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EXPLORING MAD MEN: THROUGH THE LENS OF EXISTENTIALISM, FEMINISM AND IDENTITY.

*A philosophical analysis of critically acclaimed television series created by Matthew
Weiner*

By

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DECLARATION

I , Abhirupa Sarkar, Hereby declare that the dissertation titled, EXPLORING MAD MEN: THROUGH THE LENS OF EXISTENTIALISM, FEMINISM AND IDENTITY is entirely based on the work carried out by me under the guidance of Professor Norma Rebello, of the school of Sanskrit, philosophy and Indic studies, Goa university.

I further declare that the work presented in the dissertation is genuine and it has not formed the basis for any work done previously for any degree, diploma or certificate of this or any other university. The relevant literature and research has been surveyed and all the necessary references have been provided. This entire research has been carried out independently and due acknowledgments have been made wherever the facilities have been availed from.

Place : Goa University

Date : 9th May 2022



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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the work presented in the dissertation entitled **EXPLORING MAD MEN: THROUGH THE LENS OF EXISTENTIALISM, FEMINISM AND IDENTITY**. Is a record of research work done by the candidate, Abhirupa Sarkar, herself during the period of study under my guidance and that it has previously not formed the basis for the award of any Degree or diploma of Goa University or elsewhere

N Rebello
10/5/22

(Professor Norma Rebello)

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"Just think about it deeply, then forget it, and an idea will jump up in your face." – Don Draper, Mad Men, Season 1, Episode 11, "Indian Summer"

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Introduction

From the moment it aired on television in July of 2007, AMC's *Mad Men* was an immediate hit. The one thing that enthralled the audiences the most was the depiction of the 1960's Madison Avenue, New York in the 60's was the origin of new schools of thought and counter culture. The show was successful in not just portraying and accurate depiction; its screenplay was lauded critically for portraying the yesteryear's ideology. From gender stereotypes to sexism, capitalist charades to existentialism, identity crises to the hippie movement, the show touched it all.

At first when we are introduced to the character of Don Draper, we think it is going to be show about advertising. But the philosophical struggles showcased in each season show how each and every character in the show tries to find their own meaning and identity in the transformational decade of the 60's.

At a closer glance we will notice that much of the philosophical struggles of the day are similar to the philosophical quandaries of today. The gender roles, the search for meaning, the effect of capitalism and the idea of creating an individual identity- all of these themes push forth the narrative about what it is to be human specifically what it was to be an individual trying to create a life in the sixties.

The show was created by Mathew Weiner and was a critical hit from the beginning. It premiered in 2007 and received a lot of mainstream press. The show depicted the reality of being in the advertising world in New York in the 60's and was complete with facts and depictions that were culturally and historically sound.

However, other than its worldwide critical reception, Mad Men achieved another major feat and that is of garnering a lot of scholarly interest. Research shows that Mad Men is what one can call an existential show rich with philosophical undertones.

The characters journey of self-discovery has provided viewers with a form of visual therapy. The world that is depicted in Mad Men is very similar to the world in today's popular culture. When the viewers see the characters struggling in their personal and professional lives, it invokes in them a feeling of curiosity where they can question their own philosophical motives. The quest for meaning has been a predominant theme in the show. The titular character of Don Draper is shown with a never seen before on television vulnerability. In each season we see how his character struggles with the concept of identity and purpose in a world that is continually drowning in indulgence and self-destruction.

Researchers have also found that the show also creates paradigms of the dream life soaked in nostalgia that can make the audiences feel like they are a part of something bigger. This tapping into the viewer's subconscious for something bigger than themselves is also akin to the search for a true purpose.

However Mad Men goes one step further. It also showcases the pitfalls of having all your dreams come true. Our hero Don Draper has everything that a person could wish, a stable home life with a beautiful wife and two children the house with a picket fence in the suburbs, the lavish job at Manhattan, a robust social life with a few mistresses on the side. Yet at every turn, we see him struggle with self-acceptance, he is constantly trying to reach for something without even knowing. Don Draper is addicted to the "beginning of things" this leaves him constantly restless and dissatisfied because he is never fully present in a moment to face himself and reconcile with the demons of his past.

Steeped in capitalism and post war America, the show also illustrates the hold of patriarchy, the American dream and societal norms over our characters. It goes to show that so much of their existence is an attribute of what they have been led to believe all their lives. Amidst this, as the decade heads for the counterculture in the seventies they have to rediscover and redefine the essence of their existence.

It is an extremely interesting set up, one that has given the creators of the show to dabble with a lot of themes and introduce debates which make us ponder upon the nature of existence. The gender norms of that time are also portrayed in the most realistic manner, so much so that most of the scholars called this depiction as glorification of the tribulation that women had to go through during that time.

However, the one thing that stands out despite this debate is the fact that Mad Men did introduce extremely strong female characters who went through individual journeys in their personal and professional lives to create a deeper meaning for themselves. They broke away from the shackles of patriarchy and despite all its challenges, managed to create an impact on the competitive, male dominated professional world of the sixties.

At its essence Mad Men is a show about Don Draper coming to terms with who he actually is. Despite the dominant idea of glamorous capitalism, Mad Men has managed to capture the nuances of existence and survival in the increasingly uncertain world. The emphasis is on radical reinvention of the self. Now do the characters do this by constantly shunning their authentic selves and conforming to the norm or by reflecting on their actions and values?

It honors the social movements of the decade while shining a light on the essence of nostalgia. While the characters struggle with superficial relationships and fixed norms, we see a new wave of autonomy come in. This new wave threatens to overthrow the old ways of thinking, it is challenging and stimulating.

The concepts that have been touched upon in the show are not exactly alien to the collective, but Mad Men manages to create a sense of identification with these themes of self-discovery and transformation through its journey across seven years. The power struggles and the bigger social debates about racism and feminism are showcased with painful honesty that depict the actual state of how people lived in the sixties. The most significant aspect is that the story of Don Draper and his colleagues in this mad world is still relevant for our contemporary audiences. It is the depiction of suburban ennui that propels us towards our own philosophical quandary in these uncertain times.

