

## ***Mad Men's* Color Schemes: A Changing Palette of Working Women**

In the third season of AMC's *Mad Men*, the episode "The Color Blue" finds an executive Don Draper (Jon Hamm) in bed with his daughter's art teacher. She muses aloud over a question posed by an eight-year-old in her art class earlier that day: "How do I know if what I see as blue is the same as it is to you?" While Miss Farrell (Abigail Spencer) is delighted by the wonder and nuance of such a question, Don dismisses the answer as fairly black and white: "The truth is that people may see things differently, but they don't really *want* to."

Over its first three seasons, *Mad Men* echoes this fundamental conversation between the sexes, repeatedly underscoring that the show's working women are attuned to color in ways that their male counterparts are not. Functioning as a kind of primer, a sequence of key episodes featuring the theme of color works together to reflect the complexity of women's experience in the work world, and what's more, begins to serve as a predictive tool to reveal their secrets before they are ultimately articulated in the fourth season finale.

### **Articulating Masculinity: Male Roles and Discursive Variety**

In his February 2011 review of *Mad Men* in the *New York Review of Books*, critic Daniel Mendelsohn writes that fans of the series have falsely

equated the show's superior design and costuming with good writing and acting—elements Mendelsohn vigorously criticizes. Describing the show as more melodrama than drama,

the characters and their milieu were so unrelentingly repellent that I kept wondering whether the writers had been trying, unsuccessfully, for a kind of camp—for a tartly tongue-in-cheek send-up of Sixties attitudes. (I found myself wishing that the creators of *Glee* had gotten a stab at this material.) But the creators of *Mad Men* are in deadly earnest. (Mendelsohn 1)

For the sake of brevity, I will refrain from undertaking any lengthy summary of his arguments about the show's flaws, but I feel compelled to say that I largely do not share his convictions about bad acting and bad writing in the series. However, Mendelsohn's wry speculation that *Mad Men* had been crafting a kind of "tongue-in-cheek" vision of the Sixties seems oddly resonant with my own reading of the show. While I'm certainly not suggesting that *Mad Men* is any way meant to be interpreted as camp, I do find stylistic elements of its writing and narrative structure that are intentionally playful, a step away from the deadly earnestness that Mendelsohn sees at work, and must then be taken into consideration when interpreting the series as a whole.

Just as advertising itself is a persuasive fusion of the verbal and the visual, *Mad Men*'s advertising agency of Sterling Cooper is comprised of precisely those same elements, divided neatly along gender lines. The male characters stake out the terrain of the discursive, revealing much about their place in the work world through a superabundance of dialogue, banter, and even through what the viewer soon begins to recognize as a kind of word play: Roger Sterling (John Slattery) is the wealthy playboy, Freddy Rumsen is the alcoholic, and "Don Draper," the assumed name obscuring Dick Whitman's troubled past, tips off the viewer to the evasive Draper's proclivity for cloaking the truth. Further entwining the masculine with the discursive, Timothy Richardson's elegant Lacanian reading of masculinity in *Mad Men* points to the fact that the doubling of Don Draper complicates how that character functions as a signifier: "If Dick Whitman is what Draper was or could have been but isn't, Don Draper is made up. He's a fiction, a persona via which our protagonist has amassed a great deal" (Richardson 23). With Don Draper—a figure in a television show who has assumed a false identity—*Mad Men* blurs the line between the fictional and the fic-

tive, and sets a broader standard by which male characters in the series are often associated with fiction.

The trade-off for this explosion of male discourse, it would seem, is a dearth of color, and beginning with the stark black *Mad Men* logo, the men of the show are presented in bland, tri-chromatic uniforms of black, white, and gray. Commenting on the link between workplace competition and the early nineteenth-century “graying of male attire,” Simon During notes that

the dark suit began its career as a uniform for middle-class men.

