


MAD MEN, TROUBLED MOTHERS, AND SCARRED CHILDREN:
REPRESENTATIONS OF TRAUMATIC PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS IN
MAD MEN

An Undergraduate Honors Project Presented
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In

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Introduction

In the fourth episode of the last season of the critically acclaimed series *Mad Men*, one of the protagonists, Roger, is forced to track down his daughter Margaret after she abandons her husband and her young child. He finds her in a commune, and he puts on a good show to appear more accepting than her mother, but the following day he insists she return home. She refuses. He tells her, “I know everyone your age is running away and screwing around, but you can’t, you’re a mother,” and when she still refuses, he picks her up and tries to carry her towards a truck as she struggles in his arms and demands he let her go. He is unable to keep hold of her, and they topple down together in a large puddle of mud. Their clothing soiled, they both stand up once more and stare at each other. Margaret breathes heavily and looks at Roger as if prepared to fight. Roger softens and asks, “How could you just leave him?” She sharply retorts, “How did you feel when you went away to work, Daddy? Your conscience must have been eating you alive. Calling your secretary from a hotel to pick out a birthday present for me? I’m sure you were *sick*. It’s not that hard, Daddy. He’ll be fine.” Roger stares at her, pained, and shakes his arm as if trying to shake the mud off himself, but it’s no use—it has already stained his clothing and his daughter’s. Then he leaves.

Though neither of these characters are my primary focus, this scene perfectly encapsulates the themes and relationships I aim to explore. *Mad Men* is fraught with troubled parent-child relationships most commonly characterized by trauma and abandonment. This trauma is passed down generationally, soiling the characters’ lives and relationships. Despite the prevalence of this theme, few critical works about *Mad Men* focus on it. The only character with whom parental abandonment and trauma is focused on critically tends to be Don; other

characters who have similar experiences are often given a more feminist focus, which though important, often neglects to address the trauma these characters have experienced.

Heather Marcovitch writes that *Mad Men* is a matrilineal narrative at heart; however, her focus is primarily on Don and his relationships with the maternal figures in his life. She does not fully acknowledge the numerous other troubled mothers within the series, as I intend to do, and she analyzes the female characters primarily from a feminist perspective without the trauma lens that I will use. Susan Frekko, in “Mad Men, Bad Parents,” addresses parent-child relationships through a lens of neoliberal values but focuses exclusively on Don and Betty and their parenting of the Draper children, especially Sally. Frekko is extremely critical of Betty in particular, arguing that she is shallow and self-absorbed to a fault and neglecting to address Betty’s own parental issues and traumas. Ann Duncan treats Betty with much more leniency. While acknowledging her faults, Duncan expresses a wealth of empathy for Betty and believes her circumstances are the cause for her bad behavior and ultimately serve as a “death sentence” (Duncan 81). Again, Betty’s relationship with her own mother is neglected in these discussions. Diana Davidson’s “A Mother Like You” asserts that *Mad Men*’s depictions of motherhood better reflect “a contemporary audience’s ambivalence around motherhood” (Davidson 137) than an accurate representation of 1960s American motherhood. Its focus, similar to other critical essays, is more on the identity of “the mother” as represented by *Mad Men* than the impact these mothers have on their children. While these critical works will provide a base for my thesis, I am interested particularly in the impact parents in general, and especially mothers, have on their children and will look specifically at the perspective of the child.

I intend to focus on three primary characters: Betty Draper Francis, Don Draper, and Sally Draper. *Mad Men* presents parents damaging their children as an inevitability. Whether one

can move past this and grow or be consumed by this damage is dependent on several factors, including the intensity of the trauma, the form of it, and individual personality and resilience. Betty, Don, and Sally demonstrate differing responses and can be viewed on a spectrum of ultimate outcomes, with Sally on the most positive end and Betty's responses linked to her own demise. Don and Betty also function in dual roles, both as the abused child and the abusive parent.

My main theoretical sources will be Judith Herman's *Trauma and Recovery*, Sigmund Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia," Alice Miller's *The Drama of the Gifted Child*, and Sophia Richman's *Mended by the Muse: Creative Transformations of Trauma*. Herman's book describes different types of trauma and associated reactions. She outlines the steps an individual must take to recover. This is pertinent in understanding why some characters often fail (Betty, Don) while others succeed (Sally) in confronting their traumas. Herman outlines the principal stages in recovery as the following: Safety, Remembrance and Mourning, and Reconnection. The first stage, Safety, necessitates that the trauma survivor establish safety in her physical world as well as within her own body. Herman writes that without this, "no therapeutic work can possibly succeed" (Herman 159). The second step, Remembrance and Mourning, requires the survivor to acknowledge her trauma and tell her story. According to Herman, "This work of reconstruction actually transforms the traumatic memory, so that it can be integrated into the survivor's life story" (Herman 175). In the final stage, Reconnection, the survivor moves forward from trauma, develops a new self, new connections with others, and "reclaims her world" (Herman 196). These steps are particularly useful for my thesis because they provide stages that are identifiable and applicable to the characters I intend to analyze.

Freud's work describes melancholia as sharing nearly all the same characteristics with grief but having one additional trait associated with it: loss of self-worth. Melancholia, Freud argues, is derived from a different kind of loss than what is most associated with mourning: death. He writes, "The object has not perhaps actually died, but has been lost as an object of love" (Freud 245). When this formerly loved object has been lost and the individual cannot express her anger towards the object outwardly, the melancholic internalizes it and directs it at her ego or self, developing what Freud refers to as "narcissistic cathexis." This dynamic is particularly relevant to Betty and Don.

Miller's work details how many successful people nonetheless experience depression and alienation. According to Miller, the child is completely dependent upon the mother (not necessarily a literal mother, but whoever serves the role) and when the mother neglects or shames the child's emotional needs, trauma is created that is often repressed. This results in the "gifted" child, one who is perceived to be well-behaved and compliant, but who has really been traumatized into repressing and denying her own needs and emotional responses. She details how these people often go on to experience depression, repression of their emotional needs, and grandiosity, an insatiable desire for attention in their adult lives. Miller notes that these depressive and grandiose tendencies are both rooted in narcissism and tend to function as opposite sides of the same coin. These tendencies are then often passed on to their own children in what Miller terms the Cycle of Contempt. This work will be extremely applicable to my analysis of Betty and Don.

Richman's work centers on dissociation and notes that dissociation can often be a pathological defense in response to trauma. However, that is not its only function. Richman explains that dissociation also occurs during the creative process. She writes, "Regardless of the

motivational aspects of making art . . . dissociation is an essential aspect of creativity” (Richman 72). Through dissociating creatively, Richman asserts, an individual can actually heal from pathological dissociation. Don notably dissociates from his trauma both defensively and creatively, making this text especially applicable to him.

I will also be utilizing feminist texts more typically associated with the female *Mad Men* characters to further contextualize the characters, including Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* and Stephanie Coontz’s *A Strange Stirring: The Feminine Mystique and American Women at the Dawn of the 1960s*. Friedan’s is a classic feminist text and product of the time period in which *Mad Men* takes place, and Coontz’s illuminates the historical context of the time and how it would have impacted Betty and, to a lesser extent, Sally. These feminist texts will also be useful for analyzing the series more broadly in its themes surrounding motherhood.

Though parent-child trauma is depicted in *Mad Men* from both parents, there is a particular focus on the maternal role. As noted in *Mad Men, Women, and Children*, *Mad Men*’s storyline is matrilineal and centers many of its arcs on relationships between characters and their mothers, as well as many female characters’ relationships to motherhood. Peggy Olson and Joan Harris are two particularly notable examples. There are several minor character mothers as well who are presented as discontent, often abandoning their children. Julie Stephens notes about the series, “There is no shortage of missing mothers, relinquishing mothers, hostile and discontented mothers, sexually competitive mothers and those failing to become what psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott would deem ‘good enough’” (Stephens).

The ambivalence surrounding the role of the mother within the series parallels the popular attitudes towards mothers in the decades that lead up to *Mad Men* and the nuclear family. Mothers at the time were consistently condemned, no matter what they did. Coontz

writes in *A Strange Stirring: The Feminine Mystique and American Women at the Dawn of the 1960s*:

In the view of most psychiatrists and writers who popularized their works, ‘momism’—whether it took the form of overly strict or overly indulgent behavior—was the cause of almost every social ill. It produced sissies, murderers, and homosexuals. It even produced Nazism. Had Adolf Hitler’s mother not coddled her son as a child, claimed medical author Amram Scheinfeld in a November 1945 *Ladies’ Home Journal* article, ‘history might have taken another course.’ The title of the article posed a question that many Americans answered with a resounding yes: ‘Are American Moms a Menace?’” (Coontz 48-49)

At the same time, during this post-war era, middle-class women who entered the workforce in large numbers during the war and wanted to continue working after it ended were accused by psychiatrists and society of attempting to usurp the men’s roles now that they had returned from combat. Coontz writes, “They saw no contradiction in saying that overinvolved stay-at-home mothers were as great a problem as neglectful career women, explaining that this was because such women’s natural contentment with their domestic roles had been disturbed by ‘pernicious’ feminist agitation” (Coontz 54). This ambivalence in the attitudes of the time toward American mothers correlates with *Mad Men*’s own ambivalence and contradictory messages about mothers, which will be explored in greater detail later.

Of the three characters on whom I intend to analyze the impact of intergenerational trauma, the first is Betty, one of many troubled mothers in *Mad Men*. Betty, though in many ways unlikable, is a tragic figure. Feminist perspectives on the show have discussed Betty’s status as a housewife as making her dissatisfied and unkind, but her unhappiness with her life

derives from a deeper source: her upbringing. In the first episode in which Betty is introduced, her unhappiness manifests itself in her hands freezing while she drives, causing her to crash the family car. The event prompts her to see a psychiatrist, and it is there that the audience learns about the origin of Betty's values and her unhappiness. Betty's mother, Ruth, has passed away shortly before the series starts and her presence looms over the first season. Like so many advice books of the time period, which "hammer[ed] home the idea that a woman's greatest goal should be to get married" (Coontz 15), Ruth drilled these values into Betty abusively. Betty also fits the description of Alice Miller's "gifted child," a product of narcissistic parenting, who appears to be good and tries to be what her parents want, but as a result, represses and denies her own emotional needs. Such people often appear very successful, according to Miller, but are in constant need of validation from the outside world, something Betty demonstrates repeatedly. Betty is stunted emotionally and is frequently likened, both by other characters and symbolically through imagery, to a little girl. In the opening of *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan writes, "Over and over women heard . . . that they could desire no greater destiny than to glory in their own femininity" (Friedan 15), and Betty is one of many suburban housewives during the time period who grew up with this perspective. Her mother's constant shaming and abuse when instilling these values in her resulted in her trauma. As social mores shift with the more rebellious and feminist late 1960s and early 1970s, Betty cannot change with them due to her inability to confront her childhood trauma. Despite nearly every character in the series smoking cigarettes, it is only Betty who dies of lung cancer. Her death is not only literal; it is also symbolic of her inability to move forward because of her trauma.

Don, *Mad Men*'s protagonist, grew up with an abusive father and stepmother after his biological mother died giving birth to him. He demonstrates numerous defensive mechanisms to

contend with the trauma he experienced as a child, the majority of which are unhealthy. Nearly every character in the series drinks to the point of excess occasionally, but Don is an indisputable alcoholic. While his father did abuse him, Don is more preoccupied with his maternal figures, the one who died giving birth to him, in effect abandoning him, and the abusive stepmother who never wanted him. Ambivalent feelings of anger towards and yearning for love from the maternal figures who left and rejected him co-exist in Don.

Don's most distinct defensive mechanism is dissociation. His name itself is an example of this. When his commanding officer was killed by accident in the Korean War, Don switches their dog tags and loses the identity of Dick Whitman, assuming the role of Donald Draper. This dissociation is also demonstrated every time Don experiences a significant problem. He often runs away from his problems instead of confronting them. In doing so, he repeats the abandonment he experienced with his own children. These defense mechanisms, while maladaptive, still allow Don to keep moving forward, unlike Betty.

