perceiving their own self-worth whether in the workplace or at home.

Matthew Weiner, director, deliberately uses the audience’s perceptions of glamour by incorporating period clothing, attitudes and behaviors in order to let individuals escape from their current lives, and spend time in a period where the women took care of men, and never thought about speaking against the men that they “served,” best embodied in the character of Donald Draper. *Mad Men* offers a stylish presentation of the past while removing the depressing realities that were occurring during the period represented within the show. Audiences are able to overlook the sexist characterizations of the show due to *Mad Men*’s effective use of nostalgia through the glamorization of the time period. Baudrillard argues that:
When the real is no longer what it was, nostalgia assumes its full meaning. There is a plethora of myths of origin and of signs of reality – a plethora of truth, of secondary objectivity, and authenticity. Escalation of the true, of lived experience, resurrection of the figurative where the object and substance have disappeared. Panic-stricken production of the real and of the referential, parallel to and greater than the panic of material production: this is how simulation appears in the phase that concerns us – a strategy of the real, of the neoreal and the hyperreal that everywhere is the double of a strategy of deterrence.¹ (Black and Driscoll 189)

This connection is processed through the identification of glamour, envisioned by the director’s work of making the time period displayed appear as glamorous; and is found by expanding the research to find connections between Mad Men and historical relationships that are portrayed throughout the show, even if there is no true connection to the events and the stylistic situations.

While Mad Men seemingly promotes the issues of sexism, alcoholism and excessive smoking, the show turns the page from focusing on a generalized feeling of glamourizing the sins that the world tried so hard to surpass, some of which have still not been conquered, with the revolution of women’s rights, most notably. The show spends the majority of its seven season surface focusing the its emphasis on men, with little room for growth of the female characters, in order to stay true to the time period being represented; and because of this Mad Men has been criticized for the show leaving out important details, such as, what has been referred to as “The Women’s Movement.” In Agirre’s, Am I Supposed to Say How Shocked I Was?, she argues that, “Referencing a previous era, embracing its iconography, becomes an important way of suggesting that the sexism is safely sealed in the past” (635-636). This becomes apparent through a form of sexism that has been emerging more so in cinema that revolves around past
time periods: retro sexism, which is the use of retro imagery and nostalgia to create a new sexism. Throughout the 1960’s and into the early 1980’s, women who worked for a living were the primary founders of the beginning changes for equality among the sexes. Yet in Mad Men, the show depicts women who work as repressed by the sexist behavior of male colleagues as well as the working environment in general.

Looking at the postfeminist movement and comparing it to retro sexism, can be further developed by reading “The Feminine Mystique” by Betty Friedan, which played a vital role in influencing women’s new found motivation for gender rights for women at the time of its publication. Authors such as Germaine Greer, “The Female Eunuch,” also played a vital role in stirring the feminist cause and adding heat to the already disruptive movement; as well as Bella Abzug, New York’s Congresswoman, who published in “MS. Magazine.” The 1960’s mindset of women was different, than today’s current society of post-feminists, because there is a distinct emphasis on pleasing a man as the most important job of a woman. “Everyone knew who they were supposed to be… Women, back in the 1960s, were supposed to be either a Jackie or a Marilyn” (Agirre 638). Due to this mind set, the women that paved the way for equality are left out of the television show Mad Men, failing to acknowledge the influence these women had in the creation of The National Organization for women, along with a march for equality on Fifth Avenue; the female characters within the show serve as a tool for Don Draper, Betty and Peggy seem to be most notable characters because when they “prop him up they do so on his terms, acting almost as a prostheses for his active engagement in the world” (Falkof 36). Of course the television show focuses on glamourizing the lifestyle of a housewife, insisting that women had it made living off of their husbands, and were in no way showing feelings of being oppressed, unless it was when they were unable to go to a party or had to stay home with their children.
However, what the show dismisses is that the 1950s and 1960s were a time of oppression, fear and overall discontent in the majority of women’s lives.

This thesis will identify the ways in which the show can review the past as a vintage representation through rhetorical analysis of a selection of episodes discussing each decade represented. *Mad Men* acts as an indirect time machine by creating a type of sensation that explains why female viewers might actually lust after an era of clearly defined gender roles, however misogynistic as they seem. This analysis will provide readers with an idea of the influence of the overall message the show sends regarding women’s roles from the past decades into the current, by becoming more aware of the way *Mad Men* shapes cultural realities, such as viewers living nostalgically through a television show.

**A Brief Summary of Mad Men**

The first season of *Mad Men*, set in 1960, began in July 2007 on AMC; the show familiarized viewers with the life of an advertising man in which the martini glass is always full, a cigarette is always lit and the fun never ends, especially at the office. From long lunches to midday naps in the office, *Mad Men* sets the scene of an office environment where anything goes. The show cast several actors, such as, Jon Hamm (Don Draper), John Slattery (Roger Sterling), Robert Morse (Bert Cooper), Elisabeth Moss (Peggy Olson), Vincent Kartheiser (Pete Campbell), January Jones (Betty Draper), Christina Hendricks (Joan Holloway), Bryan Batt (Salvatore Romano), Michael Gladis (Paul Kinsey), Aaron Staton (Ken Cosgrove), and Rich Sommer (Harry Crane) as the main cast. The first season occurs in 1960 between the months of March and November and is centered on Sterling Cooper advertising agency.

The season begins by introducing the main character, Don Draper, an advertising executive who is meeting his new secretary, Peggy Olson; while Don seems to minimally
welcome her, Peggy is prone to hostility from the office manager, Joan Holloway, as well as being a victim of sexual harassment among the male employees. The plot line continues to unfold as Pete Campbell, a junior accounts manager, becomes sweet on Peggy, even though he is set to get married, which doesn’t stop the two from engaging in sexual activities. Nonetheless, Pete is not the only character that is shown in the first episodes as cheating, Don, cheats on his wife constantly, Betty Draper; Roger Sterling, the son of one of Sterling Cooper’s founding partners, has an office affair with Joan, unknown to his wife, Mona.

Betty’s role as a main character is introduced, when she has to see a psychiatrist after she gets in a car accident with her children, which Betty accredits to her hands becoming numb. While Don does not support Betty going for psychotherapy, he allows it, but only after having her doctor agree to tell him what she says during her sessions, without Betty knowing. Although his wife is under a lot of stress, this does not stop Don from cheating on her; he begins a new relationship with an owner of a department store that has sought help from Sterling Cooper for marketing advice.

The season is full of plot developments, with recounts of Don’s childhood during the Great Depression, where the viewer’s find out his real name is “Dick Whitman,” who lived under an abusive father and an unloving stepmother. While Don has tried to get away from the life where he was known as “Dick,” he can’t escape it when his younger brother comes to town. Don gives him money to start a new life, under the condition that he will never contact him again. Don’s character seems ironic throughout the season, where he tries to avoid the man his father was, but ultimately seems to have embodied his characteristics in his own life. His original identity continues to unfold with his flashbacks of being in the Korean War, introducing Lieutenant Donald Draper, who was in command and nearing being sent home. However, an
explosion kills Draper, injuring Whitman, who instead claims that Dick Whitman has died, now taking over the identity of Donald Draper, by switching dog tags in order to be released from the rest of his tour in the war. “Draper” under the army’s direction, takes “Whitman’s” body to his family, dropping the coffin off of the train, but never getting off to offer condolences to the family; however, Dick’s younger brother sees his older brother on the train, telling his family that Dick isn’t actually dead, and instead of believing him, they accredit this an illusion of an emotional child.

