

“Women Usually Want to Please”:
A Linguistic Analysis of Femininity and Power in *Mad Men*
by
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To my mom.

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Abstract

This thesis provides a linguistic analysis of the negotiation of femininity and power in the 2007-2015 television drama *Mad Men*, focused specifically on main character Peggy Olson as she builds her advertising career and her personal relationships. Scholars in modern language and gender research often refer to a double-bind for women and their speech, due to gendered expectations for women in the workplace. In *Mad Men*, this double-bind manifests in a female character's frustrated acknowledgement of two stereotypes of women in the series: the "humorless bitch" and the "meaningless secretary." For Peggy, she can either be the "humorless bitch" and "be less than a woman," or she can be the "meaningless secretary" and be "less than a person." This thesis argues that *Mad Men*'s depiction of Peggy's movement towards success in her career is more complicated than this "damned if she does, damned if she doesn't" model.

With the careful transcription of several scenes throughout the series where Peggy's power and femininity are negotiated in both professional and personal contexts, this thesis employs the method of conversational analysis to demonstrate how Peggy's journey is a linguistic one. The analysis draws from Robin Lakoff's theory of "women's language" and her later work on language and power, as well as linguistic theories of politeness. As gender is an important consideration for power, this thesis uses Judith Butler's theory of gender as performance and its subsequent connection to the role of stereotypes in linguistic expectations for women in the workplace. In studying the role of language in media, this thesis illuminates that stereotypes can be used as a tool for writers to both play into and subvert in order to create believable characters.

The first chapter provides a theoretical and methodological framework for the analysis, discussing the intersection of language, gender, power, stereotypes, and performance. The second chapter examines Peggy's communication within the double-bind as she gains institutional power in the hegemonic masculinity of her workplace. As institutional power often informs personal relationships, Chapters Three and Four focus on Peggy's close interpersonal relationships with two of her associates—her male mentor Don Draper and female coworker Joan Holloway, respectively. These chapters explore the complicated set of expectations that exist in language use for intimate male-female relationships and female-female friendships.

What emerges from this analysis is a complex construction of Peggy's power and femininity as she moves through the series. The writers depict Peggy's attempts at several different styles that fit within the "damned is she does, damned if she doesn't" double-bind. Eventually, she *uses* this stereotypical binary to strategically manipulate expectations and further cement her power and respectability in the workplace, as well as navigate her personal and working relationships.

Keywords: sociolinguistics, language and gender, language and media, television dramas

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Short Titles

L&WP: Lakoff, Robin Tolmach., and Mary Bucholtz. *Language and Woman's Place: Text and Commentaries*. Oxford University Press, 2004.

MM: Weiner, Matthew, creator. *Mad Men*. Lionsgate Television, 2015.

TP: Lakoff, Robin Tolmach. *Talking Power: The Politics of Language*. Basic Books, 1990.

S###E##: Notation used to refer to specific episodes, i.e. S04E07 = Season 4, Episode 7.

Figures

The following table provides transcription conventions used in this analysis, including symbols and their relevant meanings, adapted from Jennifer Coates *Language and Gender: A Reader* (xviii–xix):

Notation	Meaning
A: I am— B: —What are	Em dashes signal interruption, where one speaker cuts off the other speaker's utterance.
A: good idea= B: =Thank you	Equal signs indicate latching, where there is no pause between the end of one speaker's utterance and the next speaker's turn.
I CAN'T BELIEVE IT	Capital letters signify that the utterance is notably louder than surrounding speech.
°I'm °sorry	A degree symbol marks the utterance as notably quieter than surrounding speech.
we::ll	Colons indicate that the syllable prior to the colon has been extended.
<i>really</i>	Italics mark utterances spoken with emphasis.
[long pause], [laughing], [deep breath]	Brackets include transcriber's notes or descriptions of elements such as length of pauses, gestures, and breathing patterns.