There is also something to be said about creative dissociation and Don's job. Richman argues that creativity often involves a form of dissociation and can "ultimately serve to foster psychological growth and healing" (Richman 73). Don is literally Creative Director at Sterling Cooper and is extremely talented at his work, but his campaigns rarely reflect the trauma he experienced or seem to help him work through it. Rather, many focus on a romanticized version of what childhood *should* be like and reflect his wishful, idealized fantasies. While Don makes occasional strides towards healing, more often he quickly spirals back into old habits. It is only at the very end of the series, when he finally breaks down and hugs a man who is speaking in a group therapy session, that there is finally a sense that Don has had a breakthrough and is starting to heal. While his dissociative ways of coping are often maladaptive, his creative use of

dissociation, as Richman describes, still keeps him going, allowing him to reconnect with others and at least begin to move towards recovery.

Sally is the daughter of two narcissists, Don and Betty, who are still contending with their own traumatic childhoods. Betty often abuses Sally, both physically and verbally, and Don is routinely an absent and irresponsible caretaker. Both parents have their loving moments, but they are far and few between. Still, Sally contends with her trauma much more successfully than other characters. As she grows, she receives support from others in ways none of the other focal characters do, and she actively rebels against the values that have ensnared Betty to the point of no return. Her recovery process largely falls in line with Herman's stages of recovery. Herman notes the importance of establishing a support system, and while Sally has no parental support, she does receive support from, among others, her nanny Carla, the therapist she is sent to see in season four, and later in the series, Megan. The first stage is Safety, which Sally actively attempts to achieve throughout the series. She demonstrates the stage of Remembrance and Mourning by confiding in her therapist and friends as she establishes her own narrative rather than that of her parents. Sally demonstrates Reconnection, particularly in the later seasons, in her relationships with others and in establishing her own identity rather than the identity her parents attempted to impose on her.

While Betty internalizes her anger in the depressive, melancholic mode described by Freud, Sally expresses her anger outwardly. Unlike Betty, who suits the model of the gifted child described by Miller, repressing her anger to please her parents, Sally refuses to do so. By the end of the series, Sally exhibits far more responsibility and maturity than her parents ever did, comforting the adults around her and canceling her trip abroad to act as her younger brothers' caretaker and advocate upon Betty's death. In doing so, Sally breaks the traumatic cycle by not

leaving and abandoning her brothers. By not repeating the abandonment so prevalent throughout the series, Sally becomes a beacon of hope.

Mad Men depicts traumas of various forms: war trauma, trauma as a result of rape, family trauma, and cultural trauma during the 1960s, a time characterized by the chaos and uncertainty of social upheavals, assassinations, and the looming threat of the Cold War. This cultural trauma resonates with the tumult of our present time. My thesis will primarily focus on the trauma found in parent-child relationships. The theme of troubled parents, particularly troubled mothers, runs deep throughout the course of *Mad Men*. The final episode in the series depicts another woman, Don's niece, Stephanie, grappling with the guilt of abandoning a child she had but did not want, reinforcing this same pattern yet again. While the cycle of parental abandonment may indeed persist, the endings of Don and Sally's stories suggest that intergenerational trauma, while perhaps inevitable, does not have to consume a person from the inside out. As Herman's work explains, recovery is possible.

Betty: Consumed by Trauma

Former model turned housewife Betty Draper (later Francis) is defined by her beauty. Physically, she is the ideal woman of the 1950s and early 1960s, and in the series, her looks are often compared to those of Grace Kelly. It is not just other characters in the series who look at Betty and only see a blonde beauty—it is how she defines herself and her worth. It also contributes to her demise. While there are societal reasons for her to prioritize what she does despite how unhappy these priorities make her, the root of Betty's tragedy runs deeper. These values have been so ingrained in Betty through childhood abuse that she is unable to cope and move on from them. Thus, as times and societal mores change, Betty cannot change with them.

As mentioned in the introduction, Betty has been addressed by many critics from a feminist perspective. In the critical book *Mad Men, Women, and Children*, Betty's arc is described in the essay "Mad Men, Generations, and Domesticity":

Throughout *Mad Men*, Betty struggles to articulate feelings of discontent to herself and to determine who or what is to blame in a society that, through medical, social, and media outlets, "portray[s] the postwar housewife as the happiest person on the planet." [68] Women like Betty Draper were afraid to admit that the things in life that were supposed to bring the most happiness were in fact bringing despair. Betty's attempt to break through the feminine mystique and find her own happiness dominates her character's role in the series. (Marcovitch 138)

This perspective offers a straightforward feminist reading of Betty's character; however, it largely examines her the same way any other unsatisfied housewife might be examined in the 1960s rather than delving into Betty's particular history and psyche. In *The Universe is Indifferent: Theology, Philosophy, and Mad Men*, Susan Frekko and Ann Duncan offer dueling perspectives on Betty. Frekko, in her essay "Mad Men, Bad Parents," chooses to focus on Betty's shallow nature and abusiveness towards her children, to the point of disregarding not only the abuse Betty herself has faced, but even the context of patriarchal abuse and oppression within the series in general. For instance, when describing the letter Betty leaves for Sally to read after her death, Frekko focuses exclusively on Betty's ever-present vanity in her burial directions and does not mention the loving things Betty says to Sally in the letter. Though much of Frekko's negative commentary on Betty has merit, Betty is significantly more nuanced than Frekko's selective reading of her character would have us believe. Alternatively, Duncan offers a wealth of sympathy towards Betty. In her essay, "All the Research Points to the Fact Mothers

Feel Guilty,” Duncan analyzes the characters of Peggy, Betty, and Joan. With regard to Betty, Duncan is perhaps too sympathetic. She acknowledges Betty’s tendency to take out her own unhappiness on women of lower socioeconomic classes, but she does not fully condemn this behavior. Like the majority of critics of *Mad Men*, Duncan attributes Betty’s unhappiness and early death to the feminine mystique, which Duncan terms “fatal.” While there may be disagreements as to whether or not Betty is a sympathetic character, there is consensus as to where her issues are rooted: the societal confines of being a housewife in that era. This is not an inaccurate assessment, but it neglects to address the greater depths of Betty’s unhappiness that originate in her childhood.

It is true that there was good reason for women to be preoccupied with their looks during the time in which the series takes place. According to feminist historian Stephanie Coontz in her book *A Strange Stirring: The Feminine Mystique and American Women at the Dawn of the 1960s*, beauty was widely regarded as a woman’s greatest qualification for obtaining a job. Coontz writes,

The advertisements in the Sunday *New York Times* of April 7, 1963, are typical. The ‘Help Wanted/Female’ section was filled with ads such as: ‘Secretary (attrac) . . . good type & steno’; ‘Pretty-looking, cheerful gal for Mad Ave agcy’; ‘poised, attractive girl for top exec’ in a law firm; ‘Exec Sec . . . Attractive please!’ A particularly demanding employer stipulated ‘you must be really beautiful.’” (Coontz 9)

Coontz also notes that women could legally be fired if they were no longer deemed ‘attractive.’ Given these conditions, it would make sense that Betty should place such high value on her and her daughter’s looks. Betty, however, has internalized this equation of attractiveness with value

to such an extreme degree that when the times and values do change later in the series, she cannot change with them.

Much about Betty epitomizes that which Betty Friedan described as “the problem with no name” in her groundbreaking book *The Feminine Mystique*. Betty’s name itself is likely an allusion to Friedan.

Sometimes a woman would say, ‘I feel empty somehow... incomplete.’ Or she would say, ‘I feel as if I don’t exist.’ Sometimes she blotted out the feeling with a tranquilizer. Sometimes she thought the problem was with her husband, or her children, or that what she really needed was to redecorate her house, or move to a better neighborhood, or have an affair, or another baby. Sometimes she went to a doctor with symptoms she could hardly describe: ‘A tired feeling... I get so angry with the children it scares me... I feel like crying for no reason.’ (Friedan 20)

Most, if not all, of these things listed by Friedan are attempted by Betty at different points in the series. She blames her unhappiness on both her children and on Don, though there is reasonable cause for blame directed at the latter. When she learns she is pregnant at the end of the second season, she considers getting an abortion, but ultimately she decides to keep the baby and stay with Don rather than leave him as she initially planned. As her dissatisfaction with her marriage grows, she also decides to redecorate her home and includes a Victorian fainting couch suggested to her by Henry Francis, the man with whom she will soon have an affair. After divorcing Don and getting remarried to Henry, she eventually decides to move the family from Ossining to Rye, stating, “It’s this neighborhood. It’s being taken over by low-caliber people. . . . I think it’s time for us to move” (S4E12: “Blowing Smoke” 00:42:29-00:42:44). When Don drops by the house to meet the realtor in the following episode, he finds Betty grabbing some

additional items she forgot to pack from a bathroom cabinet. They have the sort of even-tempered conversation that they have had since before their divorce. Betty admits to him, “Things aren’t perfect.” Don smiles knowingly and replies, “So you’ll move again.” (S4E13: “Tomorrowland” 00:44:00-44:16). There is validity in the feminine mystique argument; however, there is more depth to Betty’s character than this argument alone can provide.

In the very first episode in which Betty is introduced, it is clear that her unhappiness and obsession with beauty are not only a reaction to external, societal pressures, but to something rooted within her psyche. When her hands freeze while driving—a physical manifestation of her negative feelings that she cannot express outright—she crashes the family car. Nobody is hurt, but she explains to Don afterwards how she keeps thinking about what happened and what could have happened to the children, particularly Sally. A scar would be fine for a boy, she says, but it would have been better for Sally to die than for her to have to go on living with a horrible scar. Don looks at her with the same shock the audience likely feels; Betty’s conviction that a woman’s value resides in her beauty runs so deep that she believes her daughter would be better off dead than disfigured.

As Betty’s discontent with her life becomes increasingly obvious during the first season, she begins to see a psychiatrist. The death of Betty’s mother is mentioned in passing earlier in the season; however, it is when Betty is attending these appointments that the viewer first gets a real sense of who Ruth Hofstadt, Betty’s mother, was, how she raised Betty, and the root of Betty’s problems. Betty tells her psychiatrist, “My mother was very concerned about looks and weight. And I’ve always eaten a lot. And I like hot dogs. My mother used to say, ‘You’re going to get stout.’ And then I became a model and she hated it. Even though Suzy Parker made one hundred thousand dollars that year, my mother hated it. Manhattan . . . she called me a

prostitute.” Her psychiatrist replies, “You’re angry at your mother.” Immediately, Betty becomes defensive, sitting up from the couch for the first time during one of her sessions, and demanding, “*What?*” Betty accuses the psychiatrist of not listening to her and intentionally provoking her (“Shoot” 00:11:28-00:13:07). Here, Betty demonstrates what Freud describes in “Mourning and Melancholia”: “An object-loss was transformed into an ego-loss and the conflict between the ego and the loved person into a cleavage between the ego and the ego as altered by identification” (Freud 249). Because Betty cannot bring herself to express anger toward her mother, she instead internalizes it and directs it at herself, contributing to her depression. We learn more about the specific abuse and humiliation Betty suffered because of her mother later in the series as well. Betty’s father mentions that because Betty was fat as a child, her mother would drop her off in the middle of town to run errands and force her to walk all the way home (“The Arrangements” 00:22:38-00:22:53). In an outburst, Betty also reveals during the fourth season that as a child, all she wanted was to have long hair, and that her mother, when angry, would threaten to cut it off (“The Chrysanthemum and the Sword” 00:11:51-00:11:57).

In *The Drama of the Gifted Child*, Alice Miller identifies the so-called “gifted child” as one who appears to be good and tries to be what her parents want, but as a result, represses and denies her own emotional needs. Though we do not see Betty’s childhood itself, or any actual interaction between her and her mother, Betty demonstrates that she fits this model well. Based on her behavior, it is clear that, despite her mother’s abuse, Betty revered her and internalized the abuse. Rather than expressing anger, she is appalled by the idea of feeling anything less than loving towards her mother. She had clearly desired to please her when she was alive, but to no avail. Even when Betty makes herself so beautiful that she becomes a model, her mother only

insults and abuses her more. Her mother likely would never have been pleased no matter what Betty did.