This marked the effective end of the aristocratic display of power and prestige through male clothing, and the emergence of a de-individualized style of dress which signaled and performed an extended franchise of power: the power not of families and individuals but of a gendered collective, that is, of men. It also represented the ascetic ethics of saving, restraint and carefulness associated first with the Puritan tradition and then with professionalism, both being tied to a gender regime in which men increasingly were required to control their emotions. (During 180)

The era of the dark suit, argues During, also marked the moment in which colorlessness came to be equated with toughness and competence in an increasingly competitive marketplace. *Mad Men's* hoard of cutthroat Manhattan ad executives is no exception. With a comparatively short history of women in the workplace to consider, we may nonetheless make some implicit assumptions that the more colorful palette of mid-twentieth century women's attire was not read in a similar fashion.

### **A Spectrum of Femininity: Female Roles and the Use of Color in the Workplace**

It should be no surprise that *Mad Men* features few central female characters in its 1960s office scenes. Women are often present, but as part of the massive background secretarial and support staff, and thus rarely have dialogue. In fact, in the third season's 147 scenes featuring dialogue in an office context, female characters have lines of three words or more in 67 of those scenes, participating in less than 46% of workplace dialogue. By contrast, male characters engage in a whopping 86% of the dialogue that unfolds at Sterling Cooper or other office settings, speaking in 127 of

the 147 workplace scenes. This discussion will therefore focus specifically on the two most prominent female characters at Sterling Cooper: office manager Joan Holloway (later Joan Harris) and secretary (soon-to-be copy writer) Peggy Olson (played by Christina Hendricks and Elisabeth Moss). The fact that both of those characters' descriptions require some modification from season one to season three is significant, as each undergoes a struggle to redefine her socioeconomic status: Joan marries a doctor in an attempt to leave office work behind her and ascend to a more refined world, while Peggy becomes increasingly competitive with the male account executives at Sterling Cooper and establishes herself as an independent career woman in the city. The show's female characters, both sociologically and cinematically positioned to be seen more often than heard, signal their own changing status in the workplace hierarchy through an elaborate language of wardrobe color. We may read these changes through the colors that Joan and Peggy adopt, their successes or failures in turn creating a prismatic semiotics of sexuality and success that will become the palette of *Mad Men's* working women.

### Boudoir Red

Two pivotal scenes from seasons one and three serve to guide the viewer in understanding the operative language of color across the episodes. The first marks the debut of Joan Holloway's iconic red dress, repeated extensively in *Mad Men* publicity and reprised in slightly different iterations over the next three seasons. It is worth noting that the red dress does not in fact appear in the season one premier; rather, Joan is wearing green as she advises the new secretary Peggy about becoming indispensable to the male executives. As Joan gives the tour of Sterling Cooper, she notes to the wide-eyed Peggy, "if you really make the right moves, you'll be in the country and you won't be going to work at all" ("Smoke Gets In Your Eyes"), thus hinting at her own aspirations outside of the workplace. Even from the first episode, Joan is immediately identified as the office *femme fatale*: a beautiful redhead, voluptuous, professional, and unquestionably in control, both of the women in the secretarial pool and of the men whose calendars and libidos she expertly manages. In the sixth episode, "Babylon," Joan's red dress becomes narratively and symbolically

tied to all things of the body: in particular, her own physical self and notions of female sexuality. Art director Sal Romano (Bryan Batt) and ad executives Freddy Rumsen (Joel Murray) and Ken Cosgrove (Aaron Staton) struggle with the “Belle Jolie” cosmetics account, puzzling over how to sell the new line of lipsticks. As the scene opens, the men scoff at the names of the lipsticks—“Passion Flower Peach,” “Boudoir Red.” Lest we miss the fact that this specific band of the spectrum is being inextricably intertwined with sex, Ken cites research about how lipstick was invented to mimic the flush in a woman’s face after intercourse. But much like Don’s indifference to the mysteries of the color blue, Freddy and Ken are similarly stumped about how to differentiate one shade from another. “I don’t speak moron,” Freddy complains, “let’s throw it to the chickens.”

