

## JACKIE, MARILYN OR SOMEONE DIFFERENT – MALE CONSTRUCTED MYTHS OF 1960'S WOMEN IN TV SERIES *MAD MEN*

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Simone de Beauvoir in her ground-breaking book *The Second Sex* famously states that the ideal woman is the male construction. Although the book itself is not referred as the direct source of inspiration for Matthew Weiner's TV series *Mad Men*, there are certain elements which could allude to Beauvoir's book. Betty Draper is inspired by Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* and the famous problem without a name described therein, the unexplainable unhappiness of American housewives in the 1960s. But she is more than that. She is often compared to Jackie Kennedy, the woman who was not only the First Lady at that time but also the role model many women could aspire to become. Applying Beauvoir methodology Jackie Kennedy is the myth of a sophisticated woman. Joan Holloway, on the other hand, is inspired by Helen Gurley Brown's *Sex and the Single Girl*. The author claims that women should accept the women's objectification and make the most of it. Joan not only embraces that mantra but she also quite logically becomes another role model of the 1960's woman – Marilyn Monroe who stands at the different end of Beauvoir's myth of woman – the flesh. Both Marilyn and Joan have hourglass figures and they are both equally artificial in their act of being the Siren. They are both kind of paradox. Beauvoir claims that woman is the metaphor for nature but not the wild and untamed one but civilised and artificial. Adorning her body in the most sexually appealing clothes, Joan thinks she turns it in the kind of weapon. Unfortunately that is not the case. She is not the one that defines her, but men are. She is the object to behold and they define her in their own terms. The third character which is the subject of this paper is Peggy Olson, secretary turned copywriter. Peggy is not like any of the above-mentioned characters. She is aware that being what men want her to be is not the power she is after. Like her boss and mentor Don Draper, she is the outsider who knows how to define herself and that is the probable reason why she advances her position in the agency. All women in the series want to have control over their identity, body and space they occupy but not all of them succeed. Betty suffers at home. Joan strolls around

the office knowing it like the back of her hand, but at the floor of that very office she is raped by her fiancé. Peggy is the only one who eventually achieves some kind of control. Her secret is not being the ideal woman.

The analysed scene of the creative meeting at the Sterling and Cooper concerns the Playtex bra. Paul Kinsey has an idea about the women's fantasy: – "Jackie Kennedy and Marilyn Monroe. Every single woman is one of them." To prove his point, he shows Don the secretarial pool, and he specifically points out which secretary is Jackie and which is Marylyn. But Peggy – the only woman in the room – questions his opinion. She says that perhaps the problem is not about how women want to see themselves but how men want to see them. Paul is not willing to give up his point. He justifies his opinion by saying: "Bras are for men. Women want to see themselves the way men see them." This short scene from episode "Maidenform" alludes to Simone de Beauvoir's myth of a woman introduced in her book *The Second Sex*. Men project certain sexual fantasies onto women. She represents to them for instance, flesh or mother, generic types which help to create the Other.

The objective of this paper is to discuss the role of women in the series *Mad Men* with a special focus on the ideologies represented there and the fact that the personas they assume are male constructs. I will focus on three major heroines from the series: Joan Holloway, Betty Draper and Peggy Olson. First, I will examine the character of Joan to demonstrate that she corresponds to "Marilyn Monroe" classification signifying the carnality. Next, I will focus my on Betty and prove that she falls within "Jackie" archetype – the mother and the mad housewife which is related in Friedan's Second Wave manifesto *The Feminine Mystique*. At the end, I will investigate Peggy and show her idiosyncratic position in the series, as she eludes the classification into the specific category, and she seems to be more connected with the Third Wave rather than the Second.