Freud and Miller both note that when repression of anger towards a love object is directed inward onto the self, the result can be a form of pathological narcissism. Miller describes the ‘gifted child’ as unable to break from the bonds of a narcissistic parent, thus becoming a narcissist herself. Similarly, in Freud’s “Mourning and Melancholia,” Freud notes that this inability to mourn one’s loss and direct anger outwards results in an internalization of the loved object onto the ego, forming a “narcissistic cathexis.” Miller notes that there are two components of this narcissistic state: grandiosity and depression, and Betty displays them both. In order to compensate for a lack of love during childhood, the adult becomes grandiose. Miller writes, “the person who is ‘grandiose’ is admired everywhere and needs this admiration; indeed [s]he cannot live without it” (Miller 34). Betty demonstrates this countless times, primarily surrounding her looks. She is the center of attention everywhere she goes and is constantly praised for her beauty, whether she seeks it out or not. She feels validated and receives shallow assurance from this admiration; she tells her friend Francine in season one about her psychiatrist, “I’m pretty sure Dr. Wayne tried to look down my neckline the other day. He sits behind me. And as far as I’m concerned, as long as men look at me that way I’m earning my keep” (“Red in the Face” 00:39:39-00:39:52). There are countless moments like this one throughout the series, and they feed into Betty’s grandiosity.

Depression involves the denial of one’s emotional reactions, beginning as an adaptation in childhood, and it results in the individual perceiving herself as a failure. While grandiosity and lack of self-esteem may seem contradictory, Miller emphasizes that they actually go hand in hand. When writing about depression, Miller says, “One is free from it only when self-esteem is

based on the authenticity of one's own feelings and not on the possession of certain qualities" (Miller 34). Betty is unwilling to acknowledge her own feelings in a productive or healthy way. When upset, she lashes out, typically at the wrong person, and never willingly acknowledges her childhood as traumatic. She demonstrates these symptoms of depression as described by Miller and Freud during her low moments, such as when she discovers Don's infidelity, when she sees Don on a date while she is out with Henry, and when she gains weight and can't deal with her feelings about herself.

Betty constantly represses her trauma from her childhood, and as a result, she is emotionally stunted. In "New Amsterdam," during the first season, she watches the young boy Glen Bishop for her neighbor Helen, and she develops a perplexing relationship with him. At first, she attempts to fulfill her role as the adult in the situation; however, after he peeps on her while she uses the bathroom and then asks for a lock of her hair, she gives it to him. The two develop a strange and inappropriate friendship. Later in the season, Betty confides in him about her loneliness and tells him that he is the only person to whom she can talk.

Betty is also infantilized by those around her. Her general lack of maturity is emphasized during the meetings with Sally's psychiatrist. Rather than focusing on Sally, they become sessions about herself. When the psychiatrist attempts to recommend an analyst meant for adults, Betty refuses and asks why she can't simply keep talking to her. When her immaturity is addressed by other characters (primarily men), however, it tends to be in regard to things that are not in fact her fault. There are countless examples of Betty behaving petulantly; however, the most flagrant instance in which Don chooses to infantilize her is when she is being sexually harassed. During the episode "Red in the Face" in the first season, Betty's psychiatrist likens her emotions to that of a child. Later in the episode, after Roger Sterling tries to make a move on her

despite her refusal, Don blames her for it. He says he feels like he's "living with a little girl" ("Red in the Face" 00:16:24-00:17:30). Henry behaves more reasonably, but he has similar moments as well when Betty does not behave in the manner in which he expects his wife to conduct herself.

The overall narrative of *Mad Men* confirms Betty's childlike nature through imagery. Repeatedly, Betty is visually likened to a little girl. When speaking to Sally's psychiatrist, Betty's gaze lingers on a dollhouse. This could allude to Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, with Betty's role, like Nora's, as a perfectly manicured housewife with no agency of her own. A dollhouse is a toy for children, thus automatically aligning Betty with childishness. Like Betty, Nora is infantilized in Ibsen's play. Betty is again likened to a child through imagery later in that same season. In "Blowing Smoke," Sally cries on her bed in a blue plaid dress after Betty announces that they are moving (something Betty does to halt Sally's friendship with Glen). In the following episode, much of the Francis household's furniture has been packed. While Sally and the other children are away in California with Don, Betty stands in Sally's bedroom, wearing a blue plaid dress extremely similar to Sally's in the previous episode. Her bed has been stripped bare, and Betty curls up on it, recalling the exact imagery viewers have seen in the previous episode of an upset ten-year-old child.

The values instilled by her mother that Betty clings to begin to lose popularity as the 1960s continue. Betty's physical appearance, however, demonstrates that while the times may change, she remains stuck in the past. Her physical appearance stays extremely consistent throughout the series. While she does gain weight during season five, she nonetheless holds on to her 1950s housewife aesthetic in her hairstyle and makeup. In later seasons, she does shift to a helmet haircut in place of her former Grace Kelly bob. A helmet haircut, popular with women

like Pat Nixon, was characteristic at the time for a politician's wife. This demonstrates an attempt once again to meet social expectations: Betty changes her appearance only to conform to the look expected of the wife of her husband, Henry, a politician.

Betty's falling behind the times in her clothes and appearance is noteworthy when contrasting her with other female characters in the series. Megan is the most obvious example. As Don's cheerful and liberal wife of a younger generation, Megan pursues her own goals and refuses to acquiesce to what Don desires from her if it gets in the way of her dreams. Joan, however, may function as an even better contrast with Betty, as they are of similar ages, both mothers, and both recognized for their beauty. Yet Joan loves her work, and as more opportunities present themselves, she progresses from secretary to partner, ultimately pioneering her own business by the end of the series. No character, however, demonstrates Betty being left behind better than her friend Francine. Best friends when Betty lived in Ossining, the two women originally took great pleasure in gossiping about others who did not conform to the societal norms of the early 1960s. In the first season, Francine condemns Helen Bishop, a single mother, saying, "She's so selfish. Those long walks and that pathetic job at Benson's Jewelry" ("Red in the Face" 00:38:20-00:38:27). Seven seasons later, Francine has a job as a travel agent. She and Betty go back and forth discussing Francine's new job and the fulfillment it gives her. Francine admits she needed a reward after all her time spent as a housewife, and Betty retorts, "I thought they [children] were the reward?" Francine chuckles, and Betty adds, "I don't know, maybe I'm old fashioned." Francine laughs and says, "Betty Draper, that is indeed how I would describe you" ("Field Trip" 00:07:26-00:09:21). Though they begin the series in nearly the exact same circumstances, their journeys diverge wildly. As the world approaches 1970, Francine has

found new goals and ways to fulfill herself, while Betty is stuck mentally in the past decade, with the same values and the same role that she had before.

Betty is unable to move on, internally or in the outside world, because she never does what both Miller and Herman believe is so important when healing from trauma: mourning. She may mourn her mother's passing, but she cannot at any point throughout the series condemn how her mother raised her. As a result, she passes her toxic values and the abuse she suffered onto her own children. Miller writes, "The humiliated grown daughter, if she has no other means of ridding herself of her burden, will revenge herself upon her own children" (Miller 74). This is what Miller refers to as "The Cycle of Contempt," and it aptly characterizes Betty's parenting style with all her children, particularly with her only daughter, Sally. This is likely due to the fact that Sally is a girl, but it is worth noting that Betty is also constantly vexed by Sally's questioning and defiant nature. When Sally is first introduced, she wears a garment bag over her head and tells Betty that she and the other kids are playing astronauts. Betty is concerned not that Sally could suffocate with the plastic bag over her head, but rather that one of her dresses might be on the floor. They are in conflict even when Sally is very young. In the second season, after Betty makes Don leave their home due to his infidelity, Sally does not know why her father is gone, but even at eight she is perceptive enough to determine that Betty forced him to leave. She confronts Betty about this after Betty locks her in a closet for smoking, first telling Betty that Don left because she is "stupid and mean," then crying, "Why won't you let him come home?" Betty treats Bobby quite poorly as well, encouraging Don to hit him early in the series for knocking things over while playing with a toy, and she continues to be snappish with him later in the series. As Sally gets older, their fraught relationship only worsens.

As Betty's mother was not satisfied even after Betty internalized her obsession with beauty to the point of making it her job, Betty repeats this same cycle with Sally. When Sally cuts her hair in season four, she tells her babysitter, "I just wanted to look pretty" ("The Chrysanthemum and the Sword. 00:07:17-00:07:20). Beauty, of course, is something Betty has been pushing on Sally throughout the series, yet she slaps Sally for doing something she thought would help heighten her beauty. Betty is thereby repeating the same pattern she experienced with her own mother. This is worsened when later in the episode, Sally attends a friend's sleepover, and while the other girls are asleep, she touches herself. After being brought home by her friend's mother, an angry and appalled Betty threatens to cut Sally's fingers off.

Betty is also bitter enough to use Sally and her other children as pawns to take petty revenge on Don and Megan. This most notably occurs during the episode "Dark Shadows" in the fifth season. Betty, already bitter about her weight gain and having accidentally seen the slim Megan changing clothes early in the episode, reveals to Sally that Don technically had a wife before her. This causes Sally to lash out at Megan (exactly what Betty hoped for). Sally, however, eventually catches on to the fact that she has been used.

Betty's most maternal moments are those in which she attempts to pass the value system she inherited onto Sally. While Don and Betty are away on a business trip to Rome, Sally kisses Francine's son, Ernie. Carla, the housekeeper, catches wind of it and tells Betty once she gets back. Betty sits Sally down to talk about what happened. She tells her, "I don't want you just running around kissing boys... And you don't kiss boys, boys kiss you." She tells Sally that "the first kiss is very special," and when Sally replies that she already had it, Betty tells her she will have many first kisses and that they are the bridge between somebody being a stranger and knowing them ("Souvenir" 00:40:35-00:41:45). While there is nothing inherently wrong with

this last sentiment, Betty only says it after making it clear that as the girl, Sally should not be initiating kisses with boys. Betty demonstrates this more maternal side once again towards the end of the fifth season, in the episode “Commissions and Fees.” Betty and Sally begin the episode bickering, and rather than joining the rest of the Francis household on a ski trip, Sally goes to stay with Don and Megan for the weekend. While sneaking off on a date with Glen, Sally gets her period for the first time. She leaves without saying anything and returns home. Betty is at first taken aback by Sally, who tearfully embraces her. A surprised Betty comforts her, and later tells her, “There’s a lot of responsibilities. But that’s what being a woman is. And when it happens every month, even though it’s unpleasant, it means everything’s working. It means everything’s ready for a baby when you want one. Maybe you’ll have a beautiful girl and you can tell her all this” (“Commissions and Fees” 00:40:19-40:51). Although this talk is comforting, and in some ways typical, Betty makes the assumption automatically that Sally will someday want a child. While Betty is not being abusive in these few maternal moments, they still reflect an attempt to pass on the very values and conventions that have made Betty herself so unhappy. However, as Sally gets older, she is increasingly able to break away from this ideology, something that helps with her own recovery. This does not improve her relationship with Betty, however, until Betty learns she is going to die.

Betty was never suited to being a housewife. When she travels to Rome for a weekend trip with Don during the episode “Souvenir,” we get a glimpse into the life she lived before settling down, and we see a completely different side of Betty. Rather than petulant, vain, and forced to hold her tongue and put on a facade of passive contentment, Betty is mysterious and magnetic. She is the one who speaks the native language, not Don, and she demonstrates a different type of confidence than what we usually see from her. Rather than narcissistic, she

appears simply self-assured. Physically, while still beautiful, of course, she emerges from their hotel room to meet Don for dinner dressed entirely differently than what we would expect from her as a housewife, or even when she would accompany Don to business dinners. Her hair in a glamorous updo, she wears a black dress (a shade we have never seen on her) with fringe, reminiscent of a flapper dress, and a smokey eye. The dress's resemblance to those worn during a time of sexual freedom and increased autonomy for women reflects just how different Betty is here, unconstrained by the expectations that her mother and society have ingrained in her. She also enters the patio before Don, and so without his presence, the audience is allowed to see her free of all attachments to her life in New York, free of all the restraints that make her so unhappy. The Betty we see here is entirely different from the one we know, and it is likely that this Betty would have been happier than the one who returns from Rome to resume her life as a housewife.