**Audience Reception of Mad Men**

When the show premiered in July of 2007, the creators were shocked at the popularity of the show upon its pilot episode; at this time the viewership was higher than any other AMC original series at the time. The show aimed to fantasize a world of better times; “The job of fantasy … is to create a fictional object of desire to fill the lack of being that is the irreducible condition of subjectivity” (Falkof 37). Weiner strived to create a world where his viewers could escape to, by glamourizing the negative historical effects that the world was living through during the 1960s. The viewership between the first season premiere and second season premiere doubled in size, due to its promotional advertisements, “Much of the reception of the show has centered around its aesthetic, with *Mad Men*-style elements swiftly being fetishized in global design and fashion” (33). As the seasons progressed, the viewership grew and allowed for a variant in the demographic of viewers. *Mad Men* at its peak had a total of 3.5 million viewers, with 1.6 of those viewers in the 18-49 demographic (Nielsen). Nonetheless, the diverse viewership, of men and women of all ages and social statures, have had a significant influence on the success of the show, even integrating the culture from the depicted time into modern day lives.
The show was not only highly recognized among viewers, but also by critics with its focus portraying the ways the show was most accurately depicting the decades reflected within the series. Matthew Gilbert of *The Boston Globe* wrote "it’s an absolutely gorgeous, amber-tinted vision of the early 1960s" and added "detailed with enough 1950s-era accoutrements to seem authentically Camelot" (Gilbert). The *San Francisco Chronicle* called *Mad Men* "stylized, visually arresting [...] an adult drama of introspection and the inconvenience of modernity in a man's world" (Stern 229); while *The Los Angeles Times* said that the show had “found a strange and lovely space between nostalgia and political correctness and filled it with interesting people, all of them armed with great powers of seduction” (McNamara). Seemingly, there are a few controversial views that the show has also brought up. Similarly, a *Chicago Sun-Times* reviewer described the series as an "unsentimental portrayal of complicated ‘whole people' who act with the more decent 1960 manners America has lost, while also playing grab-ass and crassly defaming subordinates" (Elfman). *Entertainment Weekly* made the first connection between the not yet recognized issues of sexual harassment and sexism, noting that the period of time depicted, envisions the reality that "play is part of work, sexual banter isn't yet harassment, and America is free of self-doubt, guilt, and countercultural confusion. It’s the ripe fantasy before it turns rotten" (Tucker). Unlike several other historical shows that seem to exaggerate the truth or falsify information, *Mad Men* seems to receive praise for its historical accuracy, most notably in the issues of gender biases, sexual harassment and the prevalent use of alcohol and smoking in the workplace.

However, not all critics were a fan of the show, and its portrayal of events. *The Washington Post* liked the visual aspect of the show, but didn’t like the storylines that the show depicted. *The London Review of Books* stated that the series was an "unpleasant little entry in the
genre of Now We Know Better" as the cast was a series of historical stereotypes that failed to do anything except "congratulate the present" (Greif). Thus, the critics provided post-feminists with the support they needed to justify the unacceptable views and attitudes the show portrayed, while subliminally effecting the way women watching the show viewed the decade, by comparing the past to the current time periods standard for acceptable behaviors.

**Accolades and Awards for Mad Men**

Due to the widespread phenomenon that Mad Men seemed to stir up, the show became the recipient of several nominations and awards, such as the American Film Institute, Emmys and Creative Arts Emmys from the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences, a Peabody Award from the Peabody Board at the Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication, Satellite Awards from the International Press Academy, and British Academy Television Awards from the British Academy of Film and Television Arts. Similarly, not only was the show nominated for several awards, it was also the recipient of said rewards, these include the Art Directors Guild, Casting Society of America, Cinema Audio Society, Costume Designers Guild, Directors Guild of America, Motion Picture Sound Editors, Producers Guild of America, Screen Actors Guild, Television Critics Association, and Writers Guild of America. (AMC) Award highlights include winning the Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Drama Series four times, as well as setting the record for most Emmy nominations (17) without winning. While awards are not the primary reason shows are created, it seems relevant to note that

What haunts all contemporary use of notion of style is the putative opposition between form and content. How is one to exorcise the feeling that “style”, which functions like the notion of form, subverts content? Yet it is precisely this opposition, this argumentative duality that Mad Men’s aesthetic takes advantage of, through a clever referencing of
cinematic advertising history that often expresses the gulf between what is being shown and what is actually going on. (Falkof 33)

Falkof’s claim offers an explanation for how a show can cover up evidence of negative factors of historically relevant events through glamorization of said events in order to maintain the viewer’s interest and dedication to the show. Hollywood has proven in the past that sex sells, even if it means changing the views on certain events to promote a lifestyle that would not normally be acceptable, especially in the current society. Gender inequality in the show is sexualized in order to make men view females as objects, and to encourage females that if they succumb to the wants and needs of a man, they will be taken care of for their lives. This idea shows the manipulation of the history to create a glamorous past that can sell products to the consumerism households in our current society.
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Although there is entertainment with hidden value situated in the plots of historically recreated television shows, the rhetorical lens should be used in order to identify the concerns that are arising from the media’s romanticizing of the 1950s and 1960s. In Mad Men, the viewer is exposed to sexist portrayals of women in a historical context, which creates an appreciation for the women’s movement by illustrating how much women have gained from the feminist evolution. It is through shows like Mad Men, as well as, the scholarly literature listed below that allow women to view the way in which society has allowed for the advancement of women politically, socially and economically, due to the feminist expansion. While this study is not meant to promote the ideas of feminism, it does bring about the notion that while watching this show, female viewers may have a higher appreciation for their current social stances; however, noticing these advancements could also potentially allow for women to feel as though there is no longer a need to further work toward improving their rights.

Additionally, while Mad Men glorifies the patriarchal status of the 1950s and 1960s, it is subliminally sending messages of sexist reinforcement through the glamorization of the lifestyle of women through their clothing and the sets that they are “living in.” The following literature was used in order to understand that there is a direct combination of complacency of women and reinforcement of sexist beliefs within Mad Men, that potentially divert our current society back to the gender inequality that was experienced so many decades ago, if women do not choose to continue to reimage the rights that they so desperately deserve. This literature will address the way in which a show, such as, Mad Men was able to recreate sexist portrayals, rape, abuse and the degradation of women in order to send a nostalgic message of 1950s and 1960s lifestyle culture through the medium of television. These articles will also help to identify the influences
of gender attitudes that have been felt by not only female audiences, but also men, in order to identify the levels of chauvinism and gender prejudices within the show that are representative of the time period depicted.