In the next scene, Joan takes charge of a focus group comprised of a number of the women in the office. Assembled in a room behind a one-way mirror, the women are presented all of Belle Jolie’s new lipsticks for their evaluation and comments. The men of Sterling Cooper begin to gather on the other side of the mirror. As the camera’s perspective shifts back and forth between either side of the glass, the viewer cannot help but make a powerful and lasting association: while the executives smugly critique their female coworkers from a darkened room, male expression is all at once equated with the verbal and entirely stripped of color.

It is worth noting that the only male character who occasionally transgresses the color line is Sal Romano, the impeccably dressed art director whose choice of tie colors wins him the admiration of a number of women in the secretarial pool. While the viewer is made to recognize his closeted homosexuality long before Sal himself does, his role in the Belle Jolie episode seems somehow telling. Even as his male colleagues in the darkened room make crude sexual remarks about the unsuspecting women who have approached the one-way mirror to apply their makeup, Sal abstains from the sexual banter and instead critiques different parts of each woman’s appearance by picking up the lipstick himself and drawing on the mirror. In a scene in which the men and women are otherwise so carefully separated both physically and by the use of color, Sal’s application of red lipstick onto the one-way glass complicates his position in the narrative, and hints that *Mad Men* may be using color as a marker of 1960s otherness in ways that include not just female subjectivity but gay subjectivity as well.

Divided from the boisterous, darkened room, the women are silenced behind the glass but awash in color, ablaze in every shade of lipstick. (In what seems to be a nod to the show's opening credits in which men and women are similarly divided into black and white versus color, a repeated shot captures the silhouette of one of the men lounging on a darkened couch, the camera lens shooting over his shoulder through the one-way mirror at the women in vivid color, applying lipstick.) At the center of the activity is Joan, the only woman aware that they're being observed. While the focus group around her parses out the nuances of each lipstick tint, Joan's fire-engine red dress has precisely one meaning—affirmed later as we learn not only that Joan is having an affair with her boss Roger Sterling, but also that his pet name for her is “Red.” Joan discreetly looks into the one-way mirror, and then creates a pretense to turn her back and bend over, offering a view of her backside in a bold red silhouette to the roomful of executives. It is a galvanizing moment in which color has expressive impact. “I want to stand up and salute that,” says the unabashed Ken, from the darkened room. Noticeably absent from the Belle Jolie campaign is Don Draper, at work on a different campaign for the Israeli Board of Tourism. In sharp contrast with the seeming banality of the lipstick focus group, Don is pictured reading the Leon Uris novel *Exodus* in preparation for his meeting. Once again, even as Joan presents herself in front of the one-way glass, Don is conflated with the textual while the female characters remain objects of visual inspection. Meanwhile, having remained wordless throughout her interaction with her male co-workers, separated literally behind the glass wall (and metaphorically below the glass ceiling), Joan at last makes red meaningful to the men.

If the Belle Jolie plotline sets up Joan's equation of sex, the corporeal, and the affirmative presence of color, then the opposite seems to be true for Peggy in this sequence. Peggy is part of the focus group, and quietly sits in front of her own make-up mirror without applying any lipstick. Instead, a slow-motion shot catches her dressed in neutral gray—the trademark color of her male coworkers—watching as other smiling women in vibrant shades of pink, purple, and red discard lipstick blots. On the other side of the glass, Freddy Rumsen takes notice, and after the focus group disbands, he stops Peggy to ask why she didn't take part in trying on the lipstick. She shrugs, explaining that her first choice had already been taken, and she's very par-

ticular: “I don’t think most women want to be one of a hundred colors in a box.” In this case, the fact that Peggy rejects color, the accepted mode of expression for women, transforms her career: Peggy’s insight offers Freddy a key to the new Belle Jolie campaign, and he in turn champions her promotion to junior copy writer.

