

DON DRAPER LIES, CHEATS, AND STEALS,
AND WE'RE SUPPOSED TO BE OKAY WITH THAT?

By
ANNIE COLLOPY

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Dr. Barbara J. Selznick

Abstract

Don Draper is known as an antihero, but it seems he should be considered something even worse. This paper explores the ways in which AMC's critically acclaimed series, *Mad Men* uses stylized flashbacks to garner admiration and support for a man who is constantly misled by his moral compass. He cheats on his wives, abandons his children, and schemes his way out of trouble at work, but is still viewed as a beloved character. Because of the narrative structure, viewers are encouraged to root for the man who cares only about himself.

Don Draper Lies, Cheats, and Steals, And We're Supposed to be Okay with That?

The Flynn Effect is an ongoing global tendency proposing that the average score of the IQ test has increased over the past century. Because the exact causes of this rise are currently unknown, there are some who believe the exposure to increasingly complex television in the majority of people's homes has permitted them to think more thoroughly about the questions presented on screen. Whether this theory proves true or not, television series have matured into more detailed and elaborate productions since the early 80s. Television began to shift away from the stigma of it being a useless pastime until it soon became considered a cultural activity that can connect people with one another and with their society. When the spread of television sets erupted into living rooms throughout American households in the 1950s, it stood as a symbol of relaxation. People would run home after work and their afterschool activities to plop down on the couch and watch easy, straightforward, and comforting programs that stuck to the goal of making viewers happy. Now, television audiences flip open their laptops and scroll through their downloaded queues to watch their favorite shows, and are often left only more confused, infuriated, and in love with the thrill of understanding characters and themes in a deeper and

more connected way than ever before on the small screen. The easy access, ability to binge, and the audience's desire to deepen their connection with their favorite television programs enabled shows like *Mad Men* to play with the evolving conventions of the medium and create troubled characters with meticulously crafted backstories used to justify their actions.

The trend of complex television is characterized by multiple interwoven plotlines led by convoluted characters with tangled backstories and relationships, is known as complex television. As shows grew more complex starting in the 1980s, viewers began to crave series that could engage them even while they were not watching, and the boundaries of how intricate an episode of television could be were pushed. One of the first complex television series was Steven Bochco's one hour police drama *Hill Street Blues*, which aired on NBC in 1981 and challenged viewers to keep up with more than one storyline during an episode while featuring characters with flaws who did not always make the best decisions. As *Hill Street Blues* grew in popularity and remained a favorite of critics for the show's seven season run, television producers and writers began recognizing the potential for television as a storytelling medium (Zynda, 101). Coupled with the acceptance of cable television across the country, the demand for complex television convened at a platform that offered that type of content for those who are willing to pay more. Since the 1990s, cable TV has offered hundreds of channel options beyond the few broadcast networks and it is not subjected to the same rules and regulations of the FCC. This means cable television writers can scribble their characters into dangerous or compromising situations risky enough to be considered too controversial for broadcast TV and expect a spike in viewership lured in by the controversy, as well as a dedicated fan base of audiences members capable and interested in following along with increasingly complicated narratives. Not every

show on cable can be considered complex or even insightful, but because the space available for additional programs was so expansive, numerous shows, like *Seinfeld*, *The X-Files*, and *Twin Peaks*, were able to find their niche, devoted audiences who actively hope to engage with their favorite series and the issues and relationships of its characters.

The demand for this type of content grew from people's interest in television shows that seemed more authored and crafted by people who truly care about the show for audiences who feel the same way, rather than typical television shows that feel produced (Mittel, 94). The more people grow connected with their favorite television shows, the higher the demand for platforms that will support their constant cravings, which has led to the competition escalating between the multiple Subscription Video on Demand services available today, such as Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon Prime. The market will only grow more crowded with Disney, Warner Bros., and NBCUniversal planning to release their streaming platforms in the following months. With this overcrowding in the SVOD market, each platform is feeling the intense pressure to produce their best enthralling and complex content with the power to hook faithful audience members for seasons and seasons to follow. There's room for competition despite the crowded market, because the fans of complex television shows are the ones who remain loyal throughout the series and beyond, they become connected to the show and root for its success, and they can now log in and watch the show whenever they have a spare moment. The rapid and adamant push for complex TV encouraged an even stronger craving for more nuanced shows, and from there grew the rise of anti-heroes like Walter White and Dexter who viewers love to hate but still root for them against all odds.

The Rise of the Antihero

The complexity of the contemporary television shows sprawled across the growing number of platforms has enabled the creation and development for lead roles who reject the labeling of their actions as simple as 'good' or 'bad.' Actions and motivations often contradict, leaving the viewer questioning the morality of the character's end goal. These characters, labeled as antiheroes, beg audience members to hate them while simultaneously enticing viewers to care enough about their struggles and hardships to justify their shortcomings. Throughout Jason Mittell's *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling*, the author stresses the importance of keeping the audience interested with believable relationships between characters who develop enough to learn from their mistakes to keep audiences invested in the program. While Mittell does not believe a character must transcend to a higher level of personal awareness for viewers to actively invest their time in the program, he feels the appearance, characteristics, and behavior of the lead need forceful emotional backing and a worthy motivation (Mittell, 2015). Yet, how can this happen effectively when the show is lead by a flawed protagonist? Authors Daniel Shafer and Arthur A. Raney of *Enjoying Antihero Narratives* deduce that a character garners support and admiration from audiences not by judging their every action and monitoring every decision and mistake, but by recognizing the pattern of their selfish behaviors so viewers can hope to witness the protagonist overcome their challenges and defeat their metaphorical or physical enemies (Shafer, Raney, 2012). Complex narratives allow more time to viewers to connect with the characters and understand their backgrounds and motivations. Our new and advancing methods of television consumption like video on demand, streaming, and cable give audiences more time and space to spend learning with the character, facilitated by the accessibility of the platforms and the option for viewers to watch at their own

pace. The more viewers come to care about and understand the characters on a more intimate level, the more likely it is they will form their own justifications to excuse every poor decision made by the antihero.