1. Mad Men through the lens of Identity perception

At the very heart of it, *Mad Men* is a story about a man trying to come to terms with himself.

Our protagonist, Don Draper has created an illusion of the ideal man, the man with the successful career, wealth, a robust social life, perfect marriage with a home in the country- the ultimate American dream. The show is based in the sixties and much of its context is drawn from the transformational nature of the decade. Don Draper is the ultimate symbol for everything that the beginning of the sixties represents- the beginning of a new dawn. The later part of the decade was all about disillusionment with the systems of establishment and the effect of this can be seen on the collective subconscious as the show progressed.

One of the key phrases of the show is "Who is Don Draper?" at every turn of the series we are asked to question the identity of our titular character. As we go deeper, the question gets even more layered. Is the concern about where Don Draper is from? Or is it about who he actually is? Is the aim to recognize the true self of Don Draper, but considering the tumult of the decade he was in , how can we expect something as dynamic as identity to be concrete? More importantly, as we establish the central theme of this dissertation as an identity theory, it brings to surface the societal notions about identity and appearances in 1960's New York.

As soon as the show begins it throws us in the world of beginnings, it's a new dawn and advertising is booming like never before. There is post war optimism in the air and the purchasing power has never been this high. At the heart of it is our hero, championing the American identity, of keeping up illusions and winning clients at every turn. It is a carefully constructed façade but the viewers are allowed a glimpse of what is actually happening. We are shown at every point that behind every normative, superficial win there is a struggling Don.

Many scholars have studied the concept of personal identity and most have them have also devoted a lot of time to Kierkegaard's take on selfhood. One of the key points of Kierkegaard's concept is the notion that self is not something we automatically are. In fact it something one becomes. so according to Kierkegaard, selfhood is a goal that has to be actualized. In order to become our "true" authentic selves, we have to put the work in. This is not an entirely new concept in modern philosophy. However, Kierkegaard distances himself from most of the conjectures. According to him, one cannot discover themselves in throes of artistic passion or creativity.

Neither can one actualize their true self by consulting their innermost feelings, or dreams and desires (Aumann, Antony, 2016). This is in direct contrast with Don Draper, who has created his entire persona based on an illusion. While Kierkegaard relied on the help of god to realize real identity, Don relied on the charisma and allure of the American dream. The post-war idealism provided the perfect foundation for men of that era to conform to an idea of what a man should be. Don emulated that to create a distance between his former self and projected his new found aspirations to create a completely idealistic and superficial life.

The idea of this fast paced life that was lined with success and prosperity yet left him feeling unfulfilled forms an interesting basis for his identity crisis. What makes this situation more layered is conflicting ways in which he deals with it. More than his past alone, it is the act of denying and hiding his past or his true self that does Don Draper more harm. While his new self is something he has clearly worked on, the idea on which the new self is built is not entirely authentic.

The show takes in a time that exhibited the post war glory and the United States benefited immensely from winning the war. The country experienced the technological boost without having to face the brutality of war on their own soil. This helped in creating an image of how it was "the greatest nation in the world". The image that idealized around the world was also a product of propaganda. There was a steady rise in consumerism in the second half of the twentieth century and advertising acted as an important tool in accelerating that. It helped in propagating the image of a post war idealized America (Álvarez Cillero, Daniel 2018). This was the promised land of economic growth, abundance and growth. This was an image propagated not just for the soldiers to return home but also among the people who stayed back. It propelled them to create this life. The hope was sold as an idea of freedom and Don Draper bought into it. This is what he modeled his personality on.

The growth of advertising in the fifties also signified the growth of consumerism in the country. Advertising was the medium through which this illusion of American dream was sold. The whole premise of advertising was based on creating specific imagery that would help them sell a product(Haar, Michel. 1993). This could only be done with the manipulation of emotions. And this is where Don Draper comes into the picture.

Throughout the seasons of the show, it is revealed that Don Draper relies on his work and level of professional success in order to feel like himself. A self that is created in the first episode on the first season, *Smoke in your eyes*, Don is revealed to the audiences as this extremely elusive, charismatic creative genius who has it all figured out. Men want to be him and women cannot get enough of him. It isn't until the end of this episode that the audiences realize that he in fact has a family at home. It is the complete suburban American dream of a house in the country complete with the picture perfect wife and two children.

As the first season progresses, it is revealed that Don Draper leads a double life in ways more than one. Other than his philandering ways, it is his complete denial of his past life and identity that forms a major part of this show. Don Draper's real name is Dick Whitman and he was actually raised in Illinois by an alcoholic and abusive farmer who ran a brothel.

This real identity causes him so much shame that he refuses to acknowledge it as real. He takes up the name Don Draper by stealing the identity of a fellow soldier in Korea. He then moves to New York and completely changes his life to become a new Don Draper. His denial of his past self is so absolute that he has completely eradicated any part of his childhood from his memory. Through the pursuit of success in his profession, he has created a sense of duplicity. Just like in advertising, Don is selling an illusion, even to himself about being Donald Draper.

Don Draper is carefully constructed persona where the contradiction of Dick as Don comes to the surface. Even with all his success and genius, Don finds himself trapped in a lonely prison where the idea of a perfectly happy family also evades him. This is established the episode 13 of the first season, *The Carousel*. The sense of melancholia and complexity that surrounds Don is inescapable and the only way he can cope is through alcohol or infidelity.

Despite creating the perfect world for himself, Don continues to feel like a fraud. The fusion of opposing self seems impossible because the whole idea of being successful is based on the foundation of former wealth. Don comes from a past he cannot mention in the circles he is running in. It is extremely difficult for him to even embrace his roots. This conflict causes a sense of unworthiness or inadequacy, where he is not sure if he deserves to be in the most privileged of places.

This outer persona emanates confidence, but inside he is crumbling self-despair and the only way out are his unhealthy coping mechanisms. He understands how success comes at price and if the price is complete denial of his past, he is ready to do so.