The tragedy of Betty is one of a woman realizing too little too late. As she becomes increasingly cognizant not only of her dissatisfaction, but of a world that is changing, with more opportunities for women, she begins to take steps to improve her situation. This seems to be prompted by two incidents, the first being her conversation with Francine, which then inclines her to chaperone Bobby's field trip to a farm in an attempt to reaffirm her life choices. While there, she makes slut-shaming comments about the farmer's daughter to a fellow mother (another instance of her attacking women of lower socioeconomic status when she is unhappy). Rather than being the fulfilling experience she had hoped for, however, the field trip leaves Betty irritable and bitter. Later in the season, Henry and Betty host a soiree and Betty expresses her own political opinion in front of their guests, an opinion that runs contrary to Henry's ("The Runaways" 00:13:15-00:13:52). He chastises her for it later and tells her, "From now on keep

your conversation to how much you hate getting toast crumbs in the butter and leave the thinking to me!” (“The Runaways” 00:19:20-00:19:43). Rather than ultimately defer to her husband as she would in earlier seasons, Betty confronts Henry on his behavior later in the episode, declaring that she is able to think for herself. It is not long after this that Betty decides to pursue a master’s degree at a local college.

While these steps are significant, Betty still neglects her internal psychological damage. There is no evidence that she has mourned, and thus, while she is able to take positive steps forward in her life, she is already too far behind. Though nearly every character in the series smokes, it is only Betty who is diagnosed with lung cancer as the series reaches its end. As pop culture critics on “The Take” describe in their video essay, “The Tragedy of Betty Draper,” “When an early death becomes a certainty, we see that Betty hasn’t let go of her original mindset, her biggest concern is how she will look in the casket” (The Take 00:11:20-00:11:29). This enforces that not only is Betty a victim of social circumstance, but that at her core, she still has not been able to move on from the values that have been so deeply and severely ingrained in her through the trauma of her childhood. She rejects cancer treatment on the basis that she would lose her looks, and thus she gets the wish she made early in the first season—to die young and pretty rather than live to see her looks fade. Were external, patriarchal values the only impediment that had been holding Betty back, it is likely that after finding her new desire for greater education and purpose, she might have taken the chance on treatment. But to her very core, Betty cannot part with the values beat into her through the trauma of her upbringing. Though she has grown, she has never made peace with her childhood trauma. The core value Betty holds is the very same one her mother drilled into her through constant shame and humiliation: her beauty is the only thing she has to offer the world.

Don: Navigating Trauma

Don Draper, *Mad Men*'s protagonist, is a successful, charismatic, and affluent advertising man with a beautiful wife and two children when the series begins. Externally, he appears to be and to have everything American society during the 1950s and 1960s deemed aspirational. Upon meeting Don and Betty, one client even jokes, "Are you two sold separately?" Yet viewers quickly learn that internally Don is far from happy or healthy. Through flashbacks over the course of the series, Don's many traumatic experiences are revealed, most of which come from the people who raised him. As a result, Don demonstrates numerous unhealthy coping mechanisms, including alcoholism, depression, and narcissism. He also projects his trauma onto the women in his life. Of all his defensive strategies, however, the most prominent and persistent is dissociation, which Sophia Richman notes can be both adaptive and maladaptive. Don makes occasional strides towards healing that align with Herman's steps towards recovery, but he consistently slips back into his old patterns. It is only in the final episode of the series, after Don has a mental breakdown and then experiences what is essentially a group therapy session, that he finally has a breakthrough.

Don has experienced numerous traumas before the series' timeline starts in 1960. His biological mother, Evangeline, was a prostitute who died giving birth to him. As a result, he grew up with an abusive, alcoholic father, Archie, and an abusive stepmother, Abigail. Archie physically abused Don, while Abigail made it clear that she loathed him because he was evidence of her husband's infidelity. At age ten, Don witnessed his father's death as he was kicked in the head by a spooked horse. After this, Don, Abigail, and Don's half-brother Adam moved in with Abigail's brother, who ran a brothel. While living there as a teenager, Don was raped by a prostitute while ill with croup. In order to escape his upbringing, Don later joined the

military during the Korean War. There he inevitably experienced war trauma, witnessing, among other things, the death of his commanding officer. Because Don is the only character with flashbacks in the series, it is possible to identify the details of the abuse and trauma he suffered.

Don's adult experiences with women and mothers are heavily impacted by his past experiences with maternal figures in his life. As a result, he displays great ambivalence towards women and the maternal role. In the *Mad Men, Women, and Children* essay "Mad Men's Generations, Domesticity, and Family," Marcovitch writes that *Mad Men's* focus on mothers, particularly Don's relationship to them, is crucial to the narrative. Marcovitch states, "The entire series is framed by this absent mother figure, making the show what Tess Cosslett would call a 'matrilineal narrative,' or a story 'which shows how the identity of a central character is crucially formed by [in this case, his] female ancestors'" (Marcovitch et al 130-131). Indeed, the first of Don's traumatic experiences—his mother dying after his birth and being absent from his life, leaving him in the care of two abusers—looms over Don.

In the opening episode of the third season, "Out of Town," Don is heating up some milk, an obvious symbol of motherhood, for a pregnant Betty when he begins to have flashbacks of his own mother. The scene shifts to his stepmother, Abigail, after giving birth to a stillborn baby girl. On the table in that scene there is also a bottle of milk. An adult Don watches the scene. Then it shifts again, showing a young woman who seems to be more a teenager than an adult, negotiating with Don's father. She is Don's mother, Evangeline. Rather than have to compensate for the cost of buying condoms, she agrees to have sex with Archie without one, but she warns him, "If you get me in trouble, I'm gonna cut your dick off and boil it in hog fat." The adult Don, who is watching, smiles at this. The scene shifts to Evangeline shivering after giving birth, as she murmurs, "I'm gonna cut his dick off and boil it in hog fat." Don's expression shifts to one of

concern, and the scene flashes back to the present, where the pan of milk he was heating has now frothed and boiled over. This perhaps represents his own emotions and fantasies about his mother: they have reached a boiling point and become too difficult to handle. He removes the pot from the stove quickly and watches it steam and deflate. We get a sense that he has calmed as well. Then he turns and looks down the hallway and sees Abigail opening a door. The midwife who delivered her stillborn is there, carrying a basket with infant Don inside. The midwife tells her, "His name is Dick. After a wish his mother should have lived to see." Abigail reluctantly takes the infant Don and adult Don turns back to the pan of milk, a pensive expression on his face. With a wooden spatula, he lifts the film off the top of the milk and brings it up to Betty ("Out of Town" 00:00:40-00:04:17).

In the above scene, Don seems to demonstrate sympathy for his mother. He would not have been alive to remember parts of the flashbacks. He also would not really have been able to remember any of his experiences as an infant. Therefore he is either imagining a story he was told, or constructing the narrative himself. Either way, the construction of such a narrative demonstrates empathy and sympathy for Evangeline. Narrative construction of past trauma is something Herman advocates as an essential component of healing. It is noteworthy that even early in the series, Don tries to reconstruct this formative traumatic experience; he is trying to understand his mother and how she came to leave him before he ever knew her, leaving a hole in his life.

Despite the empathy Don exhibits for his mother in that scene, Don also demonstrates anger towards Evangeline's absence, despite it being outside of both his and her control. This demonstrates Don's ambivalence towards the maternal role, and more broadly, towards women in general. "Mad Men's Generations, Domesticity, and Family," states, "The narrative arc of the

TV show involving Don Draper's struggle with his identity is rooted in the debilitating emotional turmoil he feels over his inability to reconcile his absent mother" (Marcovitch et al 131).

Because Don is unable to reconcile this loss, it negatively impacts not only his relationships with women in his life, but also his view of himself.

Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia," as discussed in the Betty section, applies to Don as well. Unable to reconcile the loss of his mother whom he never knew, Don instead directs his feelings of anger inwards towards himself. The result of this is both the depression he demonstrates throughout the series, as well as the narcissism described by Miller. Don, like Betty, demonstrates the need to be loved and marveled at by others. He is charismatic, mysterious, and for much of the series, regarded by others as an untouchable genius. However, Don demonstrates that he cannot handle *not* being regarded that way. In the season five episode "Dark Shadows," while at SCDP afterhours, Don comes across ad drafts for their Snoball client by Michael Ginsburg, a young and clever addition to SCDP. He is amused by Ginsburg's work, but when both of them pitch their ideas to SCDP the following day, Pete, Harry Crane, and Ken Cosgrove favor Ginsburg's over Don's. Pete goes so far as to say, "This one's funnier" (about Ginsburg's), to Don's obvious chagrin. Ken suggests leading with Ginsburg's but presenting both. As Don, Harry, and Ken get out of the taxi for the meeting the following day, Don intentionally leaves Ginsburg's on the floor of their cab and brings to the meeting only his own. He later claims that he forgot the other in the cab, but Ginsburg is not fooled. Don's fragile narcissism cannot bear the least slight.

Don also projects his insecurities onto others. For instance, after his daughter Sally calls both him and Betty out for their narcissism in "The Forecast" during the seventh season, Don tells her, "You're a very beautiful girl. It's up to you to be more than that" ("The Forecast"

00:43:40-00:44:42). Sally has not demonstrated at any point, much less in that episode, a desire to succeed in life by using her looks, as Betty does. In fact, by the seventh season, she vocally rejects this idea. However, shortly before this exchange, Don gets in a heated fight with copywriter John Mathis and ends up firing him. Don tells him, “You don’t have any character,” and Mathis replies, “You don’t have any character, you’re just handsome! Stop kidding yourself!” Don fires him in response, but after Mathis leaves, Don sinks to his couch with a pensive expression on his face. (“The Forecast” 00:34:49-00:36:01). Though Don then talks to Sally about not relying on her appearance, the person who actually needs to hear the message is Don himself. He is not yet able to accept it about himself, however, and so projects it onto Sally.

Don also projects his traumas onto the women with whom he sleeps. There is a long list of such women, but the most notable among them are Betty Francis, formerly Draper, his first wife; Rachel Menken, a client; Bobbie Barrett, another client; Suzanne Farrell, Sally’s school teacher; Faye Miller, a consumer research strategist hired to help SCDP; Megan Draper, née Calvet, his secretary turned wife; Sylvia Rosen, his devout Catholic neighbor; and Diana, a waitress and one of the many abandoning mothers throughout the series. These women fulfill different emotional needs for Don, depending on what he is experiencing at the time he is with them.

Rachel in some ways mirrors Don. They have some physical similarities, such as their dark hair and light skin. Her mother also died while giving birth to her, and she grew up a lonely child. She is also competent and unwilling to be subdued by Don. He is able to confide in her the truth about his upbringing and traumatic childhood, something that up until this point he has not shared with any other person in the show. In this way, Rachel functions as a witness to Don’s narrative construction of his trauma. Later in the first season, when Don proposes they run away

together, she recognizes that Don is projecting his own feelings onto her, that he does not truly love her, and that she is not the reason that he wants to leave. She stands firm, and their relationship ends. For Don, Rachel seems to be the one who got away. In the final season, she reappears to Don in a dream (after not having been in the series since the second season). He learns the next day that she has passed away from leukemia.

Don's affair with Bobbie Barrett in the second season demonstrates another aspect of his attitude towards mothers. For much of their time together, Don appears to be thrilled by his affair with Bobbie. However, when he learns that she has a child, an adult son, his behavior towards her immediately shifts. He becomes aggressive and even violent towards her, and not long after, breaks off the relationship entirely. By contrast, Don exhibits an entirely different attitude towards maternity with Faye and Megan in the season four episode "The Beautiful Girls." After Sally runs away to Manhattan to stay with Don, he asks Faye, with whom he has been having an ongoing relationship, to take Sally back to his apartment, as his secretary, Ida Blankenship, has recently died. Faye agrees, but is demonstrably not good with children. Despite this, the following day when Sally refuses to leave, rather than dealing with her himself, he enlists Faye to try to talk to her. Unsurprisingly, she has little success. When Don tries to physically grab Sally and force her, Sally shirks off his grip, runs down the hall, slips, and falls hard. It is Megan who comforts her without a second thought, and it is she whom Sally embraces ("The Beautiful Girls" 00:38:30-00:40:45). Though Don continues his relationship with Faye for a few more episodes, he sleeps with Megan in "Chinese Wall" a couple episodes after the events of "The Beautiful Girls." Then, in the final episode of the fourth season, "Tomorrowland," he hires Megan to babysit Sally, Bobby, and Gene when they take a trip to California. After seeing how good she is with his children, Don marvels, "You said you didn't have any experience and you're

like Maria von Trapp” (“Tomorrowland” 00:15:37-00:16:30). Not long after this, he sleeps with her and proposes marriage shortly thereafter. Although Faye is the one with whom he had a longer relationship, she fails in something at which Megan excels: being maternal. This ultimately seals the marriage decision for Don—a far cry from his reaction two seasons earlier to Bobbie. This demonstrates his ambivalent, inconsistent feelings about mothers and women in general.