Chapter One

“Damned If She Does, Damned If She Doesn’t”: An Introductory Frame

In the fifth season of Matthew Weiner’s critically acclaimed television drama *Mad Men*, female copywriter Peggy Olson attempts to pressure a client into purchasing an ad campaign by taking a confident stance during the pitch, presenting the work with assertive language and arguing with the client. Her attempt falls flat. After the clients leave, one of her colleagues comments on the moment: “I’ve gotta admire you, that was a completely suicidal move. Women usually want to please” (*MM*, S05E05, “Far Away Places”). While Peggy doesn’t acknowledge this flippant statement, there is much to be said in response. Her male associate’s comment points to stereotypes about women, their language, femininity, and power. How do women navigate these gendered expectations in the workplace? What can we learn from *Mad Men*’s depiction of sexist stereotypes? Does the series feed into them, attempt to break them, or both? What happens if a woman doesn’t attempt to “please” the men she works for and with? How does this kind of pleasing manifest in language?

This thesis addresses these questions through a close analysis of the language of one of *Mad Men*’s central and most celebrated characters, Peggy Olson. *Mad Men* first premiered in 2007 and its seventh and final season aired in 2015. The series primarily takes place in the 1960s and follows the life and work of employees and executives at the fictional Manhattan advertising firm Sterling Cooper.¹ Peggy begins her journey in advertising as a young and meek secretary from Brooklyn, simply looking for a way to pay the bills in taking a job at Sterling Cooper. By the end of the seventh season, Peggy has made it through the 1960s with an award, the title of

¹ Sterling Cooper is later known as Sterling Cooper Draper Pryce (SCDP) and Sterling Cooper & Partners (SC&P).

creative director, a newfound partner, the respect of male protagonist and creative giant Don Draper, and the reputation of being one of the only female copywriters to reach her level of success on Madison Avenue. As this thesis will demonstrate, language is a key tool in Peggy's career climb from a shy secretary to a successful career woman.

This thesis argues that an analysis of Peggy's speech reveals a complicated picture of her movement towards success as she navigates stereotypes about femininity, language use, and power in both her professional and personal relationships. For Peggy, *success* can be understood within the plot of *Mad Men* in many different ways. It could refer to how many ad campaigns she writes, pitches, and subsequently sells to clients who are pleased with her work. Or perhaps, *success* refers to Peggy's status at Sterling Cooper: getting promoted, pleasing her superiors (directors and partners—i.e. Don Draper, Roger Sterling), and being well-liked by her coworkers (male account men, artists, and copywriters; female secretaries). Even still, *success* for Peggy could manifest in terms of her own personal fulfillment and values: As she moves towards superior status, does she remember what it is like to work below someone? In achieving her dreams, does she maintain her values? I don't purport to know what the writers of *Mad Men* intended to be the defining factors of Peggy's *success*, but all of these possible iterations are certainly at play in her character arc; more importantly, language is a crucial piece of the journey that leads to her *success* in each instance.

It is crucial to foreground that *Mad Men* is set in the 1960s in Manhattan, New York. During this time, women were entering the workplace in greater numbers, pushing back against the stifling cultural moves of the 1950s to keep women in the home. *Mad Men* is highly regarded for portraying this time period with historical accuracy, in everything from dress to speech. The

series does an excellent job of portraying the gendered dynamic of authority for women in the male-dominated working world. Women “were socialized into ‘feminine’ ways of behaving, in a sexist society which systematically strove to keep [them] in their (subordinate) place” (Cameron 454). Men often held the positions of ultimate power, and even the men that weren’t explicitly in a position of power still benefited due to male hegemony in society.

Central to the dynamics of power in the workplace are stereotypes, especially for women. While stereotypes are often not entirely based in truth, we still do perform our genders in relation to stereotypes. Stereotypes set up expectations for our behavior; this analysis is interested specifically in expectations for how we speak. So, what is the cost if Peggy speaks in ways that defy expectations of women during the 60s? Scholar Judith Butler suggests that “gender is basically an innovative affair, although it is quite clear that there are strict punishments for contesting the script by performing out of turn or through unwarranted improvisations” (531). As described at the beginning of this chapter, when Peggy stepped out of line, she was scolded and told that “women usually want to please.” This thesis analyzes Peggy’s “innovative affair” with the performance of her gender as manifested through her speech within the confines of gendered workplace expectations and stereotypes. The analysis is a complicated one because it explores the intersection of language, gender, power, stereotypes, and performance; the study of media can open up interesting insights into the interrelated nature of these subjects.