While the “Babylon” episode marks defining moments for both of these working women, Peggy’s palette will be far subtler in its changes as her narrative trajectory takes her into the uncharted territory of her male counterparts. Instead of mapping out the shade-by-shade shifts in Peggy’s elaborate color schemes as she climbs the corporate ladder, I will simply make two brief observations here.

First, Peggy also has a signature dress that makes repeated appearances through season three. It’s a muted but stylish plaid sheath in green, blue, and beige that corresponds to points in the plot at which she takes significant risks in her career at Sterling Cooper: specifically, when she refers to equal pay legislation and boldly but unsuccessfully lobbies Don for a raise (“The Fog”), and then again after an argument with Don, when it becomes clear that her options at Sterling Cooper have stalled, and Peggy makes the decision to take active control of her career by contacting a former colleague and new competitor, Duck Phillips (Mark Moses; “Seven Twenty Three”). Just as red allows Joan to express her own considerable sexual charisma, the plaid functions as Peggy’s version of camouflage, mirroring her efforts to exercise a different kind of power—that of professional strategizing—in the workplace. The recurrence of Peggy’s green and beige plaid and its careful, orderly grid indicates to the viewer that she is a woman with a plan. The second point, however, underscores the fact that Peggy isn’t all corporate stealth. Even as Joan phases red out of her wardrobe in season three, Peggy begins to include red at moments that directly correspond to a secret affair with Duck Philips.

## **Green Dream**

As if in conversation with season one’s “Babylon,” the much-discussed episode from season three, “Guy Walks into an Advertising Agency,” offers extraordinary insights into *Mad Men’s* palette for working women, using color as the means of articulating their transformations. In season three,

Sterling Cooper has undergone a number of changes: they have been purchased by a British firm, Joan has married a doctor who, unbeknownst to her friends at the office, turns out not to be the success she had imagined, and junior copy writer Peggy now has her own office and secretary.

Just as the Belle Jolie episode created multiple narrative levels around the color red, “Guy Walks into an Advertising Agency” does the same with green. While the office worries over the imminent arrival of the British executives, Ken Cosgrove celebrates landing a lucrative new account with that most American of companies, John Deere, by driving one of their riding lawnmowers victoriously into the middle of the office. It is not merely the incongruousness of the object but, as the camera’s soft focus suggests, the color that strikes the viewer. The sudden preponderance of green amid the neutral reception area establishes the preferred reading: the color will signal the promise of wealth, the good life, the American dream.

Reflecting all those ideals is Joan, also in the reception area during one of her final days at Sterling Cooper before leaving to begin her life as a doctor’s wife. While a previous scene has revealed that her husband has failed in his efforts to be a surgeon and that she will need to look for other work, Joan has carefully crafted the public image of a woman destined to leave the work world behind and ascend to high society. As she and Mr. Hooker (Ryan Cartwright), her British replacement, greet the arriving contingent from the U.K., Joan has come a long way from her days in *femme fatale* red; instead, she is elegantly dressed in emerald green, the color of prosperity that both she and the company hope to project.

Joan’s shift from red to green in the workplace—from the corporeal to the financial, from the sly wink to the very correct—comes with a name change, as well. While many in the office continue to refer to her by her first name, others have begun referring to Joan as “Mrs. Harris,” underscoring this push toward her new married identity. Mr. Hooker does precisely this as he introduces “Mrs. Harris” to the British executives. He notes that she had been an excellent office manager before him, “...but she’s off to greener pastures,” a metaphor that smoothly subsumes the John Deere mower, Joan’s dress, and the notion of social climbing.

Coincidentally, it is the day of Joan’s farewell party, and all her visual cues about leaving the office for a more refined life have not gone unnoticed by her coworkers as they toast her good fortune. Peggy pulls Joan

aside during the party to offer her congratulations and thanks, and as their conversation begins, the John Deere mower reappears in the frame as drunken office workers take turns riding it around the reception area. Referencing their very first scene together, Peggy invokes the premier episode of *Mad Men* in which Joan had spoken longingly of marrying up and out of the office (and, it is worth noting, had worn green).