Connecting these ideas to the scholarship written, Prudence Black and Catherine Driscoll’s article, “Don, Betty and Jackie Kennedy: On Mad Men and Periodization” takes a stance on the further development of nostalgia playing a factor in the television show, by incorporating ideas from Jean Baudrillard. Black and Driscoll make the argument that Mad Men uses period detail researched through historical references in order to create a type of “fetishistic” characteristic to draw the audiences appeal in through images of: “flashes of patterned wallpaper, whiskey neat, contact lining for kitchen drawers, Ayn Rand, polaroid, skinny ties, new Hilton hotels, and Walter Cronkite all evoke a time when the world and how we might live in it was different in powerful ways” (Black and Driscoll 188). The director of the show uses these images that have been researched through historiographical text in order to create a period drama – thus incorporating period details as a basis to contrast the differences between the lives of viewers in relation to the characters of the show – this stresses the differences “between the early twenty-first century and 1960s experiences of gender, domesticity, family life, business, aesthetics, politics and many types of anxiety and pleasure are different” (189). These differences are what makes Mad Men the epitome of what period dramas should be, by the time that the production crew has invested in order to create an accurately portrayed television show. This same dissention is further detailed in Baudrillard’s argument regarding the appeal of nostalgia through images, if the viewer is debating the image as an original sign of reality. Driscoll and Black state that “Baudrillard famously accounts for nostalgia as the triumph of simulation over the real and his focus for elaborating this theory of simulation
is, significantly the United States from the 1950s to the 1970s – the period of Disney land and An American Family”ii (189). The cultural revolution that is depicted in Mad Men shows the dissolution between the housewife and the independent woman that became a radical shift most predominately from the 1950s to 1970s, most notably in clothing, hairstyle and lifestyle behaviors.

Black and Driscoll make the connection regarding Baudrillard’s claims in his theories, with the nostalgia effects that Mad Men provides its viewers with. The nostalgia fetish seems to come through most obviously through the use of subliminal messages personified in the characters clothing and the period accurate sets that have been overly glamourized:

“In Baudrillard’s terms, reading this series as nostalgic means claiming it conveys little historical content. Although Mad Men in one sense seems to exemplify that nostalgia Baudrillard associates with a proliferating field of signs floating free of any anchoring historical meaning, we want to argue that Mad Men’s investment in a myriad of period details continues to say a great deal about the sixties, the present, and the relation between them. (Black and Driscoll 190)

Baudrillard’s ideas can be further developed by understanding the frame that Mad Men has created based on its historical research in order to create the content that is necessary creating an ideal nostalgic society, similar to the Kennedy’s administration, known as “Camelot”.

Another article that created the center for research was Katixa Agirre’s, “‘Am I supposed to say how shocked I was?’ Audience response to Mad Men.” In her research, Agirre primarily focused on the ways in which viewers received Mad Men in order to evaluate what, if any, postfeminist lenses might have on the female audiences perception of the show. In her findings, she discovered that male viewers were reading the show through a lens that didn’t address any
issues with the behaviors on the show, which was in a different way than women, who were noticing the lack of feminist advancement.

Agirre makes several claims throughout her research, however, the first one is most connected to this thesis, in the fact that it was asking similar questions to the ones being posed for the basis of this argument. It seems that although retro sexism, post-feminism and pre-feminism have become a few of the most valued words throughout the research for this thesis, and thus set a background for what needs to first be addressed. Is there a way that nostalgia can be masked by avoiding the real issues that are simultaneously being addressed throughout the show? Agirre states:

“My first claim was that the postfeminist sensibility allowed a nostalgic view of those old times as well as a self-indulgent sentiment towards our current situation, which, compared to the unjust world of Mad Men, seemed a much better time to live in. At the same time, the series would tend to mourn the pre-feminist world – its glamour, coolness and simplicity – and would try to lure the viewer using a nostalgic tone.” (Agirre 632)

Yet, how can women, who seem to realize the lack of feminist advancement, be so drawn into the show? These women aren’t slowly turning back from the views they strongly support in their current lives, but are engaged through the shows implementation of glamour to set apart the negative realities in a beautiful costume.

Similarly, the field of rhetoric and writing has produced several female rhetoricians that have strong claims that promote the ideals of moving forward from the past in order to develop a stronger future; one such rhetorician is Helene Cixous, and her “The Laugh of the Medusa”. Within her essay, Cixous introduces new ways of thinking and writing regarding the topics of women, as well as literature, in order to evolve feminist criticism that is based in a patriarchal
society. Cixous’ work is structured in a poststructuralist theory, which she uses to expand the possibility for feminist writing. “The Laugh of the Medusa” is meant to provide women with the empowerment they have long been suppressed from having by encouraging them to explore their own identities through both literature and media. Although Cixous analyzes Medusa, her essay can be used to discuss the traditional roles of women portrayed by men in literature. Medusa is analyzed by Cixous in order to show the different physical traits she has been given throughout many different decades, and develops these views from a disgusting character in literature to a liberating figure of feminist expansion.

Similarly, Cixous’ views can be transitioned into how viewers are receiving *Mad Men*. Betty Draper as a housewife can be viewed as an ugly figure of the lack of women’s importance in the decade presented, or she can be viewed as a strong woman who is able to run the house, raise the children, and still have dinner on the table before her husband comes home. The way women are viewed in literature should be evolved from the negativity that is bestowed upon them, and should instead be evolved into a strong support of feminism in both literature and everyday life. Male bias shines through most frequently throughout *Mad Men*, especially by showing women as a weaker being, Betty Draper seeking a therapists help, only to find out that her sessions are being discussed with her husband. Cixous’ views throughout “The Laugh of the Medusa” can be compared to Mad Men when she discusses how women should begin to be themselves, instead of hiding behind who men want them to be, stating:

I was ashamed. I was afraid, and I swallowed my shame and my fear. I said to myself:
You are mad! What’s the meaning of these waves, these floods, these outbursts? Where is the ebullient, infinite woman who, immersed as she was in her naiveté, kept in the dark about herself, led into self-disdain by the great arm of parental-conjugal phallocentrism,
hasn’t been ashamed of her strength? Who, surprised and horrified by the fantastic tumult of her drives (for she was made to believe that a well-adjusted normal woman has a . . . divine composure), hasn’t accused herself of being a monster? Who, feeling a funny desire stirring inside her (to sing, to write, to dare to speak, in short, to bring out something new), hasn’t thought she was sick? Well, her shameful sickness is that she resists death, that she makes trouble. (Cixous 4)

It is through this argument that the reader can better understand that Cixous feels women should be able to put herself in literature and create her own movement in order to leave an imprint that can simultaneously cause a revolution. In Mad Men, Betty finally takes a stand when she writes a letter to the Governor regarding issues in her community, although it is a small task, Betty is beginning to leave her own mark on her life, not just the mark as “Don’s wife”.