After years of fighting for their political rights and the place in the male dominated space, women returned home and they were successfully convinced that "truly feminine women do not want careers, higher education, political rights – the independence and the opportunities that the old-fashioned feminists fought for" (Friedan 11). Shows and films from this period depict women focused on their family, scrubbing floors, waiting for their husbands to return home and getting the "mysterious orgasmic fulfilment" out of it (Friedan 1). Friedan observes that "it was unquestioned gospel that women could identify with nothing beyond the home" (4). Again they were safely back to the confinement of home where they were told what to do. Adverts at that time showed the interior design of kitchens with mosaic murals and original paintings. Designers searched for every possible way to make the home and the kitchen particularly appealing to women. The image

of a woman fighting for her rights or a working woman was not in vogue. In the 1950s, women returned to the role of the protector of the Hearth and Home.

Betty Draper is the prime example of the 1960's American housewife. The proud mother of two beautiful children and a happy wife of the creative director Don Draper. She is a slender and elegant blonde in the type of Grace Kelly. The comedian Jimmy Barrett upon meeting Betty in the episode "Benefactor," says "When you imagine someone saying that to you, you always hope it's her." When he shakes Don's hand, he adds "Are you two sold separately? It's J.F.K. And you're not Jackie but you're his type. I've met him." Nonetheless Drapers' marriage is reduced to commodity. They are like the Kennedys or Barbie and Ken. They could easily sell the glamorous American suburban lifestyle, and, in fact, Don often uses their image to sell the advertised by him products.

Although Jimmy says that Betty is not Jackie, she does have many characteristics of the famous First Lady. First of all, she is educated. She has a degree in anthropology, and she speaks fluent Italian. Both Jackie and Betty conform to the myth of a sophisticated woman. According to Beauvoir, a sophisticated woman "has always been the ideal erotic object" (177). According to the 1960s canon, she can be considered to be an ideal woman. A significant intertextual cue of that is hinted in the song played at the end of the pilot episode, immediately after the character of Betty is introduced. Don Draper returns from a tryst with his mistress Midge. He is welcomed by half-woken Betty. He goes to his children's room and kisses them goodnight. They signify a perfect family vignette. We hear *On the Street Where You Live*, a song from the popular musical *My Fair Lady*. Taylor believes that the song is a momentous part of the Betty's introduction because the musical is about two men attempting to create an ideal woman. The author points out that this allusion "reminds us that to some extent the feminine ideal is a masculine construction" (Taylor 10). In Beauvoir's opinion, a woman in man's eye is the "intermediary between nature, the stranger to man and the fellow being who is too closely identical" (160). She observes that contrary to the nature, a woman "opposes him [man] with neither the hostile silence of nature nor the hard requirement of a reciprocal relation; through a unique privilege she is a conscious being and yet it seems possible to possess her in the flesh" (Beauvoir 160). Betty's appearance at the end of the episode is noteworthy. She is one of the major female characters in the series and yet she is pushed to the margins of passivity. Her place is reduced to the object whose place is at home. She is not allowed to speak for herself because the song "speaks" for her.

If Betty were a typical female character from the 1960s film, her role would be confined to being a passive and ideal housewife. But in the examined series her being marginalised by Don is a source of Betty's frustration. *Mad Men* writers are known for their extensive use of "the cultural ephemera" which could "play such a large part in creating the feeling of authenticity in *Mad Men*" (McDonald 117) so there is more to Betty's character than it might seem at the first glance. Even her name is significant, as it is a reference to Betty Friedan, the author of *The Feminine Mystique*. Betty Friedan describes the famous "problem without a name" faced by many American housewives – "this strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States" (11). Experts marvelled why women were so unhappy when they had everything they needed – beautiful houses, designer kitchens and magazines filled with recipes, clothes and cosmetics. What could be the reason for their unhappiness? Typically, experts blamed women's urge for the education. More and more women attended colleges those days, which, according to some critics "naturally made them unhappy in their role as housewives" (Friedan 18). An allegedly "more reasonable" approach to the education of women was proposed, meaning more subjects connected with home and domestic lives. Other, more radical consultants proposed that women should not be allowed to attend college at all. Some other conservative people from the establishment, including humourist from *Harper's Bazaar*, claimed that it is not the education but rather women's right to vote which naturally should be taken away to make women more content with their lives (Friedan 18).