The point where we begin to question our authenticity is a problem that is practical. Many will say how the participation in modern society makes them feel alienated because it requires some sort of masking. In order to get along with other people, we might sometimes have pretend to believe, feel and think things that we do not want to. As Kierkegaard says in the opening lines of *Either/Or*- we must construct our lives in way that the inner is not outer. This can create a sort of dishonesty. It might also lead to the idea that we are not being honest with regard to who we actually are. In some situations, this might make people retreat into themselves and not participate in society. Some become distant externally and some withdraw internally. Some might even continue to be their social selves but in an ironic manner where they view the society with a skeptical, cynical almost nihilistic attitude. In their minds they do not accept the society's idea of who they are supposed to be. Here, the process of definition becomes difficult.

Kierkegaard has critical things to say about this approach. Don Draper did not question the American dream ideal initially but the continued sense of despair he feels creates a nihilistic view in his mind. In this view he is never able to connect with anyone meaning fully because he believes he has to hide something about his identity from them. By creating this distance he is not even giving himself the space to figure out his real self. This constant denial creates a sense of inadequacy and this leads to him constantly choosing ways in which he can cope, most of which are extremely unhealthy in the long run. This costs him his first marriage, loss of whatever remaining family he has and even his job which he has dedicated his entire life to.

The endless repetition of same mistakes illustrate a deeper neglect, one where he is incapable of accepting the failures or the dark parts of his life. In the earlier seasons he is able to mask this despair through extraordinary professional achievement and creative prowess but later we see that it seeps into his professional life as well. What is often presented to us in the repetitive rhetoric is that he only wants to move forward, but this lack of self-reflection costs him. He is in fact not moving forward but staying still as he refuses to deal with the ramifications of his past. This is the reason for his stunted growth and constant resurfacing of similar types of chaos. It constantly leads him down the road of hedonistic pleasures with little to no regard for the people in his life and lack of fulfillment despite his efforts to escape his past.

This can be explained with the help of Kierkegaard's view on inner sense model. Don's hedonistic ways of dealing with the fear of being discovered are shown throughout the series. A theme of wanting to run away, start anew new beginnings is constantly repeated. Kierkegaard states how our most natural desires tend to be spontaneous and not so stable, they might also be incoherent. As reality is dynamic, so is our response to it. In such situations acting on our most natural impulse is not the most advisable. Following them all the time will create disconnect from life, because we will be too busy escaping at all times. This illustrated in Don's penchant for wanting new projects, new connections but not following them through. He starts with the idea that he will stick it through this, how the next new thing will help him feel that satisfaction and acceptance he has always hoped for. But it never does.

Kierkegaard criticizes this kind of life, according to him, a life where such entanglements take place, inner work gets delayed. People have to listen to their inner voice in order to create an inner unity which will lead to self-acceptance. However in Don's case, the chaos

created by his coping mechanism in alcoholism and womanizing prevent him from ever coming to the point of actually accepting himself in the truest sense.

The concept of self esteem and self identity also plays a very important role here . our titular character Don inherits an identity that's not just unique but equally charismatic. Don likes winning strangers, a function that helps him immensely win over the advertising world too. He represents an image, a persona, which he himself has created. This image is of security, charm, magnetism and success. This is important to understand because the world he is trying to win over through advertising is looking for this level of superficiality. By shunning his former identity, Don is able to constantly conjure this new identity that feeds his ego. But the undealt trauma tends to creep in the most unsuspecting ways. No matter how much tries he is never able to completely let go of his past and at every turn he tends to return back to his self-destructive ways.

What stands out in this scenario each time is that Don is not alone when takes on his ways of self-sabotage. As a working man, as a husband and as a father we continually see him shun his responsibilities. So in the broader sense, because he has not dealt with the trauma or shame of his past life, he is not able to do justice to his present either. No matter where he keeps running, he only runs into himself. The irony is that everyone around him considers him the epitome of what it means to be successful, but what Don Draper has created is a mirage, an image that even he cannot become.

Competition through masculinity

Another significant part of the identity struggle is the way notions of masculinity influence our characters. The show's time period very clearly illustrates how patriarchy was still extremely influential in all areas. Despite showing greater representation of women at workforce, the show also illustrated how women were viewed. In further sections of this dissertation, we will have a deeper look through the feminist, in this section I will elaborate on how this influences the way men behave in this show, particularly Don draper and how this affects his sense of identity.

The show continues to illustrate how white men have so much more access to education, employment and leisure. The plot has been constructed around Don who is the ultimate white, upper class male who perfectly captures and presents the American dream. He starts with nothing and fulfills the American dream to become a successful important powerful male. This reinvention is a crucial part of his identity which is why every time there is a chance that his secret might get out, he tries to protect this reconstructed image with all he can.

Don has all the qualities of the empowered male in western culture- he is dominating and defensive. He likes to call himself old fashioned. He is powerful in a way that Michel Foucault would describe as "guiding the possibility of conduct and putting in order the possible outcome". It is through Don's action that the narrative of the show is taken forward. He is confrontational and controlling, loves to win and is competitive in the workplace setting. As he is one of the few people who actually benefit enormously because they are at the top, Don believes in the "radical form of individualism".

This idea is something that a most American males inclined to because of the amount of emphasis American culture has on independence (Rotundo, 1993). In the show we see Don follow the steps of his superiors Roger Sterling and Bert Cooper, he takes after their example, being controlling and patriarchal in the similar manner. The whole office has to run as per his desires and his influence is evident.

The structure of power in the office is top-down, and the idea of individualism is embodied by Don because there are very few people at the top. His patronizing and controlling manner is very much evident throughout the series. What we constantly see is his need to emerge as superior he cannot let go of the idea that he is not the one at top. He gets immense confidence from his work and by establishing his identity as the one who rules the office space he is able to create a sense of secure identity that makes him feel secure. The reliance is on this idea of masculinity and business acumen. And this something he holds very close to him.