Every dramatic anti-hero has multiple justifications for their misdoings; for family, justice, self-esteem, and it is easy for viewers to give into that. Through the multiple story lines and complicated narratives made possible through the rise of complex television, viewers are able to connect on a deeper level with the anti-hero to get at least a partial view of their reasoning behind their mistakes. Walter White, Tony Soprano, Dexter Morgan, the list of audience-adored anti-heroes seems endless. Television viewers readily ignore these anti-heroes' prominent inadequacies in character to focus on the more appealing aspects of the men broadcasting themselves brightly enough to mask their true intentions. Their actions are sullied by an overwhelming sense of self-importance and disregard for how their mistakes might hurt those closest to them, yet audiences shower them with forgiveness, rarely holding them accountable for the pain and problems they cause. When these characters lie, cheat, and kill, they test their relationships and how far their deceiving will take them, but also how long they can continue to charm the audience into excusing their bad behavior. Don Draper is in on this game. He lures in viewers and his on-screen counterparts with his unrelenting charm, clean-cut good looks, and an overwhelming self confidence too secure of itself to be true. Yet slowly but surely, through flashbacks and stories Don's true self is exposed to uncover a tarnished surface beneath a polished cover. Don may not always have clear, or any, rationale behind many of his decisions, but through flashbacks, private intimate moments alone, and in brief spurts of weakness, the show opens the door to understand how Don's trauma created lasting harmful effects that

tyrannize his every waking moment, leading viewers to believe Don's excuses for why he is the way he is.

Don's Upbringing

Richard "Dick" Whitman was born to a woman he never met. The boy who later grows into Donald Draper spent the entire first ten years of his life being treated as a worthless mouth to feed. Draper's father, Archie Whitman unknowingly impregnated a prostitute and begrudgingly takes newborn Dick into his home upon the death of the young woman during childbirth. Despite getting tossed into the hands of a new family comprised of Archie and his disdainful wife Abigail, Dick is never made to feel welcome in his own home. With a step mother who clearly hates him for reminding her of the disloyalty and disrespect her husband holds towards her, a father who hates him because he wanted nothing more than a quick submission to his temptations and was rewarded with a walking, talking reminder of his failure as a husband, and a mother who has been described to him as a worthless whore he is responsible for killing, it is understandable why Donald Draper is unbelievably messed up as an adult. Yet by creating these sob stories for Don, the show persuades viewers to look at Don's soft side to justify his mistakes. The show lays out a troubled antihero, but then does everything in its power to convince the viewers otherwise.

Archie Whitman never let Dick forget he was unwanted. He saw Dick as nothing more than an accident from a night gone wrong and he steadfastly demands Dick knows he is not supposed to be there. While these constant painful reminders stick with Don until he is an adult, he learns to understand the insufficiency of his father's word by recognizing his lying and dishonesty. Episode 108, "*The Hobo Code*," features an unlucky man working his way down the

train tracks to find work and a place to rest who comes across the Whitman household. In return for a day of tireless work, Archie offers the man a night in the barn, a meal, and a small monetary reward upon completion of the work the following day. That night, Dick helps the man get settled for his night in the barn and listens to his tales from the road, the actual Hobo Code comprised of symbols to warn other travelers of potential trouble, and admonitions about trusting unfaithful men. Dick takes his cautions to heart, and begins to recognize the hate and cruelty resting within his father. His suspicions are fulfilled the next day after watching the Hobo toil for hours in the field, only to leave empty handed after Archie shoves him off without giving up the money he had promised. Don understands not being truthful is a trait shared by bad men like Archie, but continues down a path of infidelity to a life completely consumed by one overwhelming lie. Audiences are supposed to sympathize with this poor child who never received love or support growing up enough to forget the fact this flashback was spurred by a dizzying night spent away from his family, which itself was initiated by Don's reckless and selfish decision to take his recently earned bonus and invite Midge on a trip to Paris. When Don begins to act like the villain, the show diverts viewers' attention away to the trauma that justifies his poor behavior.

The severely negative perception of Don's birth mother, and the lingering belief that even if she had survived his birth she would never have wanted Dick, cataclysmically enforces an adverse and detrimental understanding of women and their value within Don. This is clear through his careless cheating on his wife Betty even before his wife is introduced and continues throughout his second marriage. He blatantly disregards the bounds of marriages and the respect women deserve, yet audiences excuse his poor behavior because of the rough upbringing he

endured with no maternal figure shaping a positive perception of women. Don feels utterly hurt and abandoned by his mother, and for leaving him to live with his brutal father, so rather than productively using that anger to channel a healthier way to move on with a life filled with love and forgiveness, Don's character lets that intense animosity fester inside of him, creating a warped viewpoint of women and their role in his life. Not only does Don's birth mother receive the blame for his wretched childhood with his father, but because she was a prostitute, Don's entire perception of sex and sexuality is shown as stunted through his inability to connect with his wife and his desperate need to sleep with every brunette woman who spends a second too long looking at him. He believes she was worthless because her value and work meant nothing beneficial to the Whitmans. Coupled with the strange scenario of growing up inside a brothel under the control of his spiteful step mother and her new boyfriend, Uncle Mack, Don never witnesses a committed relationship where two people engage physically with one another out of love, rather than lust and an irritating itch. In his teenage years before shipping off to Korea, Don survives at the brothel by forming fairly twisted relationships with a few of the female employees. One of the prostitutes strikes up a deal with young Don, promising him a Hershey's chocolate bar whenever he steals enough money from the pockets of her suitors while she keeps them busy in the other room. This process becomes Don's lifeline in the brothel, made clear from his final emotional breakdown in the office when during a pitch to their most lucrative potential client, Hershey's Chocolate, Don cries over the telling of this story and admits the scheme completely and unwittingly morphed his perception of sex, women, and the value of money. Don is taught that by stealing coins and petty cash from these low-life men, men just like his own father, he can make his own life momentarily better to forget about the unwavering pain he feels.