Disconnections between Portrayal of the Advertising Industry and Reality

The historical literature on the advertising industry confirms that Mad Men may get the costumes and sets right, but does not portray the advertising industry accurately. Regarding the fundamental nature of advertising, the show seems to be exceptionally off-target. The dissension between the 1960s housewife and the current post-feminist culture, is best personified by David Ogilvy, better known as, “The Original Mad Man,” whom was the most celebrated advertising man of his day (Marcovitch and Batty 32). However, in most respects, Ogilvy defied the show’s prototype depicted as the gray-suited executives of Mad Men; he was a theatrical character, sometimes flaunting a black scarlet-lined cape (Ogilvy 22). He was driven around in a Rolls-Royce and arrived at black-tie events in a kilt, coming from Scottish descent on his father’s side, before most people had seen either one. Ogilvy remarked, “If you can’t advertise yourself, how can you hope to advertise for your client?”
Ogilvy, unlike Don Draper, was a hard headed man, with eccentric behaviors as well as highly held beliefs, such as honesty in advertising and having respect for the consumer. One of his favorite sayings was, “The consumer is not a moron, she is your wife. You wouldn’t lie to your wife. Don’t lie to mine” (23). Unlike Ogilvy, the characters on *Mad Men* show little respect for the underlying purpose of their work, which is to serve the interests of their clients. Ogilvy never let his staff forget that, reminding his employees not to be reckless with client money, comparing the production cost of a TV commercial with that of the price of buying a house; *Mad Men* depicts a different rationale for advertising, which uses lying as the strongest means for promotion of a product.

While building Ogilvy & Mather into a global enterprise, Ogilvy demonstrated a professional manner of standards, including the concept of brands, the discipline of direct marketing, and the use of research in developing advertising. There is no evidence on *Mad Men* that there was an importance to adhere professional standards of any kind (Marcovitch and Batty 35). In a relatively short period of time, Ogilvy created several of the most influential campaigns in advertising history, among them “The Man in the Hathaway Shirt,” with his aristocratic black eye-patch; the red-bearded Commander Whitehead bringing Schweppes tonic to the U.S., and the most memorable car headline of all time: “At 60 miles an hour, the loudest noise in this new Rolls-Royce comes from the electric clock” (Ogilvy 54). He referred to these slogans as his “Big Ideas,” which are almost always accurately depicted as advertising clients on the show.

Although he smoked pipes and cigars, chain-smoking cigarettes was not to Ogilvy’s tastes, contributing to dissimilarity between him and the characters on *Mad Men*. He was a moderate drinker, except when he had to get on a plane, due to his fear of flying (Ogilvy 67). While the shows bosses are often fraternizing with the lower employees at bars, Ogilvy never
joined his colleagues’ for drinks; in fact, he found such behavior distasteful. Nonetheless, the show does accurately portray the way in which business lunches were conducted, depicting the commonality of men to be at lunch and receive their first drink while looking at their menus, get a second drink after ordering, receive a third before the food had arrived (Maloney 49), and even able to finish two bottles of wine with their meals, while still being able to turn down dessert and have yet another drink. Consequently, after finishing lunch, the ad execs returned to work for the day, full of alcohol.

The business world of the 1950s and early 60s, sex was a forbidden subject, everyone did it but no one talked about it. By 1965, the sexual revolution had begun, and the advertising business went wild (Maas 10), which is another topic addressed in Mad Men. In order to fully understand what these offices were engaging in, the same Young and Rubicam survey asked the question: “Were you aware of sexual activity that took place in the office? (This does not include ‘nooners’ at a friend’s apartment)”. The results were unexpected with fifty-five percent answering “DEFINITELY YES!” while eighteen percent responded as having heard “strong rumors” (Marcovitch and Batty115). The literature clearly reveals superficial measures seem to illustrate that the show is clearly defined by the attitudes and behaviors of this time period regarding sex, no matter how shocking the results may seem.

Similar to the characters on the show, Ogilvy was attracted to beautiful women and was married three times; maintaining a discreet air in his private life. His real love was advertising, a workaholic with little time for the extracurricular affairs dramatized on Mad Men (Ogilvy 73). The characters on the show seem able to leave the office to go to bars and hotel rooms at any time throughout the day. Unlike Don Draper, Ogilvy was the opposite, preferring to leave social events in order to return to the office; Don would much rather fraternize with women, then be in
the office doing work, even sometimes leaving work in order to sneak away for a scandalous rendezvous.

However, the comparisons between the show and agencies of the era seem to be different for everyone. For example, a former creative director at Ogilvy & Mather who met his copywriter wife there stopped watching *Mad Men* because he found little resemblance to the business he was in at that time. His wife disagreed with his view, stating: “You didn’t have your behind pinched right and left every time you walked through the art department” (Marcovitch and Batty 122).

Although the results of the survey seem shocking, the findings in the Young & Rubicam survey regarding the treatment of women, are both true in real life, as well as how they are depicted on the show, back up the above woman’s claim, (no name was provided because she wished to remain anonymous). The overwhelming male survey group agreed that there was a hiring bias toward good-looking women, especially as secretaries or receptionists (124). Women in professional roles were rare, with forty-five percent of the sample agreeing that women were subjected to male chauvinism, sexual innuendo and off-color jokes; while 27 percent of the participants acknowledged this behavior, but put it down to “a few bad apples.”

Initially, the personas of real life ad men contributed to the creation of the characters on *Mad Men*, however, these were not the sole resources that were relied upon; there was a more influential document referenced, the inspiration for the show is based off the 1970 memoir, “*From Those Wonderful Folks Who Gave you Pearl Harbor,*” by Jerry Della Femina, which addresses the uncensored behaviors of working on Madison Avenue during the late 1960s. Unlike what many other sources have said, Della Femina and Sopkin further detail accounts by stating that *Mad Men* is mild in comparison to what actually happened in the advertising
agencies of the ‘60s, even acknowledging that it would be impossible for the behaviors that occurred during this era to occur in the modern day workplace.

In 1967, when he opened his ad agency, Jerry Della Femina and Partners, his employees started an Agency Sex Contest; for more than twenty-five years, one week at the end of every year was devoted to this. The contest had everyone in the agency voting anonymously on paper ballots for the three people they most wanted to go to have sex with (Della Femina and Sopkin 112). They were also asked to vote on the person of the same sex they would consider having relations with. Finally, there was the ménage a trios category, in which they selected the two other people they wanted to go to bed with. Sometimes as many as 300 votes were cast, with prizes for the winners. Femina gives an example of one of the many illicit activities that took place while he was working: “From when we started the agency in 1967, we had an agency sex contest, they would literally get a telephone list and they would vote for the person they most wanted to go to bed with” (107). He further goes on to explain that the winners of the poll would be announced during a staff party held at a Mexican restaurant.

Today, Della Femina is truthful about the questionable nature of what occurred in the workplace; stating “Obviously it was not politically correct, but everyone took part in it and we were just enjoying doing what we were doing.” In those days there wasn’t even a term for sexual harassment, much less a law against it. In North Carolina, only a virgin or a married woman could bring rape charges, and many other states required two witnesses for a rape to be prosecuted (Maas 96). The concept of marital rape would not have been taken seriously in court. Similar to the characters in Mad Men, real-life single women seeking birth control in the early 1960s had difficulty finding a doctor willing to prescribe it, and in some states, not even married women were allowed access to birth control (Hardie 152). Most states still had “head and
master” laws that gave husbands final say over family decisions, including those concerning joint property.

Even though there were many negative events occurring in the workplace, Della Femina says he was very progressive in his views towards women and minorities in the workplace. He preferred to have more women working for him than men, noting that women changed the business by softening it. Nevertheless, the advertising world was a difficult business to break into if you weren’t a white male.