He constantly tries to assert his individual superiority, from the way he explains his infidelity or the way he goes about his position in the workplace based on his creative skill. The economic and cultural shift that occurred in the 1950's are also illustrated in the show, where we see Don embody the hegemonic masculinity.

Yet, as we progress towards later season another character Bob Benson is introduced, who brings a new perspective. It is very different from Don's powerful portrayal of a man. This is interesting because we see Bob Benson use his mannerism in a way that helps him gain power by being of service to others. As the ideas of the previous decade are challenged, we notice Don's power losing its sheen in all the areas of his life.

Bob Benson presents a new type of persona for masculinity, where he is confrontational, working from the fringes, never taking up too much power or control- almost an antithesis to

Don's hyper masculinity. As the last few season of the show progress we can see the old world order changing. The conversation around power and Don's struggle also leads him to question his sense of identity. The boundaries of masculinity are also challenged and the change in ways of the professional world is also pretty evident. Through these two characters we can witness a dialogue about the changing definition of what it means to be an "American man".

The western capitalist society continues to idealize the strong, heterosexual independent man yet in the changing times there is room for the more relatable, flexible man whose sexual orientation is not as clear. But it is this evolving ideal identity which makes for an interesting study. The changing demands of the current economic climate the flexible man is more likely to succeed.

It is the embodiment of the American form of manhood that is communicated throughout the show. Don personifies this personality; it is referred to as the "Market place Masculinity" by Michael Kimmel. The entire basis of this personality is the "acquisition of tangible goods" to show success. The "most manly" is the man who can thrive in competition and acquire most amount of goods(Kimmel). This is why the world of the 60's was so competitive, it required men to constantly achieve a lot so that they could be deemed as ideal and masculine. This also shows how solitary the nature of work is in American culture. This idea of success is what inspired Don's notion of self-identity one where he creates meaning through his work and hyper independence.

On further deconstruction of this identity, it can be seen just how much of expertise Don has in managing all parts of his life- friendships, affairs, family, and work. This sense of market place masculinity empowers Don and results in the success of his work and other arenas of life. It's this morality that helps him maintain a semblance of order in life. However, an

extremely important part of his personality stands out in this scenario. The market place masculinity is based entirely on the exclusion of others- anybody who is not a white male- woman, homosexual men, nonnatives. This emphasizes on his life as a solitary individual. The continuous emphasis on how he is alone is a statement about the isolation he feels. In the outer world he is included and even celebrated in every way, but by himself he feels quite alone.

As the show progresses, we notice how this old order comes down and this leads to a range of failures in Don's professional and personal life. The lack of self-reflection and honesty with self is evident. The changing cultural climate also quickly reflects the ways in which Don's personality has not adapted to the new times. The fact that the traditional type of masculinity refuses to bend in any way causes don to lose influence. The demands of the society and the office also evolve which requires a new shift in perspective, but there is particular idea of success that Don is clinging to and whether it is out of sheer stubbornness or complete lack of self-acceptance- we see how it ends up affecting his life and sense of identity.

Here we can see how the malleable and flexible of Bob Benson comes into play with changing times and evolving economy. The conventional way in which Don operates is no longer useful. So everything don had constructed in his life through this idea of American Manhood begins to crumble. As his sense of identity that he had carefully constructed through work and controlling relationships, begins to crumble, we see him grapple for any source of power. Failing which, he continues to go back to his old ways.

Neoliberalism and its effect on Don Draper's Identity Perception

Michael Foucault has spoken at length about how neo liberalism affected the idea of what a man should be immensely. The historical intersection with the series timeline also speaks of the ways in which Don Draper matured. This includes the interventionist policies of the US government, the New deal, Truman's and Johnson's policies – all of this helped Don and other American men define themselves.

The decade of 60s played an important role in redefining the resistance against liberal economics, however Mad Men only captured one side of it. Economists like Gary Becker and Theodore Schultz developed theories about human capital. The position of workers had not been given as much importance. American neoliberals were strictly against the idea of understanding or abstracting labour through the lens of economics (Haar, Michel. 1993). The fact that the analysis was now shifted to workers perspective was a new development. The discursive shifts in concepts illustrated how the object of study had now moved to scarce means. This is how they could understand and analysis exactly how an enterprise operates, through the worker's perspective.

Now the basic core of the American neoliberal discourse is always the business, the analysis is about the enterprise, never the individual. For a hyper, radically individualistic man like Don Draper, this was a tectonic shift. In one of the most famous episodes, his protégé Peggy Olsen tells Don Draper that how he cannot work for someone else. This is pivotal because it redefined the concept of self and this was because of neo liberalism.

Yet, we must consider how neoliberal individuals are their own enterprise. This led to an immense change in the concept of economics too,, the idea was no longer about an ideal economic man like Don Draper. The individual becomes the enterprise now. Under neoliberalism does not just look at the individual enterprise but also their life. The inert

personal relationships, the network, the overlapping businesses the person's own life- all of this has an effect and plays an important role in understanding of the enterprise. It is not just about Don Draper or Peggy Olsen anymore.

As a television series *Mad Men* does a great job in showcasing the history of neo liberalism and exhibiting the political and socio economic landscape of the decade. The realities of many such men were individualized and showcase don mad men. In one of the most memorable episodes, "The Suitcase" illustrates this jarring evolution beautifully. In this episode, Don and Peggy are preparing all night a pitch. This episode nails the neoliberal theme of the show as Don comes to know that Anna Draper, the only person who knew who actually was has passed away. Peggy comes to know this and says that is not true, because she, after all, knows him.

Don Draper as the curious man- through the lens of Heidegger

From the first episode, the viewers can see Draper and his self-destructive ways. He constantly tries to suppress his narrative and always finds ways to escape. The constant theme is how he is trying to start anew. This is almost always with a new woman, setting a pattern throughout the series, even when he gets married the second time to his secretary Megan. If we were to strictly speak in a Heideggerian sense, he is the quintessential "curious man". Heidegger in his work, *Being in Time*, draws an association between curiosity and "seeing", Concupiscentia ("desire" or "lust"). All of this, he aligns with an inauthentic Dasein, not with the desire to actually understand it.