Peggy: I'm really happy that you got what you wanted. I remember on my first day you said that could happen to me if I played my cards right.

Joan: Are you getting sentimental? Don't worry—I'm sure we'll see each other all the time.

Peggy: If we don't, I just want to say...

Peggy never gets to finish this thought about Joan's impending departure from Sterling Cooper (nor to answer the charge of "getting sentimental," when Peggy is at last on her way to joining the realm of emotionally controlled, gray-suited men), because in one of *Mad Men's* most famous scenes, this is the moment when a secretary accidentally runs over a British executive's foot with the John Deere riding mower. The stricken crowd is splattered with blood, and in the panic, it is Joan—she of the body, of the physical, of the corporeal—who takes over. She calls for a tourniquet and a first aid kit, and as the others watch in horror, Joan dresses the bleeding man's injury. For the viewer who has been attentive to the implication of color, it will come as no surprise to see that Joan's failed dreams of status and wealth are reflected back in her wrecked green dress, now returned to her signature red as if revealing her irrefutable nature. In the hospital waiting room later, Joan seems to acknowledge the connection as well when Don Draper greets her with a stunned, "Joan, my God!", ostensibly in reference to the day's events. Joan, however, replies as if he were commenting on her blood-spattered dress: "I know, it's ruined." Here, the significance of the imperfect, besmirched green and all it had once implied for Joan has never been more vivid.

If Joan's disappointment is rendered in the stark contrast between green and red, then financial officer Lane Price's own close call (the injury resulting from the lawn mower accident will mean he will be spared an unpleasant corporate transfer) is punctuated by nothing less than a literary reference. Lane (Jared Harris) quotes *Tom Sawyer* to Don in the waiting room: "I feel like I just went to my own funeral, and I didn't like the eu-

logy.” Where Joan is concerned, however, Lane returns to platitudes: he extends the company’s thanks for her quick thinking, and offers to reimburse her for her dress. Their conversation turns to her departure from the office, and Don comments on how much Joan will be missed. As if incapable of telling red from green—an actual affliction of perception that in fact affects a good percentage of men<sup>1</sup>—Don and Lane seem unaware that Joan’s destroyed green dress paints a clear picture of a woman whose attempts to leave work behind her for a life of leisure will go unfulfilled, and indeed she returns to work with the then-reconstituted company of Sterling Cooper Draper Price by the end of season three.

### Meaningful Speechlessness and Madonna Blue

In its depiction of the years 1964-1965, the fourth season stands apart for its more explicit and unflinching representation of women’s struggles in the workplace, and accordingly, the show’s storyline sees the addition of both a major and minor female character (market research consultant Dr. Faye Miller [Cara Buono] and new secretary Megan [Jessica Pare], their respective statuses in the workplace marked by the presence or absence of a last name) as well as a discernible increase in dialogue attributed to women in office settings. That is hardly to suggest that season four signals a moment of perfect gender equity, however; quite to the contrary, numerous plotlines revolve around escalating displays of sexism toward Joan and Peggy, and hostility among the female characters as they weigh individual versus collective goals.

Season four, then, might best be understood as the pivotal moment in which *Mad Men*’s working women are seen and *attempt* to be heard, with mixed and often frustrating results. In the midst of these struggles, the semiotics of color provide the viewer with ample clues to supplement the silences. Episode 9, “The Beautiful Girls,” signals a heightened sensitivity to the show’s history of color codes. Joan appears wearing her signature red dress for the first time in season four. Not surprisingly, the return of red in Joan’s wardrobe is in the context of on-and-off sexual tension with her boss and former lover, Roger Sterling; Roger has learned of Joan’s husband’s looming departure for Vietnam and in her distress, she and Roger have become closer. Like the infamous lawn mower accident, yet another bodily

crisis unfolds in the office, and there are evocative parallels between “The Beautiful Girls” and season three’s “Guy Walks into an Advertising Agency.” In fact, the color schemes already in place in seasons one and three provide sufficient information to predict many key points of *Mad Men's* season four finale.