However, it should not matter what Don is shown to have endured as a young child, despite the narrative's incessant attempts to feel for and side with Don. Don's humbling stories make audiences feel for the person who feels for no one through flashbacks incited by short revelations in Don that he is living the many misdeeds of his father or in moments of vulnerability and fear. However, after so many years, Don could have moved on and offered forgiveness to himself, his father, or his step mother, he instead he chose to wallow in self-pity and work on crafting the perfect persona to showcase to the world. The show wants Don to hold on to that grudge to create a dramatic show that can entice viewers, so the series is crafted in a way to continuously tempt the viewers to side with Don, despite all signs indicating he is a selfish man who could never empathize for those he hurts. He is the clear antihero of the show, but the narrative structure of offering these moments of truth into Don's life seems to suggest Don doesn't deserve as much hate or rebuking as other antiheroes would receive for their misdeeds.

The Smoking Dog-Tags and the Solace of Anna Draper

Undeniably flawed and far from the perfect man he pretends to be, Don Draper always has a justification for his poor behavior and inability to commit to family life. Growing up with an abusive, stern, and unyielding father and only a blurry idea of a mother crafted by those who despised and resented her, the young Dick Whitman never gets the chance to learn about love. From the moment baby Dick is dropped at the front door of his father's house and handed to the woman now fully aware of her husband's infidelity, he is subjected to years of emotional abuse at the hands of his family, those who are supposed to care about and protect him, as they constantly remind him he is unwanted. Upon the death of his father and after the years spent with his hostile step-mother, uncle, and eventually half-brother Adam in the brothel, Dick Whitman

craves an escape so desperately, he willingly risks his life to go to war and commits an act so disturbed and unorthodox, the guilt looms over him for the rest of his life. Stuck in a life or death situation and watching his life flash before his eyes while terrified of the encroaching Korean men and boys aimed to kill the American soldiers, he has no choice but to make a rash decision. Dick becomes delirious and makes the rash decision to strip the dogtag off the body of his freshly torched commanding officer to swap it with his own, shedding the life and stigma attached to the name Dick Whitman, and accepting a lifetime of guilt with the Don Draper nametag. In episode 112, Peter Campbell confesses to Don he has acquired information about the truth of Don's identity and his time in the Korean War. Overcome with crippling fear over how Campbell could completely disrupt the life Don has crafted for himself, viewers are finally shown the openings to the critical moment that served as a turning point for the naive and constricted Dick Whitman. Campbell eventually takes the discovery to the head of the company, Bert Cooper, who surprisingly dismisses Campbell and advises Don to create a deeper sense of loyalty among his coworkers. Cooper's reaction is shocking, but Don knows he is not in the clear, and continues to fear how this information could be used against him later. His worrying sparks another flashback. Don wakes up in a hospital bed with an extreme close-up on his bandaged face, and for the first time Don is addressed by his new, stolen name, Don Draper. The shock triggers a flashback within a flashback, when it becomes clear Dick Whitman's simple mistake of dropping a lighter that ignited the base where he and the real Don were hiding is what killed Don Draper. He remembers the moment as his head spun and enemies continued to attack his base that he stumbled towards the scorched body and peels the dog-tag from the burning flesh. He rips off his own name tag and hastily exchanges it. The swap took only moments, not

long enough to grasp the extent of the consequences, but the new Don Draper is left with a new name and years of guilt. Don's incessant stress and guilt implies he recognizes the significance of his crime of identity theft, but he needed to distance himself as definitely as possible, and going by a name different than the one given to him by his father will offer Don a bit more space to recover. Yet no matter how desperately Don reinforces the necessity of stealing a new identity, he cannot shake the fact he abandoned his post in the war, stole the only thing a man can carry with him forever, and upended the lives of all the people connect to the situation.

At the moment of the dog-tag swap, Dick is shown scared and crying, but it is not clear he is thinking about the family of the real Don, the wife and kids he could be leaving behind, the family and friends who will miss him, or fact these people must now continue their lives emotionally wounded and worrying what happened to their Don. Suffering a concussion after withstanding a terrible explosion, Dick cries over the smoking carcass before reaching for the name tag, but the swap takes only about five seconds, and his bandaged, sliced up face appears utterly confused enough when addressed as Lieutenant Draper to indicate Dick didn't take the time to process what this action could mean for him in the future. The real Don Draper's wife, a quiet and peaceful woman named Anna Draper, is left after the war wondering why her husband never came home as she struggles to support herself without the government assistance granted to those who lose a loved one during battle. Heartbroken and suspicious, Anna Draper tracks down the new Don and alerts him to her understanding of the situation. At first, a terrified young Don begs for forgiveness and offers money or anything for Anna to keep quiet, but the two connect over a mutual feeling of loneliness and eventually work out a deal starting with an official divorce, a promise from Anna not to expose Don's true identity, and a commitment from

Don to support her financially the rest of her life. Luckily for Don, Anna stays true to her word, and he begins to see the value of having a friend he can fully trust.

Don and Anna's relationship strengthens over time and blossoms into a stable friendship where one knows they can always count on the other despite their history and the distance between them. Whenever Don visits Anna in California, he transforms from the serious ad-man focused on his impression into a man who no longer has anything to hide. His greatest secrets are out in the open with Anna, and she has shown him compassion and love despite everything. Anna becomes the home Don always needed and the friend he can confide in who will tell him everything is okay even when Don feels he can't keep up his image much longer. Anna creates a small but secure family-like scenario for Don, especially upon introducing Don to her niece, Stephanie, who seems to spark a lost sense of paternal instincts within Don despite the fact he is still a father to his own children. By offering seemingly unconditional love and a sanctuary for a man so restricted by his internal conflicts, cynical Don can relax long enough to become the person he believes he would be without the influence of his childhood lurking over him. He is shown in comfy clothing, often wife beaters and tank tops, the walls of Anna's house are bright and colorful and her patio where Don relaxes is overflowing with flowers and plants. California is his escape, it's a place where he no longer has to put up his shield because he doesn't have to enforce this image of the man he thinks he should be on the woman who knows who he really is. Viewers are welcomed into the world of a man no longer tethered down by crippling shame, indicating there is an argument to defend why Don isn't such a bad guy, but as soon as he leaves California, he returns to his typical ways.