There is a saying by Joan Staumbaugh that states that "the curious individual only wants to see things, but not actually understand what is it that he is seeing". According to him the mind is only seeking novelty and the cycle of wanting novelty keeps going. This forms a very significant part of Don's entire identity. The idea for Don Draper is to not actually understand and comprehend the bigger truth, but to keep "seeking" for the sake of seeking. The possibility of abandoning itself to the world is what inspires Don. According to Heidegger this *not staying* is a sign of restlessness.

The continuous novelty and excitement presents a possibility of distraction, so a person will never actually be somewhere, they will never dwell somewhere as they will constantly keep getting uprooted as they try to seek more and more new things. Heidegger states that "curiosity is makes sure of knowing but just to have known. Curious people are the ones who desire knowledge for its own sake but lack the proper spiritual orientation.

This is directly in alignment with which Do Draper goes through his life. From the moment we see him, Don is constantly in the pursuit of new feelings. Whether it is with a new mystery woman or a new client, within him there is ache, which leads him to yearn for something at all times. This is why even when he has everything a person could possibly desire, he is still not happy. The concept of curiosity also explains why he is so addicted to new things. In season 4, Dr. Faye miller who also plays the role of one of his lovers says "you only like the beginning of things: ((Mad Men, Season 4, "Tomorrowland", Episode 13). This stands true because the idea of being in one place and actually facing himself with his past present and future is impossible. Don doesn't have the quality or the patience to actually sit with his feelings.

Even in his profession, as he keeps trying to uncover and understand what is it that his clients or the population at large- "what do they want?", he never actually ask himself about what he wants. He is trying to fulfill a role one that does not correlate with former self, he is trying to run away from it. Combined with the hyper masculine, capitalistic ideal, Don is playing a role while his restlessness keeps trying to catch up with him. Nietzsche's idea that identity is a fiction we must create ourselves, where treat ourselves as permanent even though we are not is also deeply problematic.

However Don Draper continues to buy into this. His entire identity is a work of fiction where he is constantly recreating himself to manage his life in a way he deems fit. In one the earliest episode in an especially difficult moment he advises Peggy to move on with her life after major personal tragedy " it will shock you how much it did not happen", he says. This kind of self-denial is viewed as ideal when it comes to hyper independence.

We cannot wish away our pasts, or who we are intrinsically. Maybe we can create a way in which we adapt to our surroundings, but constantly trying to run away, escaping or choosing hedonism as a way to live life the shallowness of it all gets to him. More than anything what Don Draper wants is to be understood and loved for who he really is. This confidence is not based his authentic self but who he is trying to be and when he is no longer able to run any farther, we see how his life disintegrates because he never gave himself the chance to actually accept himself.

Throughout the series Don Draper is constantly engaged in this vain curiosity, one that could be referred to as the pathology of beginnings. He is constantly trying to uproot himself, begin a new romantic relation, start afresh. This is all a part of his self-destructive tendencies stemming from trauma, to return to the first place, one before everything.

Don is unable to include his past, he has repressed a lot of trauma, his abusive childhood. His addiction to this cycle of shame and uncertainty keeps him hooked to this lifestyle of drinking , smoking and philandering. He is unable to take a deeper look within because he is too busy "seeking". His motto of constantly "moving forward " is preventing him from understanding who is as he is constantly trying to reinvent himself. This pathological pattern of uprooting and self-destructiveness is a very integral part of his identity. It prevents him from doing the actually inner work that is required.

As the show comes to end in the seventh season, we see a completely new Don Draper, one who is somehow ready to reconcile with his former self. Between dick and Don, he comes to find a version of himself that may have finally accepted his real self. At hippie retreat Don has an interesting and vulnerable conversation with man who talks about feeling unsubstantial. In that moment, when Don finally gets a chance to reconcile with himself, we see a new development one that denotes true self-acceptance.

2. Feminism in Mad Men

Dow and Condit (2005) explain how despite the fact that the discourse around feminism has become more common, the issues that feminism tries to understand and illustrate are still around. The presence of this discourse confirms that the trends of gender discrimination are still very prevalent. However, feminist critique can actualize in many ways, one of the ways in which can be studied more in depth is how it is "a mechanism that structures material and symbolic worlds and our experiences of them" (van Zoonen, 1994, pp. 3-4). Through the lens of feminist criticism we can see the construction of gender and how oppression takes place. When studying the paradigm of television the way the dialogues and the script is written, it can give us insights about exactly the ways in which women were treated.

For a show like *Mad Men*, where the research about the decade of 60's is extremely extensive, the portrayal of women is pretty close to accurate. From the beginning of the series we can see how this dynamic between men and women is portrayed. From the very first scene it is clearly shown that men and women have completely different aspirations.

The men, like Don Draper and Pete Campbell are single mindedly working towards their career goals, the ultimate goal of a secretary should be to get married. Pete Campbell exhibits his keen interest in wanting to take over Don's role someday. This sets the tone of the show, how men want to be successful and success for them is money. Women on the other hand should be doing the thing that will help men become successful- they have to be taking care of men (Bauer, Nancy 2001).

Mad Men introduces this concept from the very first episode when we see Peggy Olsen is walked around the agency by Joan Holloway on Peggy's first day. Throughout these moments, Joan socializes with Peggy and gives her tips about how she can fit into the company's culture. Most of these tips are about appropriate attire and ways in which she can

please the males around her. This knowledge is imparted by Joan, who is the ideal woman. She is the smartest and the best looking woman at Sterling Cooper and her advice is something that Peggy is expected to follow.

Following is one of the first things that Joan says to Peggy when she starts her first day at office:

"In a couple of years, with the right moves, you'll be in the city with the rest of us. Of course, if you really make the right moves, you'll be out in the country and you won't be going to work at all".

This advice literally translates that Peggy's main objective should not be to get good at her job but to make all the right moves that will help her get married. Then she wouldn't have to work and would be provided for by a man. The clear distinction between what men and women want is established from this very moment. This scene shows how gender roles are created and how men and women of that period conformed to these expectations (Bauer, Nancy 2001).