All in all, it could be assumed that the real solution to "women's problem" is not the home-oriented education or the right to vote but being seen as something more than a mother or housewife. Women at that time would like to associate themselves with ideas and actions beyond the domestic and feel something more than sheer boredom and fatigue with household chores. Like other women with her affliction, Betty goes to a psychiatrist. She suffers from periodical and involuntarily numb hands, which sometimes prevents her from doing certain activities, like using a lipstick or driving a car. Her reaction might be the psychosomatic response to her distress. In "Ladies Room," Betty and Don attend a dinner with Roger and Mona Sterling. During the evening, Betty is very eager to share her thoughts and opinions on a number of subjects. When Mona and Betty go to the restroom, Roger says to Don that he seems to know more about Don's wife than his own. Don replies "Maybe your wife is just a better drinker," dismissing Betty's eagerness to talk as the alcohol intoxication. While in the bathroom, Betty has problems with holding the lipstick in her hand. Mona

helps her to refresh her makeup, complimenting her good looks and believing that with those lips she has no problems with holding on to Don. Betty sadly replies "It's hard to hold on to anything right now with the children and running the house. And I don't know if I told you. My mother died three months ago." The exchange demonstrated here shows that Betty is desperate to share her feelings. She wants others, especially Don, to acknowledge that she is a human being and not merely "her husband's prey, his possession" (Beauvoir 170). On the other hand, however, she is afraid of being independent. This becomes visible when, a divorcee Helen comes to the neighbourhood. Later in the "Ladies Room," she drives past her home and she sees Helen carrying her possessions, and no man telling her what to do. Betty hands' numbness returns, this time she loses control over her car. Perhaps she is afraid of the perspective of being on her own and possibly this could be a reason why she ostracises Helen from the suburban community as she sees her as a threat, the Other.

One could speculate that Betty Friedan's suggestion for Betty's condition is getting "a new life plan, fitting in the love and children and home that have defined femininity in the past with the work toward a greater purpose that shapes the future" (359). This means getting a job and creating a life independent from the family, at least to some extent. But Giles points out that Friedan's plan assumes that the new woman's "image of the 'full human identity' ... is a masculine one" (qtd. in Taylor). Beauvoir also advocates rejecting femininity myth and becoming more like a man. But in the case of Betty, it would mean becoming more like Don, "literally a self-made man" (Taylor). In episode "Shoot," Betty gets a chance to leave the space of her home. She is offered a job as a model for the Coca Cola campaign to convince Don into the new account. When he declines, Betty loses her job. She puts the brave face and says to her husband that she did not want a job anyway, because she could not take care of her family. However at the end of the episode, Betty vents her frustration on the neighbour's pigeons. Her action might be seen as a "rebellion against 'the feminine mystique'" because she blends the feminine and masculine in her behaviour and outfit. She wears a pink peignoir, which is associated with her overall femininity and she uses bb gun which is typically the male attribute (Taylor). She reacts to her neighbour's threats. She is the mother and the woman, protecting her home and offspring. But having the voice of her own is not the only thing that Betty desires. Her problem also includes a sexual component. When she describes her household duties to Don, she says "I never let my hands idle," which McDonald sees as allusion to masturbation. Taylor also points out that

it is not Don per se that Betty desires so much as his recognition that she has strong sexual feelings demanding fulfilment. Betty is not telling him she is

aroused and ready for sex how so much as insisting he see her as a sexual being with equal needs and frustrations. (119)

When it is becoming more and more clear that Don will never recognise her as a human being with the equal needs, she buys a Victorian fainting couch. It is another symbol of her distress. Friedan compares the 1960s women's need for a career fulfilment to Victorian women's problem with sex. Allegedly for Victorian women sex was non-existent. They were supposed to deny their sexual needs and if they refused to do so, they were considered mentally unstable. With the 1960s women it was similar, they were not allowed to talk about their dreams or aspirations, different from getting a husband, beautiful home and couple of children. The act of buying that Victorian fainting couch, Betty symbolises two problems – Victorian one and the 1960s one. In a way, she is stuck between the First and the Second Wave of Feminism. Betty is defined by her household duties. At the same time, she is not sure what she wants and she cannot really voice her needs. She is the perfect woman but frustrated by the expectations imposed upon her by the world.