By analyzing Peggy’s rise to power and her manipulation of language, this thesis “change[s] the conversation,” in the memorable words of Don Draper, in two ways (*MM*, S03E02, “Love Among the Ruins”). First, it more closely examines one of the female characters of the show, who have been largely ignored in the scholarship on the series, which has generally

centered on Don Draper's role as an anti-hero; when Peggy is acknowledged by *Mad Men* scholars, she is typically boiled down to being a champion of feminism and a model career woman of her time (Brett and Sepinwall).

A few scholars have chosen not to focus on Don Draper and the other male characters of the series; some have analyzed the struggles of being a working woman in *Mad Men* and explored the subversive and feminist actions of its female characters. For example, Heather Marcovitch and Nancy E. Batty put together a collection of essays on gender in *Mad Men* in which they suggest that Don Draper isn't as interesting as critics and watchers seem to find him: "in spite of viewers' continuing fascination with him, Don Draper remains the most frustratingly static, if not always entirely predictable, character in the series" (Batty and Marcovitch 7). Instead, Batty and Marcovitch assert that "it seems to be only the women characters who experience what we might call growth or development" in the series (7). This thesis illustrates that this "growth and development" becomes abundantly evident through an analysis of Peggy's language.

The second way that this thesis "change[s] the conversation" is through joining the relatively new field of language and media studies. This analysis examines Peggy's "growth and development" in *Mad Men* through her scripted language, alongside her physical actions. In her innovative text *Vox Popular: The Surprising Life of Language in the Media*, linguist Robin Queen proposes that for television series, "language is just as important to setting up a story and making that story believable as are the visual, audio, and other special effects" (5). Furthermore, the creation of characters that are "fundamentally believable" and comparable to the types of people we encounter in the real world relies heavily on scripted language (Queen 155). Studying

language in the media and the creation of characters can help us learn about how writers depict the people around us and how these people navigate stereotypes. This thesis illuminates that stereotypes about how people talk can be used as a tool for writers to both play into and overturn in order to build “fundamentally believable” characters.

Central to Peggy’s storyline is her ability to achieve career success despite the challenges of being a woman entering a male-dominated industry. As such, it is imperative to analyze Peggy’s language in the context of her womanhood. Butler suggests that gender is a performance that is constantly being negotiated and presented:

In this sense, gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time—an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts* (519).

We perform our genders in a myriad of ways: how we dress, how we do our hair, how we move. Particular to this analysis, though, is Butler’s mention that this “*stylized repetition of acts*” can include “speech acts,” the kinds of language we use in order to perform our gender identities. One of the primary motivations for sociolinguists is to understand how language functions in the social construction and performance of gender and identity. Furthermore, Butler asserts that we perform our identities in order to meet certain cultural standards, expectations, and stereotypes:

[The] more mundane reproduction of gendered identity takes place through the various ways in which bodies are acted in relationship to the deeply entrenched or sedimented expectations of gendered existence (Butler 524).

In other words, our speech, often overlooked because it is so “mundane,” is central to the reification of our performed genders in correspondence to societal norms and cultural scripts.

Media, such as films and television, can and often do bring these cultural scripts into prominence in their actual written scripts because they have limited time to develop characters.

Such reliance on gendered expectations has led to contemporary feminist criticism of the “Third Golden Age” of television. Many have taken issue with drama writers who complicate the stories of relatable male anti-heroes, while limiting female characters to supplementary roles, foils to male counterparts, or boring tropes. This thesis demonstrates that, through a complex depiction of Peggy’s relationship to finding her power and performing her gender identity, *Mad Men* does an admirable job of creating a “fundamentally believable” female character, unlike other dramas of its era. Therefore, *Mad Men*’s creation of Peggy Olson approaches a more feminist model for scripted female characters in contemporary media. Butler expands on this notion of feminism with regards to gender performance:

Feminist theory has sought with success to bring female specificity into visibility and to rewrite the history of culture in terms which acknowledge the presence, the influence, and the oppression of women (523).