The roles were clearly designed- that a man must be the one to go out and work so that he can provide for his family. For women on the other hand the work place was only a pit stop, this is where she came to find a husband. The aim of her working is not advance her career but somehow return back to the inner private sphere of not working. In the show, we see the men at Sterling Cooper talk about women only in sexual terms.

Their way of talking is graphic, one that objectifies them and this is even shown in their behaviour towards them. The idea of an ideal life is also very different for both men and women. For a man, a nuclear family in the suburbs with a few mistresses in the sides while

they work on their career is the dream. For a woman it is just being part of this nuclear family.

The series showcase the patriarchal ideology perfectly, one where men are the decision makers. They are the one who get things moving and the ones who decide what the rules are. Almost in each of the earlier episodes, all the meetings at the agency are held only with male employees. The only exception is the one secretary who is there to just take down the minutes of the meeting and her presence is never acknowledged. Men do not welcome the point of view of a woman and this is illustrated in the episode with Rachel Menken in season 1. As a potential client and a woman who is in a power position, Don still tells her that he will "not be talked to by a woman like that." There was a "proper place" for women and this episode showcased the dominant ideology that men of that time were loyal to.

Gender Roles

The women in mad Men did not have offices with doors, their proper place was considered to be outside the door. Men were the ones who were given the big offices where they could sit and salute each other. All of this was not something that the women could be a part of, when Peggy Olsen is promoted to a junior copy writer, Joan tells her that she shouldn't forget that she didn't always have a door. This goes to illustrate how the shield/ door analogy where women are still not allowed into certain room does exist.

The portrayal of gender stereotypes in television is said to have an extremely intense influence on the audiences. And in each of these portrayals it can be noticed that the dominant ideology of patriarchy is extremely prevalent and that anyone who tries to subjugate this only strengthens the ideology (Gitlin,1983).

Throughout the series we see that every character somehow or the other tries to break away from the shackles of patriarchy. The only difference is the source of power. Because men hold all the power, they can break away and free to create their own environment. Whereas a woman has no power so she is constantly dependent on a man. She needs a man in order to get a job she needs a man in order to complete her life, in every situation she lacks the autonomy to create her own life. This is because she does not have the power of patriarchy. This patriarchal ideology is what drives the entire narrative of Mad Men across all the seasons.

Simone De Beauvoir considers gender identity a social construct, one where the differences between gender is something that has been created. She explains how women are not born inferior but they become so because they are considered inferior by men, they "othered". This is in direct alignment with what is shown in the show.

"A man is man from the moment he is born but a woman is always seen in relation to a man." - Simone De Beauvoir

The identity of a woman is always in relation with a man. She cannot just exist by herself. The idea of patriarchy pushes society to create constructs where women are given the opportunity to be "feminine". There is pre-ordained myth associated with her fertility and child bearing abilities. This essence of femininity where they are meant to be of service to men, to have their children and ensure that everything domestic is taken care of forms the crux of their identity. As the show progresses, we see the evolution in the mind-set of women. Through the years and then the counterculture, a new way of thinking comes to surface which threatens the old idea of patriarchal norms. Through the leading ladies of the show, we get an idea about how women navigated the professional space despite the challenges that patriarchy presented.

One of the best examples of this is Joan Holloway. We are emboldened to ask one significant question- just how much of Joan's femininity is of her own choice? So much of it has to do with her patriarchal mother's way of bringing her up based on out-dated norms, cultural influence and societal gender roles.

Another terrific example is the character of Peggy who has possibly had the biggest character arc in the show. In comparison with Don's traditional form of masculinity, Peggy represents what it is to be a female in these changing times. Through the lens of Peggy Olsen, the audiences also get a glimpse of the evolving decade and how it influences the mind-set. Peggy undergoes a lot of changes in the way she dresses how she carries herself, the way she conducts herself at her workplace and even in her personal life. She is someone who steadily understands and absorbing her atmosphere and making it work according to her advantage. At any given point, she is not afraid of being ambitious and wanting more. This is extremely different from the idea of what feminine is supposed to be.

At the end of the first season we see that Peggy Olsen decides to have an abortion, this is almost unheard of in the sixties. The evolution that her character goes through showcases how she was not ready to confirm to the idea that women were only meant to have children. By choosing her career and her ambitions she set a new example for what it meant to be a woman in the sixties.

Through the 1960's to the 1970's we notice how the changing societal norms affect men and women in the work and personal space. The second wave feminism and the Civil rights movement marked this period. Mad Men shows its audiences how each of these historic events affect the everyday lives of their characters, how it impacts their ways of thinking and behaving (Langan, Thomas 1961).

The way women were represented in the show raised a lot of questions. It was said that Mad Men has romanticised the idea of how women were treated during that time period. It created a lot of controversies. Mad Men has been regarded as a male gaze TV show for the way they only portrayed certain elements of femininity, it was all in relation to men. However all the show did was portray the reality through the eyes of Don Draper, a womaniser who had the thinking of a 60's man. The inequality and the representation is still said be glorified in the show. Yet, this could also been seen as representation. Mad Men is not just showing women being treated unfairly but it is also showing how women are evolving and growing from that. The stories of each of the pivotal female characters show strong sense of autonomy and desire to fulfil their aspirations. The female characters of the show are strong and independent. They are showing the reality while making room for strong female character who embody the changing mind-sets of the new decade, this gives it a cultural resonance with the history.

The emphasis on motherhood marriage and working conditions through the lives of Joan Holloway, Betty Draper and Peggy Olsen, gives us a complete insight into what it meant to be a woman in the sixties. Again one of the best insights comes from the character arc of Peggy Olsen. She is the youngest of the titular characters and when she joins the agency we can see that other than the secretaries, the women have no other jobs in executive or power holding positions in the agency. As the career of Peggy continues to grow, so does her sense of autonomy. Through her we see a change in the status quo; Peggy is the first woman in the office to get her own office. We can see that this promotion is interpreted as Peggy's pleasure. She likes the fact that the other male creatives envy her, she likes how the office boy is carrying her things into her new office. This illustrates her will, ambition and strength. It must also be acknowledged that this particular development establishes Don as an open

mindset person, as his mind-set is different from the general attitude towards women in the 60's.