Despite Don's apparent bliss when spending time with Anna in California, he can never fully hide his narcissism. For someone so consumed with constant worrying over his own mistakes, it is impossible for him to set aside his own worries even around those who have promised to protect him. Anna proves to be trustworthy over their years of friendship, but Don knows after leaving California he must march right back to a world where every moment is shrouded with a tinge of fear. So even as Anna willingly offers support and her companionship out of a real love she has developed throughout her long friendship with Don, Don's ego causes him to overlook the immensity of her sacrifices and hospitality, and begins taking advantage of her offerings as a way for him to escape from his troubles and focus on himself rather than his problems. He spends weeks on end at her house, doing some chores to make himself feel useful, but he never seems to acknowledge how far he set her back. Despite her jokes about how it's good Don likes the porch because he paid for it, she still lives in this house alone because her husband was killed by a simple mistake Dick Whitman had made moments before he took over Don's life. Her value to the show is only to make Don feel forgiven, proving he only takes advantage of her safe space in order to feed his narcissism. During one of Don's flashbacks, he remembers spending Christmas with Anna and admitting he will need a divorce from her to marry Betty. Fully aware of the complications that will ensue, Anna offers to help Don in any way he needs, even though this could impose extreme financial issues. Don offers to continue to support her, but he ignores how lonely Anna might be having to spend much more of her time alone, now. Anna never claims to take any issue with his visiting, in fact she even states she is the only one who really knows him, and still loves him, but as someone so self absorbed, Don's true intentions should be analyzed. Upon learning of Anna's death after she is diagnosed with

terminal cancer, Don weeps to Peggy over losing the one person he believes truly knew him, but on a grander level he is crying over the loss of his safe space. He can never again go back to the person who knows his story, his mistakes, and his efforts to make up for what he has done, and is left with nothing more than his secrets rotting inside of him.

Using Don's Guilt as a Crutch

No matter how endearing Don may act, or how much he appears to care about his family or his job, he is solely focused on boasting his character. Don's motivating force behind his every decision is to make sure no one finds out about his stolen identity. That force itself is motivated by fear and guilt, with Don terrified over how people might perceive him if they uncover his secret, which in turn means his decisions are self interested. His narcissism clouds his judgement and leads to his poor decisions. One of the first glimpses into Don's background is through a drug induced flashback during the crash of a wild night spent with his girlfriend, Midge, and her free spirited friends, as he walks up from a crowded bed and stumbles through the smoky haze into the bathroom. The couples around him continue with their personal business, but the one woman sitting on a chair by herself flips through a photo album lined with countless black and white family photos, hinting at what is to come. The lights are dim and Don lunges into the shadows for the door where it immediately cuts to a close-up shot looking right at Don as he peers reflexively into the mirror. The light overtakes his face from the shadow, as if exposing the true exterior hidden beneath a mask, and the viewers are transported back to the life of a young Dick Whitman. From there unfolds the story of Archie not keeping his word to a drifter trying to work in exchange for a place to sleep, and Dick hearing from a voice outside his own head that his father is a bad man. The hobo shows sympathy towards the hopeless kid, and

that eventually leads to Don's belief that because of who he is and what he has endured throughout his life, he does not have to follow the rules. Maybe because he feels he has already cheated the law, stealing the identity of the real Don Draper to rid himself of the grief of being Dick Whitman, and because he has yet to get caught and face any consequences, he believes the rules must not really apply to him. This doesn't keep him from worrying, however, that his secret might slip, and he will go to the greatest lengths to guarantee it remains hidden. Early in the series, episodes 105 and 106 introduce Don's real brother, Adam Whitman, whose only goal is to reconnect with the brother he was told, but was not convinced, had been killed in the Korean War. For Don, the thought of making his brother, a living symbol of the background he has all but erased from his memory, a habitual fixture in his life consumes his every waking moment and douses him with terror and panic until he finally offers to pay his brother off to never contact him again. Crushed and heartbroken at his older brother's harsh and offensive dismissal, Adam commits suicide, creating an omnipresent guilt within Don that nags at his psyche throughout the entire series. Episode 106 begins with Don tripping and landing on his back after falling down the stairs, and as he looks around in embarrassment hoping no one in his family saw his tumble, he sees his childhood living room where he watched his step-mother give birth to Adam. Don is shown wearing his pajamas and an open robe, doused in pale morning light, creating a soft appearance, until he is reverted back to himself as a child. Young Dick Whitman, scrawny and pale and clad in faded clothing, struggles to pull himself up from the floor and confront his new baby half-brother. It is at his most vulnerable times Don is weak, when he is overwhelmed with fear and guilt, like over his handling of the situation with Adam, that flashbacks are triggered to elicit sympathy for Don. As he comes to and sees his family at the top of the stairs, Betty races

down to clean up the broken dishes Don dropped, which turn out to have been a meal for mother's day, indicating he was also probably triggered by his sadness over never growing up with a loving mother. These times when sour memories are prompted are also, however, when he has committed disrespectful, selfish acts in order to protect himself, when the show knows Don needs additional support to keep audiences watching the series. He is shown wearing his pajamas and an open robe, doused in pale morning light, softening his appearance. He is verted back to himself To Don Draper, his name is everything. By discarding his original identity, Don can at least attempt to box up his guilt and shame over Adam's death and not be reminded of the pain he endured as a child at the hands of his domineering father every time he is greeted.