Mad Men’s authentic portrait of the negative realities of women’s lives captured in the behavior in the early 1960s, as described above, makes it hard for some women to watch. Over the course of its first three seasons, almost 200 women were interviewed from the same era (Marcovitch and Batty 144). Many had suffered from the same numbness that plagued Betty Draper in the first season. They had seen psychiatrists who were as unhelpful and patronizing as the one Don Draper hired for his wife, or they had been married to men who displayed a sense of male entitlement similar to Don’s. Those who had worked, whether before or after marriage, had experienced the same discrimination and sexual harassment as the female employees in the show’s ad agency (147). The literature used for this study, shows the correlation between the unfair treatments of women, while married, as well as while they were single. There is a direct connection between the inevitable role of women in comparison to their marital and job status; it seems that women were still seen as lesser than men both in the workplace and at home.

Nevertheless, even women who lived through the time period depicted in Mad Men, found the portrayal of male-female relations realistic, with some even recalling similar treatment in real life that was even more horrifying than that on the show. It was because of the way the show portrayed the sexism of the era so bluntly, that they could not bear to watch it (Tudor 336).
However, for those viewers who did not experience this era, there is still a lesson on the devastating costs of a way of life that still evokes misplaced desire to be learned from a misconception of an easier period of time; this is obvious through the new found integration of retro-sexism that the show has provided through its incorporation of sets and characters.

Clearly, Betty Draper won most viewers’ sympathy in the first season because of her husband’s infidelities and lies. Since then, many viewers have come to hate her for displaying the traits of the dependent housewife that Betty Friedan critiqued so vividly in her 1963 bestseller, *The Feminine Mystique*. She is a woman who thinks a redecorated living room, a brief affair or a new husband might fill the emptiness inside her, and her attempts to appear as the perfect wife render her incapable of fully knowing her children or even her successive husbands.

Another complaint among critics is *Mad Men*’s portrayal of the working woman. They protest that, except for Joan, the ad agency’s secretaries are depicted as passive victims of male bullying and harassment; while characters such as Peggy and Faye perpetuate stereotypes of career women as uninterested in children and concerned with their own advancement (Hardie 154). Joan is the only secretary who seems to be able to hold her own in the office, while her sexual self-confidence plays an important role. Nevertheless, many viewers are outraged that she married her fiancé after he raped her and continually allows him to make life-changing decisions without consulting her.

Having risen as high as a secretary could reasonably hope to rise, Joan uses her sexuality to get perks she could not otherwise earn, following precisely the advice that Helen Gurley Brown made famous in her best-selling 1962 book *Sex and the Single Girl* (Black and Driscoll 192). Still, the scriptwriters show us the consequences that her behavior has inflicted on her. For instance, when Joan tries to take the initiative in bed, her fiancé rejects her advances and seems
unable to regain his sense of masculinity until he rapes her in her boss’s office, telling her to pretend that he is her boss (Tudor 336). Not only is she the victim of rape by her fiancé, but she is also subjected to constant sexual innuendo and outright harassment by male co-workers.

Yet, in 1965, outward endorsements of feminist beliefs weren’t popular options for most women. It wasn’t until the next year that the National Organization for Women, a group that gave so many women the legal tools to fight discrimination, would be founded (Maas 123). Newspapers ran separate want ads with separate pay scales for female jobs, seeking “poised, attractive” secretaries and “peppy gal Fridays.” The show’s portrayal that postwar women were controlling mothers or shopaholics, participating in meaningless activities, was based off of the product of the perfect-homemaker charm, so accurately described by Friedan, not an invention of the show’s creators and writers. For example, when Betty Draper puts her children in front of the TV or slaps her daughter, it isn’t part of a writer’s effort to demonize her, but according to the scholarly literature, shows an accurate reflection of 1960s parenting (Hardie 157). Surveys show that mothers in 1965 spent less time interacting with their children than today’s mothers, despite the fact that very few worked outside the home.

The end of Season 3, finds Betty Draper exchanging one husband and provider for another, causing some critics to complain that she did not experience any “personal growth” as a result, not even demanding a divorce settlement. Mad Men is portraying divorce in the lives of women as an easy feat, which was untrue for the time being shown; homemakers of the early 1960s had few options: Only eight states gave a wife a legal right to a share of the earnings her husband had accumulated during their marriage (Maas 74). As for Peggy, when she gave up her out-of-wedlock child in Season 1, she was doing what an estimated 25,000 women did each year during the 1950s, usually because they had no alternative (Abraham). Faye telling Don that she
chose not to have children to have a career instead, reflected a sacrifice that women with professional aspirations were often forced to make in 1965; employers at this time were within their legal rights to fire women who had babies.

Since the debut of *Mad Men*, the show has been present in conversations of gender equality in the media. This phenomenon has caused the “*Mad Men* Effect”: wherein a show is submerged in nostalgia and impeccable set pieces that the sanctioned workplace and cultural misogyny becomes just another part of the artistic rendering of the era (Maas 149). Do the clothing, blatant indoor smoking and office cocktails become so mesmerizing, that politics and behavior that are no longer considered acceptable in today’s society become overlooked? These negative qualities that the show integrates becomes disregarded because the show makes these characteristics seem welcoming, as well as a fashion accessory, specific to each character within the show.

In 2006, the New York City Commission on Human Rights investigated several advertising firms, and finding that blacks made up two and a half percent of their managers (Black and Driscoll 201). The number of African Americans was even smaller in the creative and account management departments. “We go to certain universities. We hire people with certain skills. We develop and promote in a way that was not necessarily keeping up with the pace of new requirements. And so, we have legacies to deal with,” John Seifert, of Ogilvy & Mather CEO for North America states regarding their hiring practices (202). While women had a few more rights than African Americans during this time, the show seems to leave out the minimal role of blacks, but further support the role of women as a minority, almost making them appear as incapable of doing their jobs. In Season One, when Betty has to see a psychiatrist because her hands are shaking, it promotes the ideal that women were the weaker sex, and unable to be fully
dependent without a minor discrepancy occurring. The demonstration of Betty’s flaw seems to further support the postfeminist stance concerning *Mad Men* promotion of retro sexism not only in the television program, but by forcing itself into viewer’s homes.

Sanford Moore is a longtime critic of the industry, worked at BBD in the 1960s. He says the industry has been fighting the issues of discrimination for decades. “They give all these platitudes. They’ll get up and do mea culpa,” he says (Hardie 205). *Mad Men* depicts the 1960s advertising world of Madison Avenue in a way that is fairly close to reality: very white and very male, with the only female characters working in menial positions, as secretaries or housewives. This period was a turning point in American history, dealing with numerous sensitive issues that still linger today, although not as prominent as they once were. This attitude is reflected in the society that has been established in *Mad Men*, including certain aspects that are prevalent in today’s society, as well as a larger society, such as social norms and bureaucracy. Now realizing that *Mad Men*’s goal is to deliberately shock its audience by presenting what appears to be reasonable and commonplace behavior. The behaviors in the show are now viewed as appalling, similarly applying a direct association between *Mad Men* and today’s society.
Chapter 3: What is a Mad Man?

Among many of the great cataclysms over the past 100 years, one that seemed to have the greatest influence on the evolution of the economy seems to have been, the creative revolution of the mid-twentieth century. However, historians and scholars alike could argue that this revolution is a generalization for a decade of nostalgia, masking creativity through advertising. Why would anyone care whether or not this is generalization, unless they were participants in this revolution? Why does whether or not ads got hipper in New York half a century ago seem to influence personalities and practices in the modern day advertising world?