In the glass-walled conference room of the newly formed Sterling Cooper Draper Price, Don and his team scramble to land the account of Filmore Auto Parts. In the reception area, and just behind the Filmore brothers’ backs, the office is horrified to realize that Don’s elderly secretary Miss Blankenship has collapsed and died at her desk. While the executives in the conference room work to keep the clients’ attention focused elsewhere, the remaining staff frantically gathers to discuss the disaster. Amid the panic, Joan in her red dress makes the decisions about how to handle the body. She covers Miss Blankenship with an afghan, and instructs the young secretary Megan to find a man help her wheel the body quickly out of view. From what we’ve come to know from past episodes and what we can extract from this single story line, Joan’s red is evoking multiple moments—past, present, and future—in this narrative: the injured man’s foot, the bloodied dress, the secretary’s mortality, Joan’s husband’s future in Vietnam, her passion with Roger—passion that will escalate at the end of that day from a reluctant dinner to furtive sex.

The careful viewer of “The Beautiful Girls” will also note another parallel with “Guy Walks into an Advertising Agency”: there is once again a lovely young woman in green during the crisis. This time, it is Megan smartly dressed in an expensive shade of emerald. Unlike Joan’s destroyed green dress in season three, however, Megan ends the episode with her green dress flawlessly preserved as she moves with uncanny ease from the emergency with Miss Blankenship to comforting Don’s daughter Sally (Kiernan Shipka), who has wandered into the day’s chaos uninvited. Taking our cue from the signifying systems of color in past seasons, it is far less surprising when Don proposes to Megan in the season four finale, making Megan, and not Joan, the high society wife-to-be.

While Mendelsohn bemoans much of the acting in *Mad Men*, one of the rare moments he highlights includes an early scene involving Joan, who at one point is asked to help vet television scripts for potential conflicts of interest with clients’ ads, and finds she’s both good at it and intellectually stimulated by it—only to be told, in

passing, that the firm has hired a man to do the job. The look on her face when she gets the news—first crushed, then resigned, because after all this is how it goes—is one of the moments of real poignancy in the show. (Mendelsohn 2)

As is so often the case, the scene showcases a moment in which Joan has only a modicum of dialogue among a roomful of chatting men, and must simultaneously suppress her interior life while looking radiant and professional in the workplace. By the time Joan is fully engaged in the plot twists of the fourth season, her character is increasingly comprehensible through the dynamic play between vibrant color and meaningful speechlessness.

The day after their indiscretion, Joan's tension with Roger is marked by his preponderance of talk and her relative silence. Conversely, her emotions—and her new pregnancy revealed in the next episode—are visible in her color choices. Having avoided Roger much of the day, Joan is summoned to Roger's office. She enters the comically stark black and white modern room wearing a lush floral print in vivid purples.

Roger: Is this what it took to get you in here?

Joan: (no reply)

Roger: Look, I'm sorry. It was in the heat of the moment. And there was a moment, you know that.

Joan: I'm not sorry. But I'm married, and so are you.

Roger: I feel something. I know *you* do.

Joan: (no reply, exiting.)

In "Hands and Knees," Joan reveals to Roger that she believes she's "late," and with her husband away in the army, it must certainly be the result of their tryst. A complicated conversation unfurls throughout the rest of the episode revealing Joan's feelings about both her relationship with Roger and the possibility of motherhood at this point in her life, all without ever using the words "pregnancy," "abortion," or "baby." Roger arranges a visit to a doctor who scolds them for their reckless behavior, but ultimately refers them to "a good man"—the procedure (an abortion, the viewer assumes) will cost \$400. Later, in a restaurant, Roger bemoans their bad luck. Again, their exchanges are marked by fairly little input from Joan, as Roger's side of the discussion increasingly reveals the limits of his emotional investment.