On the other hand, the character of Joan Holloway seems to be quite different from Betty, as she tries to take an active part in the creation of her social role. She works as the office manager at the Sterling and Cooper. She is the red hair sex bomb with the large bosom and an hourglass figure, much like Marilyn Monroe. The first scene when Joan is introduced as the character happens to be Peggy's first day in the office. Joan is the head of the secretarial pool so she acts as a kind of guide to Peggy. She is extremely good at her job but even from this first scene, we can surmise that the career development is not in her agenda. It becomes clear that her goal is to obtain what Betty has achieved, getting a well-to-do husband. Her career in the agency is just the means to achieve it. Joan is conscious of the male gaze and she does everything in her power to transform it into kind of empowerment. She is often compared by other characters to Marilyn Monroe, because of her body, breasts and buttocks in particular, which according to Beauvoir are so appealing to the men due to "their unnecessary, gratuitous blooming" (176). The other reason why she is compared to Monroe is that she is equally artificial in her behaviour. In fact she has to be, "for man wishes simultaneously that woman be animal and plant and that she be hidden behind an artificial form" (Beauvoir 179).

Female beauty is the paradox. A woman is supposed to be natural but, at the same time, her outfit is designed as a kind of contraption for her body. She undergoes beauty procedures in order to be viewed as attractive, and, at the same time, as artificial to a man as possible. When Don and Roger arrive, Joan performs a small performance for them, she exchanges knowing look with Peggy and touches her hair. Haskell sees that as "the masturbatory

fantasy that gave satisfaction and demanded nothing in return” (qtd. in Akass and McCabe 183). Her whole character could be the commentary on Laura Mulvey *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, meaning the way Joan is conscious of her play-acting and how she transforms it into a kind of power, at least, in her own opinion.

Apart from alluding to Mulvey’s *Visual Pleasures*, Joan was created in order to make a commentary on Helen Gurley Brown’s book *Sex and the Single Girl*. It is a handbook on how to experience sex without marriage. Apparently, Matthew Weiner, the creator of *Mad Men*, upon getting a copy of *The Feminine Mystique* and *Sex and the Single Girl* said “Oh this is my show” (qtd. in Harlovich 161). Brown’s book not only inspired the character of Joan but also it was “influential in establishing the atmosphere of the office and the relations between secretaries and the bosses” (Marcovitch 4). Joan is quintessential *Sex and the Single Girl* Girl.

It is hard to call Brown a feminist. If so, she might have placed herself between the First and the Second Wave. Many scholars criticise her for the “crotch-level take on feminism” and the fact that

she wrote about womanhood in a way that confirmed entrenched stereotypes that defined a gender by housework and the fulfilment of men’s desires, but perhaps she started the dialogue about these issues so that a more profound conversation might follow (McLean 42).

Nevertheless Marcovitch is of the opinion that Brown has made an attempt of “shattering this virginal mystique that Friedan claims occurs through the grooming of adolescent girls to accept the feminine mystique” (5). What is more, she believes that Brown did not discourage women from working and not missing the opportunity “which is to get paid for producing things in her head,” while “at the same time she should display herself as ‘sexually interesting and ‘interested’ (qtd. in Marcovitch 5).

Despite her efforts, Joan marries unfortunately. In the season two, she becomes engaged to a young, dashing and successful doctor Greg Harris. When Peggy sees him while he is visiting Joan in episode “The Mountain King,” she describes him as a keeper. McDonald points out that a word “keeper” has two meanings, one positive, referring to someone worth holding to and the second, more sinister, possessive and controlling person. Greg turns out to be less ideal than Joan has thought. While she shows him around Don’s office, he forces himself on her on the floor, because he is convinced that she is sleeping with other men from the office. Although she tells him to stop.