These questions seem more prevalent now that this early model of advertising has found its way back into homes, most noticeably in the AMC TV series, Mad Men. Occasionally, a television program will attract a large audience because it is brilliantly written and entertaining; Mad Men is one of the most recent television shows to do so, revolving around an advertising agency in New York City during the 1960s (Abraham). At the start of its first episode in 2007, this title appeared on the screen: “MAD MENiii – a term coined in the late 1950s to describe the advertising executives of Madison Avenue. They coined it” (Abraham). Black and Driscoll provide postfeminist insight into the show’s psyche through a multilayered play on words, the underlying message of the title which addresses the cultural impact of the advertising industry that thrived on Madison Avenue (189). Similarly, the title informs the viewer that the show is about “ad men” while raising the question of whether “men” is used generically or intentionally to exclude women in the business. Regardless of whether or not the show’s title intentionally excludes women, it has followed the traditional goal of advertising, which is to create something both recognizable and subtly effective (Tudor 333). Thus, a rhetorical argument can be made that Mad Men is further developing a rhetorical argument that men are portrayed as the dominant sex,
while women are of little use besides sex and raising a family. “Mad Men’s storylines generally center on image-production, but these are images produced in response to uncertainty; always invoking a sense that some meaning or value has just been lost, has just slipped out of reach, or is yet again under threat”… “A retrospective story about foreshadowed decline that blends historiography with conventional melodrama” (Black and Driscoll 190). However, it seems that the show more accurately depicts the lifestyle of women during the 1960s, by illustrating that despite the glamorous portrayal of advertising agency careers, the nostalgia serves to disguise the unhappy realities of women’s lives that the show also mentions in brief scenes.

In order for viewers of the show to fully understand the time period depicted, the show incorporates elements of significant historical events which occurred in the decades being portrayed throughout the series to further educate the audience about the time period the show is centered around. The evolution of societal interactions has changed dramatically over the past fifty years; although, a scripted television show, the drama attempts to ensure the events from the period remain unchanged in order to add to the shows credibility. However, attempting to leave historical details unchanged, seems to get in the way of viewership, sex sells, and the show has taken the stance of making the 1960s sexier, even with the struggles many individuals dealt with at that time. This chapter will analyze four specific scenes that show the dark realities women in Mad Men faced at home and at work.

Mad Men’s form and content are both heavily stylized, and its archival claims are central to the way an emphasis on visual style forms part of its narrative. As image production dominates Mad Men as a story about the sixties the ways in which representation and reality interweave is key to every episode. But in this overt stylization, where self-image
is a construct assembled from a mesh of desires and ideals... history is established as the reality with which such representation negotiates. (Black and Driscoll 196)

Likewise, the characters as well as their clothing have been used throughout the seasons as a subtle symbol of historical events, people and social status. This does not necessarily portray the true attitudes that were originally experienced during the 1960s; however, the show takes the periodization in a direction that will attract viewers, even if consistency of truth is not included. *Mad Men* is able to distract the audience away from negative attitudes the time period depicted is best known for through its use of: elaborate costumes, such as the go-go style outfits that Megan Draper is seen wearing throughout the season, the sleek suits that the ad executives wear, as well as the shift from the housewife look into the Jackie Kennedy inspired style that Betty Draper shifts to throughout the seven seasons of the show.

With the first season of the show creating an influx of popularity, and placing the show up for nominations for several awards, setting the show apart from the general conception of what the most widely received shows must consist of. Many feel that the glamorization factor of the show plays a vital role in the element of popularity. However, many view the glamorous lifestyle of the late 50s and 60s depicted throughout the series as a welcome invitation of the past into their homes; however, the viewer’s begin to lose interest in the show as it shifts from glamour into the realistic limitations that were experienced during this era.

Viewership for the show seems to stem from the fascination individuals have with the past that is being depicted, especially focusing on the carefree lifestyle the characters seem to partake in. This fascination is further supported through the shows use of glamorous clothing and lifestyles to create the effect that may not have occurred, had the show focused solely on racial or feminist tensions that were also occurring during this time. The main character, Donald
Draper, is what draws many of the viewers in through his deep seated morose nature which is covered up by his glamorous lifestyle, promoting alcoholism and sexual promiscuity. His character yields to the curiosity of those who did not live during this era, giving them an insight into the factors that controlled the workplace, even from the reigns at home. When watching the show, one might call into question the similarities of its portrayal to the real life advertising businesses of the time. The show has given viewers a peek into the life of an ad man and the culture that surrounds the ad industry. Even though the industry has progressed and matured in many ways since the time in which the series is set, it doesn’t stop viewers from interpreting agency customs portrayed within the series as common practice today.

**Season Overviews**

**Betty and Peggy: The Housewife and the Working Girl**

Throughout the show there is a clear distinction between the roles of females and males; most notably between female to female roles: housewife versus women in the work force. These separations are most obvious based on the characters of Betty Draper and Peggy Olsen. Detailed below are summaries of each woman’s role throughout the show, as well as the hardships they faced. For the specific scenes chosen, season one, two, three and five were looked at in order to show the evolution of both Betty and Peggy. Season one and two incorporate many changes for both Betty and Peggy, while season three is strictly a season focusing on Betty’s life, and season five is viewing the evolution of Peggy within the workplace.

**Season One: March – November 1960**

This season ends with Peggy seeking medical attention from the doctor for rapid weight gain and stomach pains, which is found out to have been a pregnancy, with Pete being the father. Peggy delivers the baby, refusing to hold it before it is put up for adoption.
Although Peggy is one of the less glamorous characters on the show, women viewers seem to be able to relate to her the most. Agirre notes “…the young copywriter seems to be a reflection of women’s youth or present alike. Peggy is a young, talented and hardworking woman who does not fit the Jackie-Marilyn dichotomy. She does not use her sexuality to control men nor long for a proper marriage. The press has named her a ‘feminist icon’ as well as a ‘feminist trailblazer’” (Agirre 640). The separation between what women want and what women should be, is the most apparent through Peggy’s controversial attitude of what is acceptable for herself as a single working woman.

Thanksgiving 1960 is underway with Betty and Don fighting due to Don’s disinterest in attending Betty’s family’s holiday, by stating that he has too much work to do. Betty finds out
that her psychiatrist had been relaying her sessions to her husband. This dissension shows the unimportance of the housewife in order to frame the overall hierarchy of men.

Throughout the series, it becomes more apparent to the audience that Betty Draper is being used to personify Friedan’s, *The Feminine Mystique*, although never directly addressed. “Betty’s finely-coifed trance-like state is maintained over four seasons despite her own awakening through increased access to the truth of her own situation and that of America. She remains apparently troubled by what […] particularly oppresses her. She is always awaiting what we now widely understand as the ‘second wave’ of feminism to reach her” (Black and Driscoll 194). Although Betty is able to keep herself clearly poised as the perfect housewife, this is contrasted with the fact that she needs to see a therapist. Betty is the ultimate trophy wife to Don on the outside, but behind closed doors, *Mad Men* show the world that many women were ultimately living during the time represented.