The series uses Don's personal, internal trauma in its favor, understanding viewers might sympathize with the emotional burden Draper carries enough so that they will view his actions through rose tinted glasses and forgive him under his circumstances. Yet these circumstances, the abusive father, the mother he never knew, growing up poor and alone, are not unique to Don. For centuries, thousands and thousands of children have matured under the dimmed light of their unfit parents and only dreamed of a life where they can raise their children in a safe, happy home after returning from a successful day at the job filled with praise and pride. Don shares these desires, but he disbelieves in his own self worth and redemption for his misdoings so adamantly he increasingly self-sabotages his home and work life to make himself suffer through the consequences, regardless of how his wife, children, and coworkers may be affected.

Most anti-heroes are familiar with narcissism. Nancy Fulton, a television and film writer notes how astonished she is at viewer's willingness to accept the manipulative behavior driven by narcissism that often leads antiheroes to hurt or even kill people (*M2 Communications*, 2016),

but understands the appeal of the dramatic entertainment. The antiheroes' goals quickly consume their entire lives and push everyone and everything off to the sidelines. Their unwavering drive is characterized by the belief that their goals and their ideas are best. Dexter uses this rationale to justify his killing of people he categorizes as 'bad,' and Walter White puts saving his life and supporting his family ahead of the cares and suffering of other mothers, fathers, and siblings who now must watch as they lose their loved ones to crippling meth addiction. Like these captivatingly awful men, Don sees no harm in his awful actions, at least at the moments they unfold and he chooses to act on his impulses. At times Don breaks under the pressure of his mistakes from guilt and self doubt, he never seems to care about who he is hurting and how they might be feeling when he emotionally abuses them. Rather, he focuses on how people getting angry at him might affect his own self worth or his reputation at a job that dictates his status, or his picture perfect family that allows Don to appear as a part of a classically American, nuclear family. From the moment junior accounts man Peter Campbell begins working at Sterling Cooper, he attempts to question and undermine Don's authority, and Don makes it his goal to guarantee Campbell feels undervalued and underappreciated in the office. Upon the first warnings of any potential damage to Don's reputation, he acts out when he feels threatened to reassert his dominance and power, which for his sake, will make it more difficult for anyone to believe the true story of who Don is if they ever discover it. During his short fling with comedian Jimmy Barrett's wife, Bobby, Don acts like a commanding gentlemen and big shot to impress her, yet when they crash the car on the way to the beach, Don shies away when Peggy shows up to bail him out and he begs her to make sure no one finds out about this. Don's apparent self interest obscures his true insecurities regarding his fear of inadequacy and incapability of being

truly loved beyond simply surface level attraction, but every day he shows up at Sterling Cooper beaming with icy confidence, for at the deepest level, Don submerged in fear. In moments of weakness, however, like when Don tries to buy his brother out to eliminate the risk of his true identity becoming known, his confidence is crushed and he loses his ability to appear calm and collected. Don is sold as the anti-hero, lying, cheating, and stealing, but is then portrayed as a fragile, emotionally stunted man who deserves sympathy, as if to see how far the show can push the boundaries of the antihero and the support of viewers. Don appears too frightened of how the truth will affect his social standing so he keeps up his tough facade to protect himself from his deep rooted insecurities, giving audiences an excuse to claim his mistakes are not as driven by malicious intent as they appear despite the implication there being he is still only acting in a self-serving manner.

The Ad Men of Madison Avenue

Don's pristinely crisp collars cut the air as soon as he steps through the glass doors of Sterling Cooper. His perfectly tailored suits and neatly styled dark swoop of hair demand attention and respect of his evident authority, and his charmed co-workers and clients fall right in line. As early as ten minutes into the first episode of the series, Don is seen strolling into his office after a long night with his first mistress Midge, where he towers behind his desk and pulls out one perfectly pressed white button down from the stack in his drawer. As he stands changing the shirt dirty with evidence and disloyalty with the bright light pouring down on him and exposing him to the cold light of day, it also seems to illuminate him as a hero while Roger Sterling discusses how relaxed he is about their upcoming meeting with their largest client because he knows Don will save the day with one of his perfect pitches. As Don is clearly

changing from the clothes he wore sleeping over with someone besides his wife, he is being praised and framed to carry him through the scene as a hero. Don, the poster boy of copywriting on Madison Avenue in the 1960s, has earned immense praise and respect from those in the advertising business not just because Don seems to possess a natural gift of recognizing exactly how a product should be presented to hook the greatest amount of paying customers, but also because he understands how to present his product to sell it to his clients. The finale of season 1 is marked by Don's flawless pitch of the Carousel to Kodak, in which he appears to literally reinvent the wheel and rebrand this photo sharing device as a magical memory box. Looming over the conference table and surrounded by shadows, the light barely luminates Don's face as he smiles at the beautiful personal family photos being depicted on the projection screen. Yet it is not the precious family memories eliciting a smile, but the fact Don knows he has won over this room with his presentation. He showed the perfect photos, the precise amount of happiness, and and project the right amount of emotion to act as if it is really his family motivating him to do his job so well and care about his product, rather than his desperate craving to prove himself of worth in the office. Don is so adept at this because he must wake up each morning, and remember to sell himself as this mutation of who the real Dick Whitman once was, while never forgiving the guilt of taking another man's name and the pressure to have it mean something to make up for the Whitman name that has been dragged through the mud. From the beginning of the series, the way Don is discussed by his co-workers makes it clear he is held to that high esteem. Minutes into the first episode, office manager Joan must spend a great deal of time informing Peggy of the importance of her duties as Don's secretary because keeping Don happy will keep the office happy, followed by Roger strutting into Don's office to tell him now