Don projects his trauma onto the women he sleeps with in other ways as well. Sometimes this involves intense anger. He can be violent not only with Bobbie, but also with both his wives, Betty and Megan. He demonstrates such a level of control with Silvia that it too borders on abusive. Sometimes, however, he projects his desire to atone onto them as well. One such example is with Suzanne Farrell, Sally’s bright and idealistic schoolteacher with whom he has an affair during the third season. She has a younger brother with epilepsy. Though circumstantially he is not very much like Adam, Don nonetheless believes him to be similar and projects his guilt about Adam’s suicide onto this young man. As a result, he offers to drive him to the menial job Suzanne found for him. When Danny confides that he has no intention of taking another low-skill job just because he has epilepsy, Don gives him a large sum of money, his card, and tells him that if he ever needs anything, he should call him. He tells Danny, “I swore to myself I would try to do this right once (“The Color Blue” 00:35:11-00:35:46). With Suzanne Farrell he also attempts to run away, as with Rachel, in a later episode, “The Gypsy and the Hobo,” but is stopped when confronted by Betty about the truth of his past.

In the final season, the woman Don chases after is a mysterious waitress named Diana. At first, he projects the news of Rachel’s death onto her; he imagines she is Rachel. As his affair with her continues, however, it becomes apparent that she more closely resembles Don’s mother,

Evangeline, as well as Don himself. In the episode in which she is introduced, "Severance," Diana, after sleeping with Don, comes across Sally's room and feels guilty. She confides in Don that she had a little girl who passed away, and that she moved to the city to dwell in her grief. Later, however, she reveals to Don that she had two daughters. One did die, but she abandoned the other, a parallel of his perceived abandonment by his own mother, as well as his abandonment of his own children. Betty reminds him of his neglect of his children during the series finale when he insists that he wants to go home after getting the news of Betty's illness. She tells him that she wants everything to stay as normal as possible, and given Don's lack of presence in his children's lives, his continued absence would be part of that normality.

Don's rape also contributes to his complicated relationships with women. The woman who rapes him, Aimee, a prostitute who lived with Don and his family in the brothel, is nevertheless the one who cares for him and brings him back to health while he is ill. She does this when Abigail, who is meant to be his caretaker and mother figure, will not. Here we see another complication in Don's view of motherhood and the maternal role: the woman who fulfilled his emotional and nurturing needs also betrayed his trust and sexually assaulted him. In "Mystery Date," a season before the rape has been revealed, Don is ill. Though we do not know yet what has happened to him as a young adolescent, we watch him relive his trauma, not aware during first viewing that that is what he is doing. While sick, he hallucinates an ex-girlfriend he saw earlier in the day show up at his apartment unannounced. It is unclear whether this is part of the hallucination, but after he has her leave, he lies back down to rest. He imagines waking up later to find the same ex-girlfriend caressing his forehead. At first, eyes still shut, he believes her to be Megan, but when he realizes who it is, he asks her to leave him alone. She tells him she wants fast sex and puts her finger in his mouth. He says, "No," but she won't stop. He gives in

and kisses her. Later, after the imagined sex is over, Don tells her that it cannot happen again, but she insists that it will and that he will love it, “because you’re a sick, sick—.” Before she can finish that sentence, he violently grabs her by the throat and holds her down on the floor. Using both hands, he chokes her. She hits him, trying to get him to stop, but he barely notices until her hands stop and she lies on his floor, dead. Don stares in horror at what he has done and kicks her body under his bed. He goes back to sleep, and when he wakes up, he realizes that what he has experienced was not real.

Revenge fantasies, as Herman discusses, are common among trauma survivors. She writes that the trauma victim “imagines that [he] can get rid of the terror, shame, and pain of the trauma by retaliating against the perpetrator” (Herman 189). In Don’s case, this fantasy is extremely vivid. Don relives his trauma, only this time instead of being the passive victim, he is able to avenge the woman who sexually abused him. Herman argues, however, that revenge fantasies often have the opposite effect of healing. She writes, “Violent, graphic revenge fantasies may be as arousing, frightening, and intrusive as images of the original trauma. They exacerbate the victim’s feelings of horror and degrade [his] image of himself. They make [him] feel like a monster” (Herman 189). This is clearly the effect that the revenge fantasy has on Don, as after killing his abuser, he looks at her corpse with absolute horror at what he has done. Herman notes that while revenge fantasies can be appealing, they are not productive in the journey towards recovery.

Don demonstrates several coping mechanisms, some of which are maladaptive, but some are adaptive and keep Don moving forward in the world, unlike Betty, who stagnates in place. Though they are both severely traumatized, Don is able to use his defenses adaptively, while Betty is stuck and consumed by her trauma. His most adaptive defensive strategy is dissociation.

His entire identity is a dissociative act. Don's real name is not Don at all, but Dick Whitman. When Donald F. Draper, Don's commanding officer, was killed during the war in Korea, Don switched their dog tags so he could start a new life rather than having to return to his abusive stepmother and little brother in Illinois. In doing so, he is able to create an entirely new identity for himself, far from the abused child that he actually was.

Three instances in the show threaten to reveal the truth of Don's identity and destroy the life he has built based on dissociating from his traumatic past. The first is the reappearance of Don's (or Dick's) younger half-brother, Adam. When Don had returned from Korea, Adam spotted him on the train and insisted that he was actually alive, but he was not believed by Abigail. Adam, however, never stopped believing, and he identifies Don in a newspaper clipping. He finds him and wants to reconnect, but Don rejects him, too afraid that any acknowledgment of their connection will unravel the new life and identity he has created for himself. He gives Adam five thousand dollars and tells him to leave. Adam reluctantly does so, but not long after, he commits suicide. Before doing so, though, he mails Don a box of old photos and documents from his past. Pete Campbell is mistakenly given the box, however, and learns the truth of Don's identity. This leads to the second instance of Don's dissociative identity being threatened.

In the following episode, "Nixon vs. Kennedy," Pete, angry about a perceived snub for a promotion, decides to utilize the box. He pieces together that Don is not who he says he is and believes him to be a deserter. This leads to Don panicking and trying to run away with Rachel, but, as discussed earlier, she refuses to leave with him. Don decides to stay and let Pete do his worst. Ultimately, the partners are unbothered by the revelation. Bert Cooper replies to Pete, "Mr. Campbell... who cares?" Pete, in shock, asks "What?" and Bert simply repeats, "Who

cares?” Pete continues to protest, and Bert responds, “The Japanese have a saying ‘a man is whatever room he is in’ and right now Donald Draper is in this room.” Bert puts into words Don’s tendency to dissociate and how this coping mechanism, while often harmful to him personally and emotionally, does still manage to keep him moving forward in his career. If his true identity should be discovered again, Don can always keep running and become another man in another room, rather than returning to being Dick Whitman. Bert adds, “I assure you, there’s more profit in forgetting this” (“Nixon vs Kennedy” 00:37:50-00:40:07). Bert’s attitude suggests that while such dissociative behavior may be harmful to an individual’s psychic health, capitalism actually thrives on these unhealthy defensive mechanisms.

The second time Don’s true identity is threatened occurs in the episode “Hands and Knees” in the fourth season. This time Pete is an ally rather than adversary to Don (predicted by Bert at the end of the aforementioned scene). SCDP is courting an account with North American Aviation, and thus members working on it must receive security clearance. Two men from the Department of Defense come by the Francis household to question Betty about Don. Betty lies to protect him and calls Don to let him know what has happened. Don speaks to Pete about it, and Pete manages to get a friend at the Department of Defense to stop the inquiry. Before this officially goes through, however, Don panics. When he goes back to his apartment with Faye Miller after work, he sees two men, whom he mistakes for government agents, and he begins to have a panic attack. He is unable to open his door, frantically jiggling the knob up and down, and then the men approach. They ask about a family who does not live there, and Don answers them hoarsely. Don manages to open the door and bursts inside his apartment, pulling off his suit roughly, panting, and clutching his heart. Later he confides in Faye about the truth of his identity, but no conclusion as to what Don will do is reached before Pete tells him that he has not been

flagged. If the business with North American Aviation is halted, the investigation will be stopped in its tracks. Don does, however, admit to Faye how tired he is of running. This reflects some awareness of the cost of his dissociative strategies and some progress in trauma recovery during the fourth season. Ultimately, however, he will relapse again.

Dissociation can sometimes play a positive role in healing from trauma. Richman writes that dissociation can “ultimately serve to foster psychological growth and healing” (Richman 73). While Don demonstrates countless examples of the negative, unhealthy ways it can impact a survivor, he also shows some of its positive effects. Richman notes that dissociation is often part of the creative process. Don’s job for the majority of the series is literally Creative Director. Through creating his art, he is dissociating in a healthy way. According to Richman, “Regardless of the motivational aspects of making art . . . dissociation is an essential aspect of creativity” (Richman 72). Don demonstrates throughout the series that his motivation in creating advertisements does not come exclusively from it merely being his job. Countless times, the utter joy he finds in creating a good advertisement is demonstrated, and the inspiration often comes from his past experiences and inner life. In some of these ads, he is able to create something that allows him to cope with his traumatic past. For instance, in the first season, Don pitches the Kodak “Carousel,” a photo projector, utilizing the power of nostalgia with his own family photos on the slides. As the photos change, he comments, “It lets us travel the way a child travels around and around, and back home again, to a place where we know we are loved” (“The Wheel” 00:38:22-00:41:31). Through this ad, Don demonstrates his deepest fantasies and yearnings. Don’s need for love and family nurturance in particular is a recurring theme in the series.

Still, the majority of Don's dissociative behavior ultimately harms both him and the people around him. He lies often, which hurts the people he cares about, abuses alcohol, and when these do not work, he runs away from his problems entirely. By the end of the seventh season, this defensive behavior is well known to everyone who has spent any significant time with him. After Don walks out of a meeting at McCann-Erickson and does not return, Jim Hobart demands to know where he is. He asks Roger, "Where the hell is Don? He walked out of a meeting Wednesday and hasn't come back." Roger just nods and replies nonchalantly, "He does that" ("Lost Horizon" 00:43:48-00:43:54). This defensive behavior negatively impacts not only his professional career, but his relationships with his children.

Don is an absent parent, largely due to his defensive behavior of avoidance, and he perpetuates the intergenerational trauma he has experienced with his own children. Generally speaking, he is quite neglectful of them and favors letting the women in his life do the substantial caretaking. As will be discussed in the following section, Sally, as a child, goes from idolizing him to later recognizing him for the damaged narcissist he is. The most significant turn in their relationship occurs after Sally catches him having sex with their neighbor Silvia during the sixth season, while he is married to Megan. As noted previously, Don's tendency to bounce from woman to woman is a product of his trauma and fraught, conflicted relationships with the maternal figures in his life. While he spends the majority of the fifth season enamored with Megan, he eventually finds another woman on whom to project his needs and fantasies. He could not have predicted that Sally would walk in on him, but it happens nonetheless, and Sally is horrified. At this point, Sally's idolization of him is shattered beyond repair. Early in the final season, during the episode "A Day's Work," she seems to forgive him after he is finally honest with her. When she gets out of his car after they arrive at her boarding school, she bends back

down and sticks her head in to say brusquely, “Happy Valentine’s Day. I love you.” She shuts the car door before Don can respond. Don is visibly floored and watches her with a tender expression on his face as she enters the school (“A Day’s Work” 00:45:53-00:46:21). Though we cannot know his thoughts, he seems to be shocked at the idea that anybody could love him, much less her, after what she has witnessed and what he has done. Though this seems to suggest progress in their relationship, Don fails her again later, and Sally appropriately calls him on it. When he has his mental breakdown in the series finale, he confides to Peggy that he “scandalized his child,” demonstrating that even after Sally has appeared to forgive him for that transgression, it still weighs heavily on him.