Greg violates and humiliates her by this act: he treats her as a piece of meat, as a physical being endowed with a mere vegetative or animated soul, and not as one possessing a rational soul or one with the same dignity as men. (Barkman 214)

Greg's abusive behaviour might be also seen as marking his own territory. He thinks that he has control over Joan's body and he can punish her for not fulfilling his expectations. After that, she gets up and pretends that nothing has happened. For the contemporary viewers this might look abnormal but Akass and McCabe give the explanation of her silence. She simply does not have the language to describe her situation, and she does not know how to cope with this situation and "silent discretion translates into quiet confusion" (Akass and McCabe 187). To viewers' amazement, she continues her wedding plans. Joan has no power to seek justice, in her times the problem like Betty's problem simply did not exist and the language to describe was yet to be invented.

There are other instances when Joan suffers injustice. Although she is the invaluable part of the agency, she is rarely perceived as such by her colleagues. What is more, at first, she does not seem to understand Peggy's determination to be successful. But in the second season, she is offered a temporary position as the script reader in Harry Crane's newly opened television department. Akass and McCabe notice that Joan is "uniquely qualified" for the position, as she lives that feminine desire created by ad men who "absorb[ed] it into the serious business of consumer capitalism" (186). She learns how the television narrative works and how to spot the best places for the commercials, but when she starts to enjoy her new work she is quickly replaced by an inexperienced man. Like in the previous situation, she neither complains nor acts against her discrimination.

In the season five, Joan becomes the partner in SC&P (Sterling Cooper & Partners). But the position in the board has its price. She is offered the place in exchange for sleeping with the client in order to secure the Jaguar account. Convinced that the partners voted unanimously for her prostitution, she agrees. Later Don appears in her apartment and says that she should not have done it because she is more than her body. That is very noble of him to say but Joan's ideology, being the so called beacon to male erotic fantasies prevents her from being something more than the mere flesh (McLean 47). Other members of the board look down upon her when she tries to bring her own accounts, like for instance Avon, and there are men, like for instance Harry Crane, who are not afraid to fight for their place in the board, saying that they have more merit than the office manager who slept with the client. Joan is different from Betty, but, at the same time, quite similar to her. She is also defined by men but not as a mother but as the flesh. Contrary to Betty



who seems to be frustrated by her role, she tries to control the way she is perceived by men. Her effort usually is futile, as she has no control over her image. But as opposed to Betty, she can identify herself with something more than just the home.

Peggy Olson, the secretary turned a copywriter, is someone with whom contemporary female viewers of the show can identify. She represents none of the 1960s myths of a woman. She dresses like a little girl and she does not want to participate in the gaze. Marcovitch explains that period genre, like *Mad Men*, is a comparison between then and now. "Racism, sexism and anti-Semitism both casual and vitriolic are part of acceptable conversations and attitudes" and when they are transported to the past they summon up the nostalgia (Marcovitch x). While Betty and Joan are the characters stuck in their own ideologies, Peggy is a personality "bridging the early sixties with the feminist movement of the later sixties and early seventies and finally with the working women of the early twenty-first century" (Marcovitch xiii). We may scoff the scenes with pregnant women smoking or children running with plastic bags on their heads as the thing from the past, but thanks to Peggy, the show speaks about problems that contemporary women can identify with. In a way, Peggy is an anachronism in the show – she is the present-day woman in the 1960's world.

"Not just another colour in the box," that is Peggy's mantra and a line which launches her career as a copywriter. In the episode "Babylon," secretaries are given samples of the new Belle Jolie lipstick. A group of women closed in the room with one-way mirror have a good time, trying new colours on but not Peggy. She sits in the corner, not participating in all that gender play. When asked by Freddy Rumsen what the matter is, she replies that she does not find the colour she could like. When she helps after this whole market research, she says "Here is your basket of kisses," while giving Freddy the bin with the used tissues. It catches Freddy's attention and he asks Don to let Peggy do the copy. Her work is so successful that she is eventually offered a position of a copywriter. Akass and McCabe call it "being given permission to speak" (188). Peggy's identity struggle offers a new perspective to the advertising discourse and the challenge to the whole advertising feminine mystique. She knows that what women want should be treated as unique and individual.