Roger: What if this is a sign? Maybe I'm in love with you.

Joan: (tentatively) So you want to keep it?

Roger: No, of course not. I mean, if there's going to be something

between us, I don't want it to start this way. Do you? With a scandal?

Joan: (withdrawing) I see.

Sensing Joan's disapproval, Roger desperately considers other options, including the possibility that her husband may never come home from the war. Joan cuts short his morbid ramblings: "I'm going to take care of it."

Later, in a modest royal blue dress (an unusual color choice for Joan), she sits in a doctor's waiting room across from a young mother who begins to cry quietly as her daughter is shepherded back into the clinic. Composed but empathetic, Joan initiates a conversation with the mother, who confesses through her tears that her daughter is only seventeen, and that she herself had been only fifteen when she had given birth to her. "How old is your daughter?" asks the woman, assuming that Joan too is waiting for her child. Joan pauses for a moment, and responds softly, "Fifteen."

Many viewers saw the first hints that Joan would secretly opt to keep the baby in her next-day assurances to guilt-ridden Roger ("It's ok—we avoided a tragedy," she tells him, as he worries for her and regrets not having gone with her to the clinic. Steering him out the door, she adds, "We have a partners' meeting. Life goes on."). In fact, the precursor to that clue is a telling sequence in which, immediately following a shot of Pete Campbell (Vincent Kartheiser) and his very pregnant wife Trudy (Alison Brie), Joan rides the train home from the clinic. Alone and pensive in the darkened car, she leans her head toward the window where her image is reflected in the glass. Joan instantly evokes the iconic Madonna figure in countless paintings, a figure that symbolizes maternity throughout the West in its depiction of a serene woman clad in royal blue bending in a subtle, feminine arc to accommodate a cradled child. While Joan does not confirm our suspicions until the final episode of season four when she discusses her pregnancy with her husband by phone (she has created the fiction that she's much further along, and that the baby is his), the thoughtful reader of color will have long before noticed this significant change in Joan's usual palette, and situated that color scheme both in the context of the "Hands and Knees" episode and in the context of powerful historical and cultural associations.

## Color Commentary

None of this is to suggest that *Mad Men* has absolutely nothing to say about the interplay between men and color, but even as the palette from which women express themselves becomes more telling, men are repeatedly indifferent to those nuances. From Don Draper's conviction that everyone must undoubtedly want to perceive the same shade of blue to Roger Sterling's song-and-dance performance of blackface for his delighted guests at a garden party in "My Old Kentucky Home," the show's implicit commentary insinuates a wry kind of male color blindness toward power and privilege in early 1960s society. Nor would I contend that the dialogic content surrounding the female characters is insignificant—there is quite simply less of it. *Mad Men* has had the insight to replicate an office environment from that age in which men are not only vastly in the majority in the workplace, but develop an ease in communicating with each other because of it. On the other hand, the capacity for women to relate to and converse with their coworkers in the 1960s workplace becomes constrained by a variety of office inequities and sexual discrimination, all of which are increasingly the topic of season four. In sum, both the quality and the quantity of women's dialogue is reduced, and appropriately so for that historical moment. Shifts in the use of color, then, become an alternative language by which the viewer might gain insight into the complexities of office life for *Mad Men*'s working women. Both our cultural associations to color and the artful narrative links created by individual plotlines work together to give these central female characters a powerful semiotic tool to articulate a vibrant spectrum of personal and professional transformations.

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## **Notes**

<sup>1</sup>Red-green color vision deficiency is a relatively common form of colorblindness in which red and green are perceived as identical. It is inherited in an X-linked recessive manner and affects 8% of Caucasian males, but only 0.5% of Caucasian females; these statistics go down to roughly 3% among males of African or Asian descent (Deeb and Motulsky 2005).

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