Don’s traumatic childhood impacts his ability to believe that he is loved, as well as his ability to love his children. During the sixth season, a few episodes before Sally encounters Don with Sylvia, a young woman named Wendy, daughter of Frank Gleason, a partner who perished a few days prior, is at SCDP. Don is high from a cocktail of stimulants Jim Cutler gave to everybody at the office to help them meet a deadline. Wendy offers to read people’s fortunes if they ask a question. Later, she guesses Don’s question: “Does somebody love me?” In response to this, Don frowns and asks, “What?” She says calmly, “That’s what your question was.” Guarded, he asks, “Why would you say that?” She answers knowingly, “That’s everyone’s question” and holds a stethoscope she found to his heart. “I think it’s broken,” she says. “You can hear that?” Don asks softly. She reveals that the stethoscope is broken (“The Crash” 00:22:31-00:23:26). This scene demonstrates both Don’s inability to believe he could be loved and his feeling that there is something wrong with him that he cannot love.

Love from others comes as a shock to Don, as seen here and in the scene mentioned earlier with Sally, but so does experiencing the feeling of love himself. This feeling that he is

unable to love due to his trauma impacts his relationships with every person in his life, but most notably with his children. In “The Flood,” during the sixth season, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is assassinated. Megan takes Sally and Gene to a vigil for him, but Bobby does not want to go. Don takes him to the movies instead. After they see *Planet of the Apes*, they stay to watch it again, and Bobby talks to a Black man working in the theater in between showings. At first they just have polite conversation and Bobby talks about how much he likes the movie. Then he says, “Everybody likes to go to the movies when they’re sad.” Both the man and Don’s expressions shift (“The Flood” 00:37:51-00:38:33). Later, Don drinks, sitting hunched over on the side of his bed, while Megan puts the kids to sleep. She comes in and confronts him about drinking instead of being there for the children during such a culturally traumatic moment. Megan asks him, “Is this really what you want to be to them?” Don replies, “No.” She sits down and joins him on the bed. He continues, “I only ever wanted to be the man who loves children. But from the moment they’re born . . . that baby comes out and you act proud and excited. Hand out cigars. But you don’t feel anything. Especially if you had a difficult childhood. You want to love them, but you don’t. And the fact you’re faking that feeling makes you wonder if your own father had the same problem.” Megan watches him with sadness in her eyes. He sighs. “Then one day they get older. And you see them do something and you feel . . . that feeling that you were pretending to have. It feels like your heart is going to explode” (“The Flood” 00:40:44-00:43:33). In this monologue, Don demonstrates the harsh reality of how intergenerational trauma impacts children. He is so numb emotionally that he cannot feel love even for his own children.

Despite all of the damage that Don does to his relationships, he is still closer to recovery than the Draper children’s other parent, Betty. This is because he is able to recognize and reflect on his trauma. Though Don dissociates in every way he is able, from changing his entire identity

to running away whenever he feels the need, he is still aware of his trauma in ways Betty is not. The fact that he has flashbacks demonstrates that no matter how much he tries to distance himself, he is not always able to do so. Herman notes, “Traumatized people who cannot spontaneously dissociate may attempt to produce similar numbing effects by using alcohol or narcotics” (Herman 44). Don obviously can dissociate, but not always. He is also a notorious alcoholic; every character on *Mad Men* drinks a great deal, but Don takes it to the point of extreme excess. Nevertheless, his ability to remember and recount his trauma, even when he does not want to, can be beneficial to his growth. His trauma is not so repressed or deeply buried that he can live without acknowledging it. Because he is aware of it emotionally, he has the ability to talk about it.

In this way, Don distinguishes himself from Betty. Despite all of his unhealthy coping mechanisms, he confides in others. As mentioned, Herman asserts that the reconstruction of one’s trauma, and specifically, narrating it to others, is crucial to recovery. Anna Draper, the wife of the real Donald Draper, who fulfills a maternal role for him and knows the truth of his identity, is the first to whom Don recounts his trauma because he has no choice. Nonetheless, it is clearly a healthy, regenerative moment for him, and his relationship with Anna may indeed be his most healthy one in the entire show because it is the most honest. She knows Dick Whitman as well as Don Draper, and she loves him anyway. Her death in the fourth season pains Don greatly, and he tells Peggy that he lost the only person who ever truly knew him. Besides confiding in Anna, he also willingly tells the truth to Rachel and Faye after dating them for a while, as well as to Megan shortly after their marriage. Megan accepts him for who he is, giving him more support than he has ever experienced with a woman before. Don eventually shares details of his childhood with Sally and Bobby as well. We do not see all of these moments, but

the truths he tells seem to be factually based. Herman notes that such narration is a first step in the reconstruction of the trauma, but it is still incomplete. She adds, “A narrative that does not include the traumatic imagery and bodily sensations is barren and incomplete” (Herman 177). The audience gets to see the traumatic imagery through Don’s flashbacks, even if those he confides in cannot. One of the most notable moments of Don’s truth-telling, of his sharing and recounting his trauma, is also one that temporarily disrupts his life. At the end of the sixth season, SCDP meets to pitch to representatives of Hershey’s Chocolate. Don tells everyone at the meeting that as a young boy, his father would buy him a Hershey’s bar whenever he helped him mow the lawn. This, of course, is not true, and while everyone is charmed by this false anecdote, Don has reached a point where he cannot lie anymore. He then tells the truth about his childhood experience with Hershey’s chocolate bars. When he was a kid, one of the prostitutes in the brothel would give him and Adam coins to buy a chocolate bar in exchange for raiding her clients’ pockets while she had sex with them. Don confesses that this was the only time he felt like a normal kid. Everyone at the meeting is significantly less charmed by this account, and Don is put on an indefinite leave of absence. In that moment, though, Don has taken a step forward in his recovery. He shares these painful details of his horrific childhood and thus constructs a more honest and emotionally genuine narrative of his trauma.

During the seventh season, Don is able to return to SCDP. He is not, however, granted his job back as Creative Director, which has been taken over by the dull Lou Avery. Don at first does not take well to being forced to work under Lou, or Peggy, his former protégé, but eventually he accepts this reality. Not long after this, SCDP is acquired by McCann-Erickson and Don regains his old title. Shortly after McCann absorbs SCDP, Don walks out and goes on the road trip that will result in his emotional breakdown and ultimate breakthrough in the series

finale. His initial motivation in doing so is to find Diana, the woman who resembles both him and his mother. When he cannot, he travels across the country and eventually lands in California, a place that has functioned as a safe haven for him (due to Anna's influence), yet has also been a place where he could never stay too long (even when Megan lived there and wanted him to join her). He catches up with Stephanie, Anna's niece. Earlier in the season she was many months pregnant and since then has had a son and given him to her parents to raise. As with so many other parents, particularly mothers, in the series, the cycle of abandonment continues.

Stephanie and Don attend an oceanside spiritual retreat together. Stephanie is criticized for abandoning her child, and feeling guilty and distressed, she leaves, stranding Don. Before she goes, however, Don encourages her to dissociate from her trauma and that doing so will allow her to "move forward." This resembles the advice he gave Peggy so many years prior, after she too abandoned her child. Stephanie replies, with sad certainty in her voice, "Oh Dick. I don't think you're right about that" ("Person to Person" 00:33:22-00:33:54). Don's own defenses fail after this moment. He is faced with the reality that such avoidance and dissociation have not worked for him either. While dissociation has kept him moving, it has not healed him. At this point he experiences a complete emotional breakdown and calls Peggy. Peggy encourages him to come back, but Don does not listen. Instead, he confesses that is "not the man" that she thinks he is and tells her, "I broke all my vows. I scandalized my child. I took another man's name. I made nothing of it." Peggy tries to tell him that this is not true, but he says he only called because he did not get to say goodbye before leaving.

Stuck at the retreat with all his defenses shattered, Don is coaxed by a kind woman into attending what essentially appears to be a group therapy session. One man finishes speaking when they arrive, and after a moment another one takes his place and begins to talk. He is an

unassuming looking man and his clothes do not resemble the counterculture styles that many of the other retreat attendees wear. “My name’s Leonard,” he introduces himself. He continues, “And um . . . I don’t know if there’s anything that complicated about me. Which is why I should be happier, I guess.” The moderator interrupts him, reminding him, as he told the man before him, that he should not use ‘should.’ Leonard tells him that that may be true for the first man because he is interesting. “I’ve never been interesting to anyone. I, um, I work in an office. People walk right by me. I know they don’t see me.” He stares at the ground for a moment. “And I go home, and I-I watch my wife and my kids . . . they don’t look up when I sit down.” The moderator asks him how it feels to say that, and Leonard replies, “I don’t know. It’s like no one cares that I’m gone.” Don looks up for the first time since arriving at the session, a spark of recognition in his eyes. “They should love me,” Leonard says and then shrugs. “I mean, maybe they do. But . . . I don’t even know what it is. You spend your whole life, thinking you’re not getting it. People aren’t giving it to you. Then you realize they’re trying. And you don’t even know what it is.” Don stares at Leonard. This harkens back to Don’s incapacity to believe that anybody could love him, and the words clearly resonate with him.

The camera returns to Leonard, only now he is facing forward and much closer to the camera. This demonstrates Don’s intense feeling of closeness and understanding with this stranger. Leonard continues, “I had a dream I was on a shelf in the refrigerator. Someone closes the door and the light goes off. And I know everybody’s out there eating. And then they open the door and you see them smiling and they’re happy to see you. But maybe they don’t look right at you. And maybe they don’t pick you.” He is quiet for a moment and his voice catches as he adds, “Then the door closes again. The light goes off.” Leonard tries to force a smile, but begins to cry. Don stands. He approaches Leonard and embraces him. He begins to cry as well. The other

participants watch and the woman who brought Don smiles (“Person to Person” 00:47:34-00:52:28). In this moment of emotional vulnerability, Don has made a human connection. He realizes that he is not alone in his suffering, and he feels perhaps more empathy and more comfort than he has experienced in the entire series. Such reconnection with others is a final step in Herman’s path to trauma recovery.

The final scene of *Mad Men* depicts Don the following morning, still at the retreat. He watches the sun rise. It is a new day. To drive that point home, one of the men working at the retreat narrates that a new day “brings new hope” as participants sit in the lotus position to meditate. He continues, “The lives we’ve led, the lives we’ve yet to lead. New day. New ideas. A new you.” The camera stops on Don. After mourning the losses one experienced because of trauma, Herman writes that the survivor “has mourned the old self that the trauma destroyed; now [he] must develop a new self” (Herman 196). After Don’s breakthrough of the day before, the retreat leader confirms that there is a new dawn, indeed a new Don. Bells ring and everyone begins to meditate. The camera zooms in on Don, who smiles peacefully as bells ring again. The famous “I’d Like to Buy the World a Coke” advertisement plays. This is where the aforementioned “new ideas” come in. McCann was working with Coca-Cola before Don left, and the implication here is that Don will return and create one of the most iconic advertisements the world has ever seen.

It is difficult to say with certainty whether this ending suggests a completely healed Don. Healing is not linear, and Don has a history of relapses. Whether he will repair his relationship with his own children and attempt to heal the cycle of intergenerational trauma is unknown to us. Still, we know that something has shifted. The series ends at a turning point and a new

beginning. As Don smiles, as if at last at peace, and optimistic music plays in the background, we are given hope for him and for ourselves.

Sally: Overcoming Trauma

Sally Draper, Don and Betty's eldest child, is the daughter of two narcissists who have yet to work through their own traumas. It is no surprise then that Sally is in turn traumatized by them. Yet despite the abuse and neglect Sally experiences throughout the series, she remains unbowed and unbroken. By the series' end, she is a mature and capable young adult. Sally manages to break the cycle of abuse perpetuated by both her parents. She accomplishes this in several ways, and her journey of overcoming her trauma closely follows the steps outlined by Herman.

As previously discussed, neither Betty nor Don is a good parent to their children. Betty is abusive, verbally and physically, to her children, and to Sally in particular. Betty yells and berates her children constantly, making herself the victim in the relationship despite having the position of authority, and over the course of the series, she shoves and locks Sally in a closet, slaps her, and threatens to cut off her fingers. She can also be more subtly abusive. Betty ultimately decides she wants to move the family when she discovers Sally's friendship with Glen Bishop. She is jealous because Glen once preferred her, and thus she seeks to separate Sally from him. As mentioned previously, she also intentionally tells Sally about Don's technical marriage to Anna Draper in the fifth season in order to sow discord in Sally's relationships with Megan and Don because of her own bitterness towards them. She does not care about the emotional distress it causes her daughter in the process. As Henry's mother, Pauline, observes in the

opening episode of season four, her children are “terrified of her” (“Public Relations” 00:41:51-00:42:00).