Like Betty and Joan, Peggy is also defined by the female stereotypical roles in the society. Like Joan, she is conscious of the male gaze and her role as a sexual object, but she decides not to take part in it. In the pilot episode, she has sex with the office most obnoxious guy, Peter Campbell, knowing that it is the night of his bachelor party. Her pregnancy, of which she seems to be completely unaware of, collides with her career advancement. Taylor

observes that by her seemingly more masculine behaviour, Peggy fulfils “modern, but masculine ideal articulated by Betty Friedan” to recreate herself and reject femininity. Nevertheless Taylor also adds that Peggy’s weight gain was not due to the opposition of beauty conventions but the effect of her pregnancy, which means that “Peggy becomes a guy by being a woman.” What also seems interesting is the fact that she suffers from the “temporary trauma” after her labour (Marcovitch). She refuses to hold her newly born child, thus, rejecting her role as a mother. She spends several weeks in the psychiatric ward and when she comes back to work, slim again, she does not talk about what has happened to her.

While she recovers at the hospital, she is visited by Don, her boss. He gives her advice, one of many she has received from him. He tells her to forget about this experience and he tells her that she would be surprised how much of this had not happened. Peggy is one of very few women with whom Don did not have sexual relationship. Taylor points out that their relation is far more intimate and probably he sees Peggy as the second Anna, the real Don Draper’s wife with whom he also establishes a very close bond. Moreover, he acknowledges her as self-made woman, someone very similar to him. On one occasion, in the episode “Shut the Door. Have a Seat,” he says to her “I’ve taken you for granted and I’ve been hard on you, but only because I think I see you as an extension of myself.” The reason he sometimes treats her worse than other colleagues is that Don knows that she can do better than them because she is the outsider like him.

Peggy is very much aware that in order to succeed, she has to be better than men with whom she works. When her career progresses, she learns the rules of being a successful woman in the men’s world. One of the most basic rules that she learns is that “women are different ... code for ‘other’ to keep women positioned as outsiders” (qtd. in Harlovich, 165). It means that different rules apply to her than to her colleagues. She knows that she will not be a part of the group and that she will not take part in the meetings in strip clubs or bars. On one occasion, she goes to such a meeting, dressed in a glamorous outfit. Marcovitch points out that “from Brown’s perspective, Peggy is on the road to career success, but a modern viewer might see her as having naturalized her own threat” (6). Thus, Peggy learns another rule: “Looks matter. Bare those arms and legs at your own risk. Flesh conjures up images of the beach and the boudoir, not the boardroom” (qtd. in Harlovich 165). Another lesson she gets is the importance of having mentors Don tells Peggy that the quality of her work performance matters and she should be her best self at all times. She also shows her how to be assertive to the point of being pushy. Thanks to her new attitude she gets her own office, not shared with Xerox machine. She is the only person brave enough to approach Roger

and ask for it and he admires her for that. Peggy's another mentor is Joan. From her, she learns how the office works and that she should accept objectification and make the most of it. Apart from learning how the office works, Peggy does not take much of her advice to heart. She knows that the best she can do is to ignore sexism and avoid the gaze as much as possible. Her last mentor is Bobbie, one of many Don's lovers. When she stays in Peggy's flat in the episode "The New Girl," she tells her to respect and regard herself in esteem and she should live the life of a person she wants to be.

That last advice can be the overview of all things Peggy and all the other women in the show do. Peggy does not want to be only mother and housewife. For her job is "more than an economic convenience", it is "an emotional necessity" (Jaffe 7). She stays true to herself and she is not an embodiment of male myths like Betty and Joan. That is probably the reason why she becomes the series most successful female protagonist.

In fact, all women in the show want to be in control of their own lives and bodies, and they seem to be more psychologically complex than male characters and according to Marcovitch only them "experience what we might call growth or development" (ix). Perhaps much of the series success, in McDonald's opinion, is due to the fact that it does not assume that women want the same thing "a house, husband and children perpetuated throughout traditional fifties media" (120-21). They all have different goals and different opinions. They are not generic types created by men.

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