**Season Two: February – October 1962**

The second season of *Mad Men* ran from July 2008 until October 2008. This season is aligned with the Cuban Missile Crisis, occurring in 1962, and introduces the rise of Peggy in the workplace, following her pregnancy. While Peggy struggles with dealing with her previous pregnancy, she turns further toward her Catholic faith, and befriends a priest, who tells her that her sister had confessed to him regarding her pregnancy in confession. Peggy has flashbacks of being in the hospital during her pregnancy, and recalls that Don was the only visitor she had, and he convinced her she needed to move on and return to work.

Continuing the discussion of Peggy’s pregnancy, the sixties were when the ‘baby boomers’ were most prevalently being born. There was an evolution of men leaving for the war to them returning home and having babies with their wives. However, Peggy was not married,
but the father of the baby was, to someone else. This type of behavior was unacceptable for a woman at this time, and it was immediately obvious to Peggy that she could not keep this baby, especially if she planned to continue her goal of rising up the working ladder. “Mad Men’s form and content are both heavily stylized and its archival claims are central to the way an emphasis on visual style forms part of its narrative” (Black and Driscoll 196). The inexcusable behavior of Peggy is hidden through the glamorous life she is beginning to lead, and the story soon shifts from her unplanned pregnancy to her decision to move into the city.

At the same time, Don and Betty’s marital issues, as well as a secret correspondence between Don and an unknown character, and Betty has since taken up horseback riding in lieu of therapy. Don and Betty’s marriage faces struggles when Betty kicks her husband out of their home, when she learns about an affair Don had from the husband of the woman he had relations with. This season ended with yet another pregnancy among the cast; Betty Draper is informed by her doctor that she is expecting. Instead of acting the way a happily expectant mother would, Betty instead asks several questions about abortion, to which her doctor refuses to comply. Betty leaves the doctor, goes to a bar and has a sexual encounter with a stranger. When she gets home she finds Don has written her a letter, begging her to let him come home, to which she counters with informing him that they have another child on the way.
While abortion is a viable option for women that do not want the responsibility of raising a baby, this was not always the case. When Betty goes to the doctor in Season 2 because she isn’t feeling well, she learns of her pregnancy and discusses with the doctor her intentions to not keep the baby. He however, does not allow her to follow through with this decision and tells her that wouldn’t be fair to her husband. This behavior of the doctor, shows the inability of a woman to make a decision on her own, even in regards to her own body. “Mad Men is set in the early sixties, a period dominated by perceived disjunctions between now monumental categories of the fifties and sixties – an image of immanent liberation, as if any minute now Don and Betty […] will be freed from the period’s constraints upon them” (Black and Driscoll 195). While the show clearly projects the behaviors of men towards women in their place in society, the viewer still craves the characters ability to make their own decisions. If the feminist movement had happened by the time Betty was pregnant, she would have been able to make her own decision
regarding the abortion, and not have been pressured into keeping it for her husband, by her
doctor.

Season Three: April – December 1963

*Mad Men*’s third season began in August 2009 and ended in November of 2009, focusing
on the end of the Camelot era, six months after the Cuban Missile Crisis. It begins with Don
leaving for a business trip to Baltimore; upon his return, Don and Betty attend a party thrown by
Roger and his new wife, Jane; here they both end up meeting influential strangers: Don, Conrad
Hilton, founder of the Hilton Hotel chain, and Betty, Henry Francis, an employee of Governor
Rockefeller. Needless to say, it seems that the cast cannot catch a break with familial affairs,
especially when Betty’s father, Gene, who dislikes Don, moves in with them, dying almost
immediately following the move. Soon after, Betty gives birth to her and Don’s new child, Gene,
who Don was vehemently against agreeing to name the baby after Betty’s father.

*Figure C. Season 3, Episode 1: Don and Betty Meet Strangers*
With Don’s illustrious affairs, and negligence of family life, Betty begins correspondence with the stranger she met at Roger and Jane’s party, Henry Francis; realizing Don’s lies, Betty’s infatuation with Henry, and the emotional grief she feels about being a wife, Betty asks Don for a divorce. Don finds out that Betty asked for a divorce because of her relationship with Henry, and refuses to sign the papers; however, Don soon realizes that he was unfair to her throughout their marriage. Upset by Don’s refusal to sign the papers, Betty and baby Gene, along with Henry travel to Nevada in order to file for divorce.

Overall, season three took the viewers into a side of Betty that many of them did not like. She went from appearing to be the housewife that would do anything to make her husband happy, to being the woman that was attempting to seek attention from anywhere she could get it. “We know Betty is a stylized image of early sixties upper-middle-class suburban housewives even as we recognize specific historical authenticities in her story” (Black and Driscoll 196). The housewife of the 1960s is glamourized throughout the show, however many of the attitudes perceived seem to come from the time period depicted; women were lonely while their husbands were at work, and were grateful for any attention they received. Unlike Betty, many women did not choose to cheat on their husbands because they knew what the consequences could be; *Mad Men* turns away from the ideas of negative effects on cheating, and further pushes emphasis toward the comparison of Betty Draper to Jackie Kennedy, both are meant to be viewed as aesthetically pleasing and beloved, not meant to be taken too seriously.

**Season Five: May 1966 – Spring 1967**

Season five of *Mad Men* occurred between March and June 2013, and began on Memorial Day of 1966 and ended in the spring of 1967. Due to the amount of work that has been neglected by Don, SCDP hires a new advertising executive, Michael Ginsberg. Many of the
employees within the firm believe that he seems to be a cause for alarm due to his enamoring talents within the advertising world.

Nonetheless, Don and Ginsberg are pitted against each other in order to gain another client; instead of submitting both ideas, Don “forgets” to present Ginsberg’s idea, in order to ensure his own gets chosen. Peggy realizes that Ginsberg will be able to move faster within the company due to the fact that he’s a man; however, he informs Peggy that he was born in a Nazi concentration camp for Jews and was an orphan until his father found him and took him to America for a better life. Peggy realizes that Ginsberg will also have a harder time moving up in the company due to the fact that he is Jewish, but still decides that it is best for her full potential if she leaves SCDP to join a new firm. Upon finding out that she is planning on quitting, Don offers a raise, but she declines, telling him that she needs to move out of his shadow, finally causing Don to realize how important Peggy was to him not only as an employee but also as a confidant. With her work life changing, Peggy has also decided to move in with her boyfriend as well.
While Peggy acknowledges that because Michael Ginsberg is Jewish he will have issues rising up into the advertising world, as well, she still cannot allow herself to be overlooked, and thus decides to resign. This competitiveness between companies for Peggy’s skill, seems a bit overdone, due to the fact that as a character she isn’t that glamorous and doesn’t hold much sustenance to the show, besides serving as a stepping stone into what will become the “women’s movement.” It is here that the viewer is more heavily introduced to the idea of nostalgia through historical references, while also removing the vision of straight historical research. “The nostalgia film was never a matter of some old-fashioned ‘representation’ of historical content, but instead approached the ‘past’ through stylistic connotation, conveying ‘pastness’ by the glossy qualities of the image, and ‘1930s-ness’ or ‘1950s-ness’ by the attributes of fashion” (Black and Driscoll 198). Clearly, Peggy is used as more of a place holder for what an advertising agency wanted; someone that other companies were jealous of, and business wanted to promote their accounts. The aesthetics of this change from “Peggy the mousey girl” to “Peggy
the copywriter” takes shape in order to turn the series shift from the 1960s into the attitudes of the 1970s with liberation and freedom of expression, as well as the rise of women in the workplace.
Chapter 4: Summation of Analytical Findings