Sally also experiences neglect from both parents. The Draper household is highly dysfunctional from the beginning. If Carla, the Draper’s housekeeper and nanny, is not around, there is very little supervision. When Sally is upset about the death of Grandpa Gene, Betty’s father, Betty sends her to watch TV, and she sees news footage of the self-immolation of a Buddhist monk (“The Arrangements” 00:44:38-00:45:15). Don and Betty sit at the kitchen table as Sally lies curled up on the floor with puffy eyes from crying; in the shot, Don and Betty are visible behind Sally, and yet they remain oblivious as she watches the violent, graphic imagery. This neglect does not cease as the Draper children grow older. Both parents, though particularly Don, frequently leave Sally unsupervised. This culminates in “Commissions and Fees,” the eighth episode in the sixth season, when Don and Megan are both away at night when it is their turn with the Draper children. An elderly woman robs them and keeps Sally from calling the police. Don arrives at the apartment drunk. He is in the process of trying to come up with ways to keep Silvia from ending their affair before he realizes what has happened to the children. He seems to have forgotten that they were even there. Sally tells him she wants to go home, and Don collapses on the floor.

Sally also twice experiences trauma through accidental exposure to sexual acts. The first occurs in “The Codfish Ball” during the fifth season. Sally attends an event where Don will be receiving an award. When looking for the bathroom, she opens the wrong door and accidentally witnesses Marie Calvet, Megan’s mother, fellating Roger Sterling in an empty room. The second time this occurs, a season later, Sally accidentally walks in on Don having sex with Silvia. She flees the scene. Later, she has an outburst after hearing Silvia’s husband and Megan both praise

Don for helping Silvia's son Mitchell avoid the Vietnam War draft. She exclaims, "You make me sick!" Don follows her to her bedroom and tries to lie to her about what she saw, saying, "I know you think you saw something. I was . . . comforting Mrs. Rosen. She was very upset. It's very . . ." Don swallows. "Complicated." Though his intention with Sally may not be malicious, his denying what she saw with her own eyes (particularly at an age when she is more than old enough to know full well what she observed) is a form of abuse. Don asks if she heard what he said. Sally, clearly weary and emotionally exhausted, answers simply, "Okay," resigned to the fact that Don will not be honest with her ("Favors" 00:44:18-00:46:18). As she says in the following season, it is easier for her to simply listen to him lie than to confront him.

Sally, even as a very young child, tends to behave as the adult in the room. She demonstrates this multiple times, including the first three seasons when her age ranges from five to nine. In the second season, when Betty demands Don hit Bobby for making a mess while playing with a toy at the dinner table, Don throws the toy instead. As Don and Betty storm off, Sally is the one left cleaning up their mess ("Three Sundays" 00:41:27-00:42:09). After the assassination of John F. Kennedy, which occurs in "The Grown Ups," the penultimate episode of the third season, Sally is the one who calmly comforts Betty, who is crying inconsolably, an inversion of how one would expect a parent and child to interact ("The Grown Ups" 00:16:30-00:16:36). This dynamic continues as she grows older. Though Sally does display childish shenanigans at times, she nevertheless demonstrates a substantially greater level of emotional maturity than the adults around her. She is forced to take on the role of adult while still a child. When Sally learns from Henry that Betty is dying, she gets a mere minute to grieve before Henry breaks down crying himself, and she is forced to comfort him instead ("The Milk and Honey

Route” 00:24:03-00:25:44). Being forced to act as the adult while still a child is its own form of trauma.

Because Sally’s trauma is ongoing rather than a singular event, it complicates tracing her recovery, as she makes steps towards recovery while simultaneously still experiencing abuse. Nonetheless Sally engages with all of the stages towards trauma recovery as outlined by Herman. The first of these stages is Safety. Of this stage, Herman writes, “Establishing safety begins by focusing on the control of the body and gradually moves outward toward control of the environment” (Herman 160). Sally does not demonstrate feeling unsafe in her own body, but she does actively try to ensure herself a safe environment. She first demonstrates this in the fourth season during the episode “The Beautiful Girls,” in which, at ten years old, she boards a train without a ticket to go see Don and try to live with him. She is found “trying to avoid the conductor” by an elegantly dressed older woman. The woman brings Sally to Don’s office and warns him that he was lucky she found her rather than somebody more dangerous. She notes, “Somebody should keep track of her” (“The Beautiful Girls” 00:15:48-00:16:25). Sally is able to spend the night with Don because Betty refuses to pick her up until the following day. When Don tucks Sally into bed, she attempts to escape her abusive life with Betty by telling him, “I want to live with you all the time.” Don replies that she can’t, and she asks, “Why not? I’ll be good.” Don asks about her brothers, and Sally says they could live with him too, but Don simply tells Sally to go to bed (“The Beautiful Girls” 00:31:17-00:31:58). The following day Sally fights tooth and nail, refusing to leave. She tells Don, “I’m not going, I’m not leaving, I hate it there!” When Don tries to drag her, she jerks out of his arms and runs away from him, falling hard onto the floor. It is Megan who helps her up, and Sally embraces her. Megan tells her it will be all right, and Sally says in a resigned voice, “No... it won’t” (“The Beautiful Girls” 00:38:45-

00:40:37). Sally is not prompted to try again to remove herself from her traumatic situation completely until two seasons later, after she witnesses Don and Silvia having sex. This confirms for her that the place she once thought was safe, an escape from the toxicity at home with Betty, is not safe at all. In the following episode, she applies and is accepted to Miss Porter's School, a boarding school in Connecticut. On the drive home, Betty allows her to smoke a cigarette, rationalizing, "I'm sure your father has given you a beer." Sally takes a drag from the cigarette and pensively replies, "My father has never given me anything" ("Quality of Mercy" 00:44:26-00:45:12), affirming that the illusion of comfort and safety Don once provided has been shattered. This time Sally is successful in her endeavor to escape her traumatic environment; by leaving home and attending Miss Porter's, she effectively achieves safety, the first stage of recovery.

The second stage of recovery, according to Herman, is Remembrance and Mourning. In this stage, the trauma survivor must reconstruct her personal narrative. She writes, "The survivor tells the story of the trauma. She tells it completely, in depth and in detail. This work of reconstruction actually transforms the traumatic memory, so that it can be integrated into the survivor's life story" (Herman 175). Because there are many traumatic moments in Sally's life, as abuse and neglect are ongoing rather than a singular event, Sally does not talk about every single instance that happens to her; nonetheless, she is depicted constructing her own narrative surrounding her trauma. Sally's first opportunity to do this is with her psychiatrist. Though most of their conversations happen off screen, it is apparent that Sally does confide in her doctor and tells her story. Likewise, we become aware that Sally confides in Glen during this time as well. After everyone gets home to Don's apartment the night that Sally witnesses Marie performing oral sex on Roger, she calls Glen while everyone else has already gone to bed. This is the final

scene of the episode, and Glen asks Sally how she finds the city. She answers in one word: “Dirty” (“At the Codfish Ball” 00:46:16-00:46:40). The episode ends there, but Sally does not hang up the phone, and it is implied that the conversation has continued. It is evident that Sally has confided in Glen before, and it is quite possible she tells him about what she has witnessed. Herman discusses the revenge fantasy that is often a component of this stage of trauma recovery. While Sally does not outright express desire to get revenge against her parents, she does tell her friends early in the seventh season that she would stay at her boarding school until 1975 if she could “get Betty in the ground” (“A Day’s Work” 00:5:41-00:5:50). Yet when Sally learns at the end of the series that Betty is in fact dying, she is deeply upset. This demonstrates Herman’s point that the desire for revenge that trauma victims might express will not give them the true healing that they need in order to recover. Of this stage, Herman writes, “The descent into mourning is at once the most necessary and most dreaded task of this recovery” (Herman 188). Though Sally’s trauma is ongoing, she, unlike her mother, seems to grieve. One instance of this is when she says to Betty about Don, after witnessing him having sex with Silvia and then lying about it, “My father has never given me anything.” She is wearing dark clothing and stares ahead silently and melancholically. Though we cannot know what is going on in her head, she seems to be mourning her lost innocence. Because mourning trauma largely occurs internally, it is difficult to trace exactly when and how Sally mourns her trauma. Nevertheless, she is self-reflective in a way her parents are not, and her behavior demonstrates that she does in fact grieve.

Before detailing the specific stages of trauma recovery, Herman discusses the importance of having a support network when recovering, asserting, “Recovery can take place only within the context of relationships; it cannot occur in isolation” (Herman 134). Having a support

network while coping with her trauma is something that differentiates Sally from both of her parents. Carla clearly cares for her and is affectionate with the Draper children. This is not portrayed in detail on screen, but it can be inferred. For example, when Sally, age ten, cooks breakfast for Don, Don first tells her that he does not like her using the stove. When she tells him that she does it all the time, he asks where she learned to cook, and she replies, “Carla taught me” (“The Beautiful Girls” 00:32:59-00:33:21). Betty’s father, Gene, also offers her a great deal of support, particularly in the face of Betty’s abuse. Not long before he passes away, he tells her, “*You* can really do something. Don’t let your mother tell you otherwise” (“The Arrangements” 00:23:19-00:23:28). Sally also appears to receive support from one of her teachers, Miss Farrell, during the third season after Gene’s death. Sally’s psychiatrist is also a significant source of support for her; she is able to provide the comfort and validation about her emotions that Sally does not receive from her parents. In the last episode we see of their sessions, she tells Sally, “Your mom acts that way because she has stresses. Not because you’re bad or did anything wrong.” They talk a little longer, and then she adds, “I said I’m very proud of you, did you hear that?” Sally smiles. (“Blowing Smoke” 00:11:16-00:12:07). Through this relationship, Sally gets significantly more support than Don or Betty ever received as children. She is told not to blame herself for Betty’s abusive behavior. After Don’s marriage to Megan, Megan too becomes a person of support for Sally. Megan treats Sally as capable and mature, something neither Betty nor Don ever do. Their relationship is more like a sisterhood or friendship than one between an adult authority-figure and a child. This occasionally causes issues, but for the most part, it proves beneficial for Sally. Megan is able to give Sally something neither of her parents do: respect. The fact that Sally has a support network is one of several reasons why she is able to recover and break the cycle of abuse that her parents cannot.

Sally is also able to recover more successfully because she does not do what Betty or Don do—repress her negative emotions. Such repression, as described in *The Drama of the Gifted Child*, is particularly characteristic of Betty. Miller writes,

Accommodation to parental needs often (but not always) leads to the ‘as-if personality.’ This person develops in such a way that he reveals only what is expected of him and fuses so completely with what he reveals that one could scarcely guess how much more there is to him behind this false self. He cannot develop and differentiate his true self, because he is unable to live it. (Miller 11-12)

Betty is unable to experience this true self because she is so committed to being what her mother insisted she become. Sally, alternatively, refuses to meet Betty’s expectations. This intensifies as she grows older and will be discussed in more depth shortly, but even as a child, she refuses to repress her own anger. She expresses it consistently, sometimes to extremes, causing Carla to remark, “That temper” about her. When Sally starts seeing the psychiatrist, we see for the first time that she is capable of hiding her anger. The psychiatrist tells Sally, “I’m very proud of how you’ve found a way to behave so well, even when you get so angry at your mother sometimes. It’s hard to control ourselves when we get so angry.” Sally shrugs and replies, “She just doesn’t know that I’m mad.” Her psychiatrist tells her, “As long as you know it” (“Blowing Smoke” 00:11:00-00:11:15). Though Sally is now disguising her anger, it is distinguishable from Betty and Don’s tendencies in that she is consciously *concealing* it, but not *repressing* it. Furthermore, though her psychiatrist does encourage Sally to hide her negative emotions from Betty, she does not encourage Sally to suppress them. She is encouraging a survival tactic for Sally’s benefit so that she might avoid the worst instances of Betty’s abuse. However, she nonetheless emphasizes

that Sally should still acknowledge what she truly feels and not bury her emotions in a way that would be unhealthy (as Betty herself does).