not-nervous he is about their pitch that afternoon because if Don's leading the meeting, he knows it's in good hands. When the young account man Peter Campbell first gets a chance to talk to Don about the business, every reaction from Don is filmed looking up at him in a tight frame, allowing him to fill the space and tower over those beneath him as a way to assert his dominance and strength. His midday trysts of sneaking off with whatever girl appears on his radar that week raised no alarms in the workplace, for that is nothing out of the ordinary, so much so that every secretary learns codes to communicate with the businessmen's wives as to not give away their secrets. This lying and covering up for Don despite the clear disloyalty of his behavior shows the extent characters will go to defend this man based on the domineering personality he has crafted for himself, and the way Don is positioned in the frame helps subconsciously reassert that message on the viewers. The show sets him up in a way that almost dissociates Don from the consequences of his actions by cutting away to other storylines or to flashbacks to soften the blow of his morally misguided actions. He gets away with his sloppy behavior at work by shaping up and wowing their clients at meetings, setting the principle that as long as he does his work, he can do whatever he pleases. This allows him and willing audiences to disregard these actions as bad all together because by the end of the day, Don has once again saved Sterling Cooper and created more time for himself to build up a reputation for himself that would squash any rumors or uncoverings of his past life. Other antiheroes justify their bad behavior with excuses, like how Tony Soprano will threaten, hurt, and even kill people, but claims it is all to protect his family. Don just pretends his awful actions and the possible justifications for why he might be so messed up just don't exist. By changing his name from Dick Whitman to Don Draper, Don doesn't have to remember the life he endured years ago, he doesn't have to

remember pain of being unloved or the brother he abandoned, and while every introduction Don gives is another lie about his identity, he has suited himself precisely into the role of this new name so that nothing seems out of the ordinary.

The Family Don Thinks He Needs, Not The One He Wants

Inside his beautiful house in a suburb outside Manhattan, Don treats his home life not much differently than his work life. His two children, Sally and Bobby, are strictly governed but never seem like unhappy kids, at least in the early stages of their life. And his stunning wife, Betty who is so delicate that Roger Sterling once notes his wife Mona always thought that Betty and Don looked like came right from the top of their wedding cake (Episode 310). Typical for women in this time, Betty remains restrained by her own and society's expectations of women and remains at home to keep up the household. Betty constantly complains about her work load at home, whether that's cooking dinner when the maid is gone or gossiping with her friends about the other women on the block, all the while feels she is going through this struggle alone. Betty feels disconnected from Don and never asks about his true feelings or identity because Don has established himself as a private person, and not even his wife is allowed to know the truth. However, even Betty reaches a point when she fears Don is cheating on her and decides to dig around to discover what she can about Don on her own that he refuses to share. In episode 102, Betty admits to Don on the drive home from dinner with Roger and Mona Sterling that she loves seeing Don "that way." She means she loves seeing Don talk about himself and his childhood, because even though he barely let a few sentences about growing up without a nanny and his less privileged young life slip into the conversation, Betty can never get him talking about himself or his all consuming internal dialogue. She craves connection with a man who feels he doesn't

deserve connection. Betty herself is no stranger to a troubled upbringing, and while her situation was far different from Don's life as a child, they both can't let go of the damage caused by the parents they feel let them down. Despite this offering of a chance to connect with each other on a deeper level about their feelings of inadequacy perpetrated by their parents' strict controlling and simultaneous dismissal of them, Don simply changes the subject. He is not ready or willing to communicate with Betty, either because he doesn't care enough about her and her feelings, or he is too embarrassed to admit how hopeless and alone he had felt as a child. What makes Don an interesting antihero is the uphill battle the show is fighting to lessen the magnitude of Don's decisions, mainly though relating his current struggles to the pain he experienced as a child, and this manipulation is apparent through the depiction of Betty and her own upbringing. While her life was far easier than the young Dick Whitman's life, many of her flaws, like her shallowness, insecurities, and obsession with her appearance, are all tied to lasting emotional wounds left by her mother. However, Betty is never given the chance to let her trauma speak for her as it does in Don's case, and therefore Betty is always seen as the awful wife viewers were happy to see Don divorce.

Whether it is because Don thinks so little of Betty or because his ideals of women have been irreparably damaged, Don never takes Betty very seriously. His mistakes, his late nights out, and the countless experiences he has missed with his family mean nothing in the grand scheme of their marriage, but Betty's flaws and mistakes weigh down on their relationship like a boulder, crushing Don's esteem and this image of how his wife should treat him. Filled with distrust and a lack of confidence in Betty's ability as a woman and a mother, Don forces her into therapy so she can talk about her issues without him having to listen. Draper sets up a back

channel with the psychologist to discuss Betty's sessions, blatantly disregarding how this major violation of trust might affect Betty. Upon hearing the doctor's comments about Betty having the emotional well being of a child prone to jealousy and dissatisfaction with her daily life, Don becomes aggravated. The camera is placed even below Don's waist, forcing viewers to look far up at him as if they are children as well, and he seems to almost roll his eyes when the therapist offers the death of Betty's mother as a possible explanation for her behavior. Over the course of the first season, Betty has her self-worth stripped away after Don refuses to meet with the company giving Betty modeling work, she comes to the realization her husband is adept at lying to her face, and even teases the idea of fooling around with the air conditioning salesman she lets into the house. Never considering how Betty might be feeling, he lashes out first at the therapist, blaming him for making her more unhappy. Don is shown in close-ups, rolling his eyes and almost even laughing at the doctor, all to show he knows better. Don sees Betty's issues not as a sign of internal suffering under the control of a distant and often emotionally manipulative husband, but as an implication she has not learned to work as efficiently or intelligently to mask her unhappiness with life as Don has done for years. Betty has shaking fits spurred by her anxiety over Don's looming presence in the house and eventually is driven to her own trysts of infidelity. On his worst days, Don views Betty as not much more than a vapid shell of a human desperate for attention and love, which only turns him off as he remembers how hopelessly he craved connection of any kind as a child. He thinks it is silly Betty wants to keep working as a model when McCann Erickson casts her for their Coca Cola commercials and never considers how taking that away from her might affect Betty. When she complains about him not pulling his weight around the house, like when he ditches Sally's birthday party to sit in his car near the

train track and contemplate suicide, Don always disregards her remarks and goes to sit back down with the kits in the living room or back to the office in the city. Yet like with the example of Sally's birthday, audiences are made to sympathize with the antihero because they are led to believe Don is even considering suicide because he is so unhappy with his family life because he never got the chance to understand family. He formed this picture family life with the perfect, well paying job because that is all Don thought he would need to be happy. The problem is, Don doesn't know what he needs, so he searches for it in every glass of liquor, every woman he sleeps with in her messy apartment or fancy hotel, and in the eyes of those whose admiration he craves.