If anything, *Mad Men* gives its female characters more purpose and self-confidence than most women would have been able to maintain in 1965. Except for an early scene in which she turns to a 9-year-old neighbor for validation, Betty Draper is uncommonly self-assured (Abraham). She never beats herself up questioning what she did to drive her husband to infidelity. Unlike Betty, Joan has the self-confidence to confront her boss and sometime-lover about his ill-mannered behavior. In real life, this might have cost her both her lover and her job (Black and Driscoll 196). When Peggy articulately describes the discrimination she faces as a woman, only to have her supposedly progressive suitor respond sarcastically that maybe there should be “a civil rights march for women,” she takes offense at his ridicule rather than being shamed by it, as most women of that era would have been. The information provided throughout this study, further shows that the propaganda that is incorporated into television and written literature, can provide a type of retro-sexist movement regardless of whether or not audience members partake in a resistance theory state of mind.

Nevertheless, *Mad Men* continues to be as true to the period thus far, it wouldn’t be shocking to see the shows women keep paying a price for their personal growth throughout the series; even the show’s men are beginning to pay the price for their privilege. This being said, it is interesting to see that Don Draper is such a favorite among the audience, both male and female. “Draper represents a strong and traditional masculinity type: his robust physical appearance, taciturn temperament, secret scars and lack of any male bond remind us of a lonely cowboy riding his horse towards the sunset”... women find him “‘alluring’, ‘attractive’, ‘extremely handsome’, ‘confident’ and ‘powerful’. Also men pick him when asked to choose their favorite character on the grounds of his ‘security’, ‘charisma’ and ‘wit’” (Agirre 641). This
type of alpha male seems to be what separates the shows portrayal of the 1960s from the modern day lifestyle the viewers are living in.

Similarly, the show itself focuses on setting the characters in a professional sphere, where women are more concerned about being taken seriously in their male-dominated lives, which is different from the way that most other period dramas portray the same time. In the long run, Sally, the Drapers’ daughter, may be the one to watch, it was the daughters of the 1950s and 1960s housewives who, determined not to end up like their mothers, grew into the militant feminists of the 1970s (Marcovitch and Batty 183). These women are the primal force behind the movements that led to the evolution of women’s rights into a new, stronger more independent faction of women coming out of the household.

Further, it seems that although the images being viewed in Mad Men are crude in comparison to what is acceptable behaviors of the 21st century, it’s easier for the viewer to watch due to the aesthetically pleasing images. “It could be argued that this historical vantage point is at the inception of the postfeminist sensibility that pervades the series. We can deal with and even aesthetically enjoy the gender injustices of the early 1960s because we are at the same time reminded that such sexism is something from the past” (Agirre 635). The costumes, sets and glamorous lives become more appealing to a viewer because they live in a reality, but are able to enjoy a bit of time each day in a fantasy. The charm on the show is based off of its nostalgia and glamorization effects on women, not on creating a reverted world centered on the ideals of pre-feminism.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

It seems as though *Mad Men* has always acted as an indirect time machine, by creating a type of sensation that explains why female viewers might actually lust after an era of clearly defined gender roles, however misogynistic as they seem. In the first season, there was a definite uncertainty to the show’s critiques, mixed with glamourizing clear gender roles. For female viewers, it is possible to have a sense of life being easier, back when the choices were narrower, when dinner was paid for, when expectations were lower. Thus, the reason why *Mad Men* is so effective in addressing the gender biases of the time is because of its subtlety. According to Marcovitch and Batty, the costumes are not meant to overlook cultural flaws, but to force the viewer to address them head-on, both in history and current day (189). The clothes and the cocktails may be appealing, but they’re a way of revisiting a period when women were starting to remake the world, and take on the questions of where the fight for women’s equality got derailed. “The job of fantasy […] is to create a fictional object of desire to fill the ‘lack of being that is the irreducible condition of subjectivity’” (Falkof 37). The show creates a clear distinction to what was an acceptable behavior at the time depicted while reminding the viewers that this is not the time that they live in currently.

The misogyny of *Mad Men* is rendered ‘quaint’ because it is set in the past, and glamorized by the costumes (Hardie 160). For some viewers, it’s easier to allow the real gender issues to be glossed over; while for others, shows like *Mad Men* serve as liberation from real life issues. This is most prevalent in the postfeminist argument that *Mad Men* enforces ideals of retro sexism, thus taking our current society back decades by promoting stances that should no longer be supported, however the show readjusts the viewer’s vision to what the Sixties was really like, in comparison to how those that lived during it, have relayed it back. The writers are resisting the
temptation to transform their female characters into contemporary heroines; they’re not, and they cannot be, which the brilliance of the show’s script is. Mad Men’s writers are not sexist; the time period was.

Due to the fact that Mad Men is a show based upon advertising and marketing, it shows the way in which manufacturers have used and continue to use sexism to sell products. Marketers are increasingly using retro-sexism to sell products; this form of advertising uses irony and humor as a way to distance itself by focusing on modern attitudes in an attempt to mimic and/or glorify the sexist representations and stereotypes from the past that are being perpetuated. In “The Laugh of the Medusa,” Helene Cixous discusses the way in which the past is not meant to emulate the future, but is instead meant to be used as a measurement of how to avoid similar mistakes in the present. She states:

Since these reflections are taking shape in an area just on the point of being discovered, they necessarily bear the mark of our time – a time during which the new breaks away from the old, and, more precisely, the (feminine) new from the old (la nouvelle de l’ancien). Thus, as there are no grounds for establishing a discourse, but rather an arid millennial ground to break, what I say has at least two sides and two aims: to break up, to destroy; and to foresee the unforeseeable, to project. (Cixous 3)

The purpose of this thesis is not to repeat the previous discourse that has been created by rhetoricians addressing the issues between nostalgia and feminism in literature or media, but instead to expand the argument to audiences. This thesis is meant to contribute to the field of rhetoric and writing by allowing the audience to understand that a connection between nostalgia and feminism has the potential to lead to a cultural movement that promotes retro-sexism.
While current literature seems to be focusing on the evolution of feminism in literature, audiences must remember that there is still a long way to go before the past can be completely expelled. If there is to be any improvement in the current field of rhetoric, the writings of past rhetoricians, such as Helene Cixous must be evaluated and expanded upon. “The future must no longer be determined by the past. I do not deny that the effects of the past are still with us. But I refuse to strengthen them by repeating them, to confer upon them an irremovability the equivalent of destiny, to confuse the biological and the cultural. Anticipation is imperative” (Cixous 3). Mad Men is a primary example of how the effects of the past are still celebrated in the present, especially in fictional media. Although many viewers understand that the past must stay in the past, it is still a struggle of media to portray the importance of establishing a rhetoric of evolution in order to step away from the promotion of retro-sexism.
Notes

i Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan, 1994. Print. This was taken from Black and Driscoll article.

ii Ibid.

iii An informational survey, conducted by Emmerling Communications, revealed that this term did not exist during the 1950s/1960s.
Works Cited


