

# Mad men and gender relations argumentative essay

[Media](#), [Television](#)



## **Introduction**

Mad Men is an American TV series, which explores the classic days of advertising, as it was done in the sixties on Madison Avenue. It treats the business style of Sterling Cooper, a small - medium sized advertising company activating on Madison Avenue. The show also touches with humor and sarcasm the social and political specificities of that time, sometimes presenting them in an ironical light. A social aspect that the TV series emphasizes on is the gender relations. Mad Men focuses on the absurdities in gender inequalities, illustrating the " then" and " now" situation regarding this aspect.

Gender relations are treated from a social representation perspective. This theme is utilized in every episode of the TV series and it elaborates various social representation of the relations between men and women. Male domination, submissive women, yet classical beauty, style, refinement, femininity and romantic representation of the traditional relations between men and women or the rise of feminism, are some of the subthemes of gender relations that are being treated in Mad Men.

The show is dynamic and intriguing and analyzes in depth the gender relations, illustrating with cruel irony the absurd of the situations in which some of the above - mentioned subthemes are exposed. However, the augmented representations of the gender roles, as they were played in the sixties are actually indices that gender inequalities still exist nowadays, because specific situations that illustrate the males' supremacy over women still exist today.

## Body

This is a men's show, illustrating that the advertising world of the sixties and in general the business world of that period belonged to men. The TV series focuses on the mysterious figure of Don Draper, the creative director from Sterling Cooper, a successful business man, desired by women and feared by men. He is the representation of the idea that men had the power and the control and the world was in their hands. They are represented as self-assured, financial independent, charming, professional, classy persons. In the TV series, most often men are the sole providers in the family, which makes them entitled to behave arrogantly or indifferent sometimes with their wives. This is "toxic masculinity" (Danis, "Toxic Masculinity in Mad Men"). This is the case of Don Draper who has a beautiful wife and two children that he adores. Nevertheless, he is inclined towards searching for happiness in other parts, as he is involved in several adulterous romantic affairs throughout the show.

When it comes to familial life, men duplicate, have a sexual double standard (Stoddart 188). Wife and children represent a comfort, which generates the relaxation time and also a social status. However, what the show is indicating is that men have a hidden face, a dark personality, which determine them to permanently search for passion and happiness. That is to say that they are romantically challenged, being attracted by many beautiful, feminine and stylish women. On the other hand, this attitude of permanently searching for love elsewhere than in the marital home also signifies that men treat women with superficiality, perceiving them as simple sexual objects.

In relation to this aspect, women were perceived as sexual objects or as procreators, as their single accepted role in the society was that of a mother and a housewife, taking care of the children and the chores, and permanently serving him, the man. Because of this, they were not enough for men, as they were not sufficiently challenged to dedicate themselves entirely, body and mind, to a relationship in which they were not intellectually challenged. Edgerton explains that this situation is an “untrammelled misogyny”, and men are privileged to act as they do (186). Woman’s acceptance of the traditional roles imposed by the social standards of the time made them the weak gender. Most of them are, as stated, housewives, financial dependent by their husbands. Their sole decision makings involve selecting the brand of the cleaning ingredient or what to prepare for dinner. However, they are the ones most dedicated to children and responsible for their education, because they have the needed time to take care of them, while their men are at work (the representation of Betty Draper in Weiner, Mad Men).

The TV show also explores the shy emergence of women in the business world. Edgerton observes that the show continues to explore the gender gaps in business world (161). Most of the employed women are hired as secretaries or persona assistants for men, serving all the professional needs of their bosses and sometimes the personal needs also. They are represented as the loyal dogs that always come to work before their bosses, and then welcome them when they enter the room, and take their hat and their jacket.

This image, although not at these proportions, is also available today. Some

women are still filling the roles of the Sterling - Cooper secretaries, always near their managers, permanently aiming to perform at their highest standards in satisfying their bosses' professional needs. However, nowadays it is encouraged the proactivity, which is actually perceived as an added value of the individuals. In this context, women who are still acting as simple secretaries, only executing orders, are putting a disadvantage on themselves and are also perpetuate the gender differences.

Returning to the image of women, as they are represented in Mad Men, the show indicates the rise of feminine power, a social revolution, as women become self - aware of their capacities and start to emancipate. The proponent of this image is Peggy Olson, Don's ex secretary, who becomes a copywriter at Sterling Cooper after her ideas were recognized as valuable, and developed into an advertisement. She finds out that being in the men's world is no easy job and she confronts rejection, obstacles, even backstabbing from both men and women. Men are envious on her position and function, considering women bellow their capacities, and hence not accepting the fact that a woman could be better from a professional point of view than them. Women are also envious, or better said they are jealous on Peggy's achievements. However, secretly they all admire her and want to be like her. A women solidarity can be slightly perceived, transposed in the movie between Peggy and Joan Holloway, the secretarial chief at Sterling Cooper (Weiner, Mad Men).

The TV series ridicules the romance from the sixties, focusing on the superficialities that account for social appearances. The gender inequalities indicate the classical image of the perfect couple, who form the perfect

family and have the perfect children. Taking Don and Betty Draper, they are both beautiful, charming, desirable, elegant, have the perfect hair, the perfect skin, perfect teeth, perfect smile, etc., just as an advertisement layout. This image indicates the shallowness of the familial life, an aspect that is still very visible nowadays. Beyond the traditional courtship, wherein the man conquers the woman following a seduction ritual, women are frivolous and easily let themselves conquered. Even more, sometimes they are the ones that make advances on men. As such, Draper is occasionally approached by waitresses, flight attendants, and all kinds of women, who are proposing him an adventure. This aspect explores a hidden aspect of femininity, which is also highly visible nowadays (Weiner, Mad Men).

## **Conclusion**

The cover of a magazine is not always representative for what is actually inside that magazine. This is how Mad Men TV series can be briefly described. Men and women duplicate: they have two faces: one representing the person devoted to family, and the other one representing a person who wants to be free, or who is searching for new romantic challenges.

Mad Men is the representation of a sexist society, wherein men are the engine of the society. The movie is a mirror of the nowadays society, exploring social aspects that are still existent today, although they are not so much debated.

## **Woks Cited**

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