By cheating on Betty with the multiple women on his rotation, he believes his only deserved punishment is suffering through the quips of his irritating conscious as it pokes at the back of his mind all day long, yet when Betty so much as raises her voice at Don, he instantly loses his temper at her. After a long night at the bar following a long day at the office in episode 107, Don invites Roger over to his house for a home cooked meal from Betty. Surprised by their guest, Betty hesitantly welcomes Roger into their home, and plays along with his increasingly less fun and casual flirting, all while sitting directly across from Don. Don leaves the room for a moment, giving Roger the perfect chance to make a fairly forward pass at Betty, who quickly pushes him off seconds before Don reenters. Aware of the shift in tension, Don tenses up as Roger takes it as his cue to leave. Furiously, Don demands an answer from Betty over what happened between her and Roger and in return receives a quick quip about the disgracefulness of Don's drunken boss. Don tells Betty, "You made a fool of yourself. You were throwing yourself at him, giggling at all his stories. Sometimes I feel like I'm living with a little girl" (Episode

107), then returns to work the next day only to pretend Roger doesn't owe either Betty or Don an apology. The viewers are given a short moment to feel bad for the treatment Betty receives at home, but are ultimately persuaded to side with the men in this situation once Don brushes it off as soon as Roger brings him a drink and a joke. Roger brings in a bottle of "the good stuff" and offers up a half-hearted apology about how his entitlement leads him to act erratically, and the only mention of Betty is that she'll want her glass back that Roger used as a to-go cup. Draper's double standard for women's choices and behaviors thwart any chance of him recovering from his childhood trauma, but his relentless dismissal of his own mistakes proves he would rather wallow in self pity and pretend he is a misunderstood underdog than accept the facts and take responsibility for his actions. It isn't the other characters who make Don an anti-hero, no one else makes him good or bad, the show created him to be the way he is because it gifts him the option to refuse to take full blame for his bad behavior and flaws. Yet this never dissuades viewers from sympathizing with the man who lacks even a basic comprehension of thinking of anyone besides himself.

In the later episodes of the series, after both Don and Betty have divorced and remarried, Betty attempts to cause a rift in the blooming relationship between Sally, Megan, Don's secretary turned wife he meets in season four, and Don. Betty reveals to Sally that Don had been married once before, meaning Megan was really Don's third wife, and Anna Draper was his first. Shocked and hurt by her father and cool new step mom neglecting to tell the truth, Sally turns on them until Megan and Don tell her he married Anna just to help her out. Keen to Don's tricks, however, Sally knows some details remain protected. By hiding a portion of the truth, Don extenuates the distance between him and his daughter, who in turn makes it her goal to protect

her younger brothers from the same crushing feeling of abandonment and disappointment. Don's relationships with his children have never strayed from this pattern. He makes grand promises and takes on the role as the fun parent as Betty's anger and dissatisfaction with her life spirals her off into another fit over minor issues like her son Bobby messing with the record player or when she locks Sally in the closet after catching her smoking a cigarette, but then soon turns about and betrays their trust by never making time for them as they grow up and breaking his promise to be there for them when they needed. Don blames this on his drinking, his work commitments, and personal drama like his divorce from Megan, but excuses aside, he is never there to watch his children grow up. Early in the series, Don tries to be a good parent; he wants to be, but he doesn't have the ability. He promises Bobby he will never lie to him, that he will never treat him the way Don's dad treated him, but like most people, Don becomes too similar to his father for his own good. In the final season of the series, Don drives Sally back to her boarding school and offers to help care for her and her brothers once Betty passes away from the cancer she was recently diagnosed with, but it is Sally who shows the most sound judgement and assures him his help is not needed. They have grown up without him and plan to continue their lives that way to save them from the hurt they've had to endure under a distant, negligent parent. She steps out of Don's car lined with its dark interiors and into the light of her school, leans in the window, and tells her dad she loves him. Don smiles, for the show has set up Don's narrative as someone who seeks affection over love because he never received true love, but he drives off as in agreement with Sally that he no longer needs to be a part of his children's lives. He lacks the emotional strength to really see his children and love them because he never experienced that as a child, but he never makes the effort to learn from the mistakes of his parental figures and

make a better life for his children than the one given to him. Audiences are intended to appreciate Sally's strength, and maybe even see a bit of Don in her, but feel for Don in this time of loss and pain, even though it is self-inflicted. Sitting in the hospital waiting room awaiting the birth of his third child in season 3 episode 5, Don converses with an anxious young man on the verge of becoming a first time father. As they grow increasingly drunk and lament about their fears of parenting, Don makes a bold statement regarding everyone's inability to take responsibility for themselves, judging those who blame their parents for their shortcomings. Don may not admit it, for it is through the television medium and the connections created through flashbacks that it becomes apparent every decision Don makes, every time he chooses to sneak off during his daughter's birthday party, to cheat on his wife and disrespect the bonds of their family, to forget half the time when it's his weekend to spend with the kids, Don is emulating his father. He might not realize it, or might be refusing to let himself believe it, but the show creates excuses for Don's behavior to give influential context that could sway viewers' opinions. The narrative wants him to be shown as troubled and incapable of raising children because he never had the chance to see how effectively raising children is done, but that shouldn't excuse the fact he constantly puts his interests ahead of others. The show's excuses cannot justify the actions that define him as such a troubled antihero.