It is through Peggy that we can see the evolving gender roles in the sixties. Each of the challenges in her personal and professional life has a positive impact on her personality. Because from the very beginning, Peggy has shown a strength of self where she is not afraid of asking for what she wants whether it is from her domineering mother, her church, her lovers and even her boss Don, Peggy knows exactly what she wants and is not ready to compromise.

One of the most memorable scenes is in season 5 episode 11 where we see Peggy achieve the highest level of character development. Through her sheer dedication and hard work, Peggy has created a whole new career where she walks into the new company. In one particular scene, she walks into the new office, smoking, moving with confidence, like it is her own company.

The fact that she broke away from her mentor Don and created this new path for herself shows not just resolve but also courage. If this is compared to how she was a secretary in the first season the character arc can actually be measured. This shows how she is a symbol of freedom and confidence. The changes in her life are also a reflection of the changes in the decade. The third wave feminism issues were also coming up during that time where topics like equal wage, equality in work place were a big debate. All of this influences the way Peggy thinks her work and her efforts should be treated.

One of the most important characters who followed the second wave of feminism is Joan Holloway. Throughout the series, her character also goes through immense transformation that aligns with the feminist movements of that decade. The show is so thoroughly researched that we can see evidences of every day happenings from that decade make their way into

general conversation. During the first few season, all we see of Joan is this hyper sexualised avatar that is only objectified by the members of the society.

"My mom raised me to be admired" says Joan in one of the episodes to Don Draper signifying a level of passivity that was just in alignment with the dominant patriarchal view of women. But as the seasons progress we also get to see just how much Joan suffers at the hands of patriarchy. Despite of the efforts, her work is never really considered as important. She also goes through sexual harassment, rape and an abusive marriage that makes her realise that the ideal she has been chasing may not be what she actually desires. This is a significant development because it shows that despite playing by the rules, she never given the due recognition. And this is when we actually notice her sense of resolve as she advocates for herself. She shows her colleagues how she is the one who puts in a lot of work to keep the company running, she is always holding her head high and never loses faith in herself. From secretary she actually becomes partner.

Despite the ways in which the society was changing its view on women, there also existed a certain bubble in that reality. For example, despite being a shareholder in the company, Joan's new partner/ boss would not treat her equally. Her status as a key member is ignored and she is still being treated like she is not one of the primary figures of the company.

In retaliation Joan tells her boss that if he does not treat her equally she could raise her voice against this and protest would follow. She mentions Equal Opportunity Employment Commission, American Civil Liberties Union, Betty Friedan, and Ladies Home Journal.

These are strong symbols of the second wave feminism that were actively present in the 60's and the 70's. Joan is also a single mother throughout the series which is an extremely important statement that has been made by the show. It shows her resolve to understand what is best for her and not rely on a man in order to survive.

By the end of the series we see Joan start her company all by herself, and given the amount of experience knowledge and drive she has it's the natural outcome for her to become financially successful.

This is completely different from another important character- Betty Draper. She is the first wife of Don and is the quintessential American wife in every way. She is economically and emotionally dependent on Don who does little to nothing to help her actualise herself.

According to Betty Freidman- "the suburban housewife-she was the dream image of the young American women and the envy, it was said, of women all over the world". The suburban house with the picket fence and the perfect family is the ideal life. But this does not make happy. We can see that throughout the series she is extremely dissatisfied with her life and cannot point at one thing that is causing her this sense of ennui. Other than being a mother and wife, she does not know how to define herself.

The only time Betty begins to speak for she is when she realizes the extent of don's infidelity and his lies about his identity. This is very different from the role of submissive wife she had been playing before this. It also reflects the influence that Betty Friedman's works published in the home journals of 60's . This is when women began to realise that they do have the power to impact their own lives and do not have to be dependent of men for every single decision. However all of these changes reflected through character development did not happen overnight.

Mad Men used these three characters to beautifully portray the reality of living in the world of 60's during the many waves of feminism, as a woman. It introduced dimension in terms of independence, courage, ambition and resolve instead of just representing stereotypes, thus creating a new paradigm of what could have also happened in the 60's.

3. Existentialism in Mad Men

From the very beginning of the show, the show illustrates Don Draper's search for meaning happiness and identity. Around him, in the transformational decade of the 60's, everything is in steady decline. The Kennedy murders, the assassination of Martin Luther King, the possibility of nuclear war, the third wave of feminism, all of this indicates how nothing in this world is certain. The themes of freedom, responsibility, choice and anxiety looms over the heads of all the characters and the search for authenticity is even more challenging in a world that tells you what to do. Finding peace in such scenarios, despite the existential despair can be quite challenging, but through the lens of these characters we see how this can be achieved. The series uses the theme of existential advancement to show how one can move from uncertainty to the creation of an authentic self.

According to Kierkegaard, living in a society according to a set system is in bad faith. This is because it shows that one must adhere to certain rules of the society that dictate how one must live. This does not allow us to live the most authentic life as we are constantly trying to fit in by conforming to the superficial ways of life. Don Draper's life follows a similar pattern, we see his preoccupation with being the ideal American man and his unactualized quest to reconcile with his self at war from the first season. Don is trying to find a fixed spot in the liquid ocean, this is relentless pursuit that leaves him starved all the time.

This is why he is constantly trying to create meaning to fleeting experiences. This prevents him from looking inward to face his own sense of existential despair. Because of his affliction of the superficial nature, he is always engulfed with a kind of emptiness. This is why he cannot connect with anyone at a deeper level. The surface level connection and the need to constantly escape are associated with bad faith.

According to Don there isn't any one grand purpose in one's life. So from the very beginning his definition of meaning is only derived through work. For everything else he relies on hedonism. Kierkegaard has also said that a life that is too indulgent is doomed to repeat its destructive cycles. Don Draper is stuck in this cycle of short term pleasures and this prevents him from actually understanding his true soul purpose.