One of Sally's most defining characteristics is her honesty. Sally is unabashedly herself and says what she thinks, even when it might not be the time or place to do so, such as when Grandma Pauline asks if she likes the food for the Draper children's first Thanksgiving with the Francis family, and she answers bluntly, "No" ("Public Relations" 00:29:13-00:29:25). Her consistent refusal to repress her negative emotions or independent thoughts draws ire from Betty, but it is part of what keeps Sally from following a similar path to her mother's. Sally demonstrates that not only is she honest, but she values such honesty from others as well. This is consistent throughout the series. In season 3, as a nine-year-old child, Sally tells Don, "You say things and you don't mean them, and you can't just do that" ("Shut the Door. Have a Seat." 00:33:40-00:34:05). After Sally discovers that Don has lost his job in the last season, the now sixteen-year-old Sally tells Don, "Just tell the truth" ("A Day's Work" 00:22:58-00:23:06). She also recognizes how this differentiates her from not only Don, but Betty too. In the penultimate episode of the fourth season, she says to her psychiatrist about Betty, "She doesn't care what the truth is as long as I do what she says" ("Blowing Smoke" 00:10:30-00:10:36).

Sally's valuing honesty so highly temporarily allows Betty to manipulate her in "Dark Shadows." After Betty tells her about Anna, and Sally confronts Megan, Megan asks her from whom she heard about Anna. Sally answers, "Someone who doesn't lie. Someone who didn't just *pretend* to care about my school project" ("Dark Shadows" 00:27:44-00:28:10). Sally still manages to realize the truth of that situation and turn it on its head when she returns home. Consistently, Sally's value of honesty and her refusal to suppress her negative emotions benefits

her and allows her to become a fully realized human being rather than somebody defined by her trauma, as both her parents are.

Sally's prioritizing honesty falls in line with a larger theme: Sally's rejection of her parents and their values. As mentioned in the section on Betty, Betty tries to force on Sally the values forced onto her. When Sally is very young, this seems as if it might work. In "Souvenir," Sally watches her mother expertly put on lipstick, and after she leaves, the eight-year-old Sally stares in the mirror, as if assessing her own appearance in light of her mother's. However, as she gets older, it becomes increasingly apparent that Sally will not conform to Betty's beliefs. In the same episode, "Souvenir," Betty tells Sally, "You don't kiss boys, boys kiss you" ("Souvenir" 00:40:35-00:41:45). Yet in the sixth season, when Sally is old enough to be properly kissing boys, she rejects a boy she is not interested in who forcibly attempts to kiss her ("Quality of Mercy" 00:32:57-00:33:23), something a single and young Betty likely would not have done. The following season, in the episode "Waterloo," Betty has her friend's family staying with the Francis family. There are two boys—Shawn, a football player, and Neil, his awkward younger brother with an interest in astronomy. Initially, Sally seems to flirt with Shawn. During this same episode, Jim Cutler calls Don "a football player in a suit" ("Waterloo" 00:11:10-00:11:15), and Betty dismisses Don to her friend as "somebody a teenaged anthropologist would marry" ("Waterloo" 00:07:34-00:07:45). As Betty says this, Shawn, the football player, brusquely enters. He and Sally nearly run into each other, and Sally cannot help smiling afterward. Yet after Shawn is cynical about the moon landing, and the other brother, Neil, shows her stars on his telescope, it is Neil whom she kisses. With this choice, she is rejecting Betty's values twice over. By choosing the alternative to the football player, she evades the fate of a young Betty. Likewise, Sally initiates the kiss rather than demurring, as Betty had encouraged her to do years ago.

Sally also rejects the notion that she must be beautiful above all else. When she is sent home from Miss Porter's with an injured nose and two black eyes because she and her friends were sword fighting with golf clubs, Betty calls Sally an idiot, telling her, "You can't be trusted on your own, that's your *face* young lady!" Here Betty demonstrates her projection onto Sally to the point that she believes Sally cannot even be in control of her own face. "That's right, it's *my* face," Sally retorts. Henry stops them from arguing and tells her that they are just worried about her nose. Sally replies, "Yeah, I know, because where would Mom be without her perfect nose? She wouldn't find a man like you. She'd be nothing." Here Sally demonstrates that she is well aware of just how deeply Betty's sense of self-worth is tied to her looks. Sally will not follow in her footsteps. "It *was* a perfect nose, and I gave it to you!" Betty snaps in response, and adds, "You're *lucky* Henry is important enough to get Dr. Kramer to fix it this weekend. I suppose you'd rather do it in a barn in Farmington." Sally smirks and replies, "It's a nose job, not an abortion." This further enrages Betty, and she threatens, "I'm going to break your arm next." Sally replies calmly, "Don't worry about me finding a man. I already have you to keep me in line" ("The Runaways" 00:23:20-00:24:09). In this scene, Sally effectively rejects every value Betty has tried to force upon her. This rejection undoubtedly has to do with Sally's personality, but her being of a different generation is also likely a factor. Coontz notes, "Some young women had already turned against the prevailing ideology of the 1950s and early 1960s simply by seeing the damage that ideology had done to their mothers" (Coontz 158). Sally absolutely recognizes the damage the ideology of beauty and the feminine mystique has wrought on Betty, and she demonstrates her determination not to follow in her footsteps.

Above all, Sally rejects her parents' narcissism. In "The Forecast," near the end of the series, Sally first watches in horror as Betty flirts with a now eighteen-year-old Glen. Then, later

in the episode, Sally's roommate Sarah flirts with Don, and he entertains her advances, even lighting her cigarette for her, a move he routinely makes with women he is seducing. Sally is appalled. Don then brings Sally and her friends to a bus for them to go on a "teen tour." Sally tries to avoid talking to Don, but he will not let her board without saying goodbye. Sally confronts him, saying, "You can't control yourself, can you?" Don asks what she is talking about, and Sally points out that Sarah is seventeen, of which Don informs her he is well aware. Sally looks at him in disgust and says, "But it doesn't stop you. And it doesn't stop Mom. Anyone pays attention to either of you, and they *always* do, and you just ooze everywhere." Sally effectively describes here the grandiosity and craving for attention that Miller details in *The Drama of the Gifted Child*; Sally sees Don and Betty both as the narcissists who are "admired everywhere and need this admiration" (Miller 34) to the point that they cannot live without it. Don tries to justify himself, but Sally is unconvinced and tells him, "You know what I'm gonna write down for my dream? I wanna get on a bus and get away from you and Mom and hopefully be a different person than you two" ("The Forecast" 00:43:41-00:44:23). Sally's vow here to be unlike her parents signifies what she will demonstrate a few episodes later as she breaks the cycle of abuse.

Though it is clear at the end of the series that despite the trauma they have caused her, Sally still loves her parents, she nonetheless refuses to be like them. She cultivates her own identity distinct and different from her parents and their choices. As Herman writes of the final stage of recovery, "Reconnection,"

The simple statement—"I know I have myself"—could stand as the emblem of the third and final stage of recovery. The survivor no longer feels possessed by her traumatic past; she is in possession of herself. She has some understanding of the person she used to be

and of the damage done to that person by the traumatic event. Her task now is to become the person she wants to be. (Herman 202)

By renouncing the narcissism and falseness of her parents, Sally demonstrates this final stage of recovery. She rejects the values traumatically imposed on her by her parents, and she understands who she is as a person and who she wants to be. Being of a younger generation likely contributes to this. For instance, Sally declares intense opposition to the Vietnam War, a political view that runs contrary to Betty's. Still, Sally's self-determination extends beyond the rebellious tendencies of her generation. The traits she embodies, particularly honesty and not narcissism, are personal and a result of Sally's self-possession and hard-fought battle to free herself from her traumatic history.

The final stage of trauma recovery includes reconnecting with others. Sally arguably demonstrates this with many of the series' characters, but one in particular is her younger brother Bobby. Over the years, their relationship could be categorized as primarily quarrelsome since they are constantly getting into small fights. When Sally is back home after her nose injury, however, we see their genuine affection for one another. Bobby visits her in her room, and Sally tells him that Betty had better not catch him there. Bobby protests that if he didn't sneak in, he wouldn't be able to see her before she returns to school. Sally tells him, "That's the way Betty likes it." Bobby then expresses his concerns about Betty and Henry divorcing, which Sally assures him will not happen, and Bobby confides, "I have a stomach ache all the time." Though Bobby is not as central a character as Sally, it is clear from this scene that he has trauma of his own. Recognizing this, Sally lifts her blanket and allows Bobby to join her in bed ("The Runaways" 00:29:49-00:30:59). This renewed closeness between the two Draper siblings persists to the end. In the series finale, she and Bobby talk about what is going on with Betty, and

Sally helps him cook after he burns the dinner he attempted to make (“Person to Person” 00:22:34-23:41). Sally sets healthy boundaries between herself and her parents, but she is still able to reconnect with them on her own terms. In “A Day’s Work” early in the seventh season, she is able to reconnect with Don after many months of distance after catching him with Silvia. This occurs only after Don is honest with her, and she tells him at the end of the episode, “Happy Valentine’s Day. I love you.” Of course, Don ruins this later when he flirts with Sally’s roommate, but perhaps given his breakthrough at the end of the series, he might eventually be capable of making amends properly. Sally is also, on some level, able to reconnect with Betty when she learns that she is dying, not because Sally compromises her recovery, but because Betty makes peace with the fact that Sally has and will continue to forge her own separate identity and path.

By the time *Mad Men* ends, Sally is exhibiting more maturity and responsibility than either of her parents ever have. When she learns Betty is dying, Sally takes action, advocating for her brothers. She calls Don to tell him what is happening so that she can ensure a secure future for her brothers. She tells Don that Betty “wants Gene and Bobby to live with Uncle William.” Don tries to assure her they will all live with him, and Sally replies, “Let me finish. I’ve thought about this more than you have. You have to tell her you think it’s best that they stay with Henry.” Don rejects this and Sally continues, “Daddy, it’s gonna be so hard for them already. They should at least be in the same bed and at the same school.” Don replies, “Sally, grownups make these decisions.” Frustrated because she is not being taken seriously, Sally responds, “Do you understand that I’m betraying her confidence? I’m not being dramatic, now please take me seriously” (“Person to Person” 00:10:37-00:11:43). Sally also had planned to study abroad in Madrid, but she cancels it because of Betty’s illness. Madrid would have provided a perfect

escape for Sally to run away and avoid the problems at home, an avoidance pattern that we see Don fall into countless times. Sally, however, chooses to stay and support her brothers. In doing so, she breaks the cycle perpetuated by Don and the many absent, abandoning mothers of *Mad Men*. Sally proves Herman's argument that it is possible to break the cycle of intergenerational trauma rather than be consumed by it. As such, Sally represents a beacon of hope.

Conclusion

Though *Mad Men* ends on an optimistic note for Don and Sally, there can be no denying the legacy of troubled mothers and intergenerational trauma throughout the series. These prevailing themes pertain to countless other characters, such as Pete and his difficult relationship with his mother, the trauma and abuse Lane Pryce experiences at the hands of his father, and Peggy and Joan, who both experience unexpected pregnancies during the series and respond to them very differently. In the previously discussed scene of "The Beautiful Girls," this theme is demonstrated yet again. After Sally runs away to Don's office and refuses to return to her abusive home with Betty, she emotionally breaks down, slips, and falls to the floor while running from Don. As this occurs, Joan, Peggy, Faye, and Megan are all positioned around her. When Megan and Don bring Sally out to Betty afterwards, Joan, Peggy, and Dr. Faye all stand behind, watching, as though they recognize and perhaps even identify with Sally's extreme reaction. Given the backgrounds of all these female characters, it is likely that they do identify. They watch Sally being reunited with Betty with a look of concern and protectiveness, but of course they are unable to do anything to help her. This scene emphasizes just how far the theme of strained parent-child relations reaches in the series. The focus on the mothers here ignores the culpability of the fathers, who are often also absent and damaging to their children. The

narrative, however, does not give the same emotional weight to paternal neglect as it does to the maternal.

Throughout *Mad Men*, it is the mothers who are centered. At the end of the series, Peggy, who unexpectedly has a baby at the end of the first season, is revealed to be still grappling with her decision to give the child away and dissociate from the memory. Nevertheless, Peggy, like Sally, demonstrates substantial progress in her path to trauma recovery. Towards the series' end, Joan also provides an example of a successful and loving working single mother. Still, we continue to see mothers like Margaret Sterling, Diana, and Stephanie, who reveal that the cycle of abandonment and trauma has not been halted. Such problems will continue to pervade our world, and while *Mad Men* shows that this may be a hard truth, it coexists equally with the truth that trauma can be overcome.

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