Of all three children, possibly of all members of the Draper family, Sally is the most aware. She possesses the strength and empathy to recognize the potential consequences her brothers will face following the abandonment of their father after living through the trauma herself, and does everything in her power to keep that cycle from continuing. Upon hearing the news of Betty's cancer that granted her only a few more short months to live, Don attempts to

step up to raise his three children, but it is Sally who immediately cuts him off before he can start breaking another promise. Sally knows the most, despite still not knowing much, about Don's childhood, his father, and the person behind the stoic mask. She is the first to call Don on his lies, like when she catches him sleeping with his neighbor and he says he was just helping her with something, and she refuses to accept his weak apology and instead leaves his apartment in the city the next day and refuses to visit him again. She has seen the dilapidated brothel where Dick Whitman spent his early years, and she knows Don wants to be her father and wants to love his children, but she knows it can never happen. Betty's death forces Sally into a position where she must now run the house, and part of her responsibilities includes protecting her brothers from harm. Don has focused too much energy clutching onto his past and the grievances towards his father to ever move on, to ever become the father he wants to be for his own children. Sally is the only one to stand up to Don and refuse his excuses, something audiences maybe should have done, as well. The sympathy for Don seems to drive the narrative, leading audiences to feel for him as the consequences of his actions finally hit the fan, but his inability to shape up make him seem like nothing more than a pathetic, lonely man.

Just because Don is an antihero doesn't mean the creator of the show intended for Don to be unlikable. Despite his countless flaws and repeated mistakes that seem to teach him nothing, *Mad Men* never gives viewers a long enough chance to recognize the faults of its leading man and the consequences that will arise before he is already off breaking more rules and more hearts. *Mad Men* never hides Don's misdeeds for minutes into the first episode and it's obvious Don is someone who cheats on his wife pretty casually, but the show never really attempts to label him as a bad guy, either. The narrative of *Mad Men*, from each individual episode to the

structure of the entire series, is designed to make viewers feel bad enough for Don that they will forgive his mistakes. His background is slowly introduced to lure in viewers to crave a deeper understanding of Don Draper, so they will be there throughout the series as Don is forced through the lowest points of his personal life and career. There's no doubt Don is considered an antihero, but the reason he doesn't fit as neatly in the box is due to the fact the series creators and writers emphasize his flaws to use as an excuse for his wrongdoings. By portraying Don as a reclusive, rigid man who keeps his secrets hidden from even those he is supposed to love the most, it allows viewers the chance to peek into the world he protects so adamantly to create a connection between the audience and Don, which gives viewers the time and space to see his actions and mistakes in context with his history and background, and in turn make excuses for him despite the blatant egocentrism driving his every decision. This isn't to say Don doesn't deserve forgiveness for some of his mistakes, the absence of his parents absolutely makes it difficult for him to raise children of his own, but he never puts in the effort to move on from his past and make the changes necessary to give his family a better life. Of course any show wants to build lasting support for their hero, but at some point supporting Don means foregoing morals in order to justify his lies and forgive him for simply not caring enough to mature and grow so he can welcome in enough love to spread love in return. Then again, if Don learned to move on from his past, he would probably have no reason to hide behind the allure of his high-paying advertising job and the constant adultery and there would be no show.

In season 3, after finally getting caught for breaking the bonds of his marriage, Don is distanced from his children and the chance at a family life. He tries to rebuild his tainted relationship with his three kids through his second marriage to Megan, but Don's refusal to stay

loyal to his new wife and betrays the trust of his family all over again. So why do we forgive Don, when he not only refuses to learn from his mistakes, but perpetuates the suffering that caused him such pain onto his own offspring? Why are audiences inclined to root for him when our only justification for his misdoings is invalidated by his continuation of this vicious cycle. Even after risking his job too many times to count at Sterling Cooper by risking client relationships and betraying the trust of his coworkers, viewers are led to still root for Don, for him to reinstate his position at the company he helped create, simply because the narrative takes advantage of Don's vulnerable moments when he is consumed with guilt and fear to build up a case to support the man who cares only for himself. Yet at the end of the series, Don manages to wrap up the show in signature Don fashion, swooping in at the last moment with a Hail Mary Coca Cola commercial to shock those around him by presenting exactly what his advertising clients had in mind. Don is worse off than when he started, he let the changes happen around him and remained stagnant as his world was completely morphed. By the end, Don is no longer at Sterling Cooper, but with his former competition McCann Erickson. He no longer has the opportunity to head home after a long day at work and see his wife and kids watching TV in the living room, for he betrayed their trust and disappointed them too many times for them to have faith in his ability to be a parent. He ends exactly where he wants to be, as the saving grace for the ad company, without the pressures of having to raise children and be a part of a family he created just for show, still seen as the stoic man with the brilliant ideas behind his sullen eyes.

Mad Men showrunner Matthew Weiner pushes this complexity of Don to explore how far people will take their support of someone they know is deeply flawed. Don isn't the character people love to hate, he's more like the character people love not to hate even with substantial

amounts of damning evidence stacked against him. So as Weiner further complicates Don's internal dialogue as a way to push the boundaries of complex television and the definition of an antihero, viewers get sucked into his mesmerizing, intricate depictions of life, class, and the standards of 1960s society and see Don as just another one of the fellows at the office. His mistakes are minimized in the presence of other ad-men who have more mistresses than they can count, but even those mistakes mean nothing once the men turn on their charm. Does anything bad these men do matter if they can just sweet talk themselves out of trouble? Leading audiences to side with Don, or Roger, or Pete whenever they fail their wives or give up their parental duties perpetuates a cycle where they don't need to be held accountable for their actions. Maybe it's time for justifying slick talkers in expensive shoes to face their consequences rather than letting them slide by because they tell a plucky joke that disperses the tension. The motivation for this entire paper was to understand why, despite all the evidence stacked against Don as a bad guy, viewers still praise the trouble ad-man. The narrative creates a roadmap to understand Don, but in doing so also attempt to weaken the seriousness of his wrongdoings. So maybe Don isn't so different from other antiheroes after all. He lies and cheats his way through life for his own selfish reasons, yet in the end still comes out on top with a support system behind him ready and willing to defend his every action.

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