The philosophical struggles that are shown in this show are very similar to the philosophical struggles of today. In one of the first scenes of the entire series, Don Drapers delivers one his most famous lines. In the middle of a meeting with Lucky strike, where the conversation is tense because the public revelation of smoking being dangerous has threatened the position of the Lucky strike as a client of the advertising agency – Sterling Cooper. Don postulates that advertising is based on one thing – happiness and then he says:

” And what is happiness? “Happiness, is the smell of a new car. It's freedom from fear. It's a billboard on the side of the road that screams reassurance that whatever you are doing is okay. You are okay.”

This sets the tone for the rest of the series. It is through this one dialogue that we are introduced to the existential anxieties of the characters. Their pursuit of meaning and happiness all through the decade of 60's is not linear because of the society they live in. And the narratives focus on how each of the titular characters decide to rise above these challenges to create their own meaning. For the ones who don't, they keep going in circles, repeating cycles of self-destruction- seduced by decadence, waiting for true meaning.

However authenticity and true meaning is something that one has to create for themselves.

Jean Paul Sartre, established the concept of Modern existentialism in his work- Being and Nothingness.

It is a type of philosophy that talks about how the most important thing is for an individual to determine the value and purpose of their life. This notion is phrased as existence precedes essence. According to Sartre, existence precedes essence but according to metaphysics it is essence that precedes existence. This implies that any object that has come into existence has a pre-determined essence, the image of which is created in the mind of the creator. Jean Paul Sartre believed that the existence is what determined the essence. According to him, the human body or self has been plunged into existence and the only way man can conceive himself only after he exists.

It is only through his interaction with nature, his surroundings, experiences people and opportunities around him that he can become self-aware. This self-awareness combined with the subjective yearnings of the individual alone will determine his essence. The development of an individual's character through his life, over time and interaction with his surroundings will create and shape his essence.

Existentialism, in this way, is a return to absolute truth. When a human being is thrown into existence with no will or consciousness can only develop the same through their experience on this earth. The emphasis is therefor on existence.

Throughout the series, we can see Don struggle with this notion of wanting to find meaning. The post war scenario in the country has left a void in the name of intrinsic meaning. The dominant ideology of patriarchy created an illusion of control through success. So it is quite obvious why men of that period regard their professional life as the epitome of all meaning in their existence. In this scenario they use the idea of professional success to define themselves.

We see this pattern in all the male characters of *Mad Men*, where they only created meaning in their lives through work. Though there is nothing wrong with this notion, in this context it is most often hollow and devoid of any true meaning because the very basis of advertising is rooted in capitalism. The corporates control our minds and tell us what we need to buy in order to be happy, in such a situation any semblance of authenticity has no actual place because no amount of material wealth can ever be enough (Langan, Thomas 1961).

The veneer of capitalism leads us to believe that our next purchase will provide us the satisfaction that we are looking for, but true solace lies in complete acceptance of our imperfect selves. Kierkegaard had warned against this exact response to changing social systems, one that would deprive mankind of a deeper level of existence. The changing times and emphasis on consumerism has enslaved us into believing that all that we are can be reduced to our propensity to consume. We do not even know who we are. We think it is the idea of success and power that will create meaning but that is untrue as exhibited by the characters of *Mad Men* through its seven seasons.

Existentialism is also a product of the war, one of the primary examples of the post war is shown by Roger Sterling. As one of the most important men in the show, we see Roger continually struggle with the concept of meaning despite all his wealth. As one of the veterans who fought in the war, Roger is unable to create a sense of gravitas in his daily life. Also as ageing businessmen he constantly tries to recreate a semblance of his youth because unlike the other characters he is unable to find that kind of depth in his work or his personal life. This is reflected in his general debauchery and his two failed marriages.

Roger Sterling is also extremely entitled, at times juvenile and extremely unaccountable. The lack of struggle in his life has left him feeling completely disempowered and he tries to drink and sleep his troubles away. The lightness he possesses is a sweet disposition that distracts the

viewer from the deeper insight that Roger is in fact extremely unhappy maybe it his privilege that has taken away any sort of impulse to create meaning. According to him he has nothing to look forward to which is why he keeps acting in ways that indulge his self-destructive side. Roger does not feel fulfilled, this is regarded as bad faith.

In comparison, Peggy Olsen is driven by her desire to make a name for herself, she is acting in good faith. One where she is true to her authentic desires and constantly taking steps to make her life more meaningful. Despite the hurdles and challenges that keep coming her way, Peggy is relentless in the pursuit of her goals.

According to Dostoyevsky, philosophically an individual cannot traverse the self because any form of analysis can only take place from a position of detachment from the world and the self. This requires the individual to create a sense of relation where they are not the object but the subject of their philosophical analysis. This conflict is something that the self has to embrace (Vaškovic, Petr 2020).

Conclusion

For the shadow characters in the show, the existential answers may be hidden within the realms of productivity. But through the main characters we are able to analyse the deeper questions of who we are through all the seven seasons. As each of our characters traverse through all the seven seas we can see them evolve and create their own meaning.

The philosophical ideologies that came about in the later years of the 60's truly saw how collective subconscious was affected. Mad Men has managed to encapsulate all these changes and all these nuances through the seven seasons.

What the show creators gave us was a sense of theatre where we could see our own existential strife play out if we had been in the sixties. What makes the show more engaging is that despite the affluence and glamour, at the very core of it, human beings just want to be understood for who they really are. All this struggle, all this work is for us to actualise our true selves. An important part of this philosophy is also the fact that we must learn to live with our despair, this is the condition for our existence, along with the search for true meaning and purpose, we must also have the courage to face our true selves even when we do not feel like doing so.

At the end of the seventh season we see Don Draper truly find a sense of good faith, one where he is able to reconcile with his self and accept himself truly. Though the future of Don Draper is unclear to us the series end on a note that suggest he found good faith.

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