As demonstrated throughout this thesis, *Mad Men*’s writers do an excellent job of incorporating “female specificity” into Peggy’s character. They realistically depict the women’s mediation between the different possible approaches of performing their femininity through language. Additionally, evidenced by an analysis of Peggy’s linguistic shifts, they address the effects that the “oppression of women” had in the 1960s on the ways that women were expected to speak.

One of the first linguists to properly study language and its relationship to gender was Robin Lakoff. In her influential book *Language and Woman’s Place*, published in 1975, Lakoff establishes the concept of “women’s language.” She argues that the way women speak is

fundamentally different from the way that men speak—and that this contributes to sexist attitudes and practices against women. Lakoff claims that through the usage of “women’s language,” “a woman’s personal identity [is] submerged” and she is “never [taken as] a serious person with individual views” (*L&WP* 42). Thus, the restrictive nature of “women’s language” results in a poverty of identity and agency for women:

So a girl is damned if she does, damned if she doesn’t. If she refuses to talk like a lady, she is ridiculed and subjected to criticism as unfeminine; if she does learn, she is ridiculed as unable to think clearly, unable to take part in a serious discussion: in some sense, as less than fully human. These two choices which a woman has—to be less than a woman or less than a person—are highly painful (*L&WP* 41).

Here, Lakoff presents a familiar double-bind that women face in navigating gendered expectations. This “damned if she does, damned if she doesn’t” model mirrors Butler’s assertions of gender as performance, that “those who fail to do [or perform] their gender right are regularly punished” (522). In Chapter Two, I look at how Peggy is “punished” when she “refuses to talk like a lady” and performs her gender in a way that contradicts expectations for women. Additionally, I analyze how Peggy is shown subverting this double-bind and manipulating feminine stereotypes in order to solidify her power and further her career.

Since the 1970s, subsequent scholarship has raised questions about Lakoff’s “women’s language,” suggesting that “the variation in WL² features may be related more to social powerlessness than to sex” (Atkins and O’Barr 385). More specifically, one study found that those who held higher positions of social power exhibited fewer features of “women’s language”

² “WL” is often used in sociolinguistic scholarship as an abbreviation for Lakoff’s “women’s language.”

in their speech (Atkins and O’Barr 385). Lakoff likely primarily observed this kind of speech in women “because of the all-too-frequent powerless social position of American women” (Atkins and O’Barr 386). As demonstrated in Chapter Two, Peggy most closely adheres to Lakoff’s concept of “women’s language” when she is in her most powerless position: a secretary.

Stereotypes are inextricably linked to power because, according to scholar Mary Talbot, “[they] tend to be directed at subordinate groups (e.g. ethnic minorities, women) and they play an important part in hegemonic struggle” (471). In Talbot’s piece “Gender Stereotypes: Reproduction and Challenge,” she defines “stereotype” as it is understood in sociolinguistics:

Within the field of language and gender, the term ‘stereotype’ is often used to refer to prescriptions or unstated expectations of behavior, rather than specifically representational practices (472).

In a scene in the fourth season of *Mad Men*, Peggy argues with another female character, Joan Holloway, about sexism in their male-dominated workplace. Joan asserts that there are two choices for women in the series: to be a “humorless bitch” or a “meaningless secretary” (*MM*, S4E8, “The Summer Man”). For Peggy, these two stereotypes are the relevant manifestations of Lakoff’s double-bind: she can either be the “humorless bitch” and “be less than a woman,” or she can be the “meaningless secretary” and “less than a person” (*L&WP* 41). The linguistic analysis presented in this thesis demonstrates that Peggy is actually capable of transcending this double-bind and these two stereotypes; however, she does seem to inhabit them in some contexts, often in relation to her power and position. Some scholars note that “Lakoff’s early speculative work on WL has recently been revisited and reinterpreted in terms of stereotypes in operation” (Talbot 477). This thesis adopts this kind of revisitation of “women’s language” in

order observe Peggy's oscillation between and eventual subversion of the "humorless bitch" and "meaningless secretary" stereotypes throughout the series.

Ideally, stereotypes could be cast off as unimportant or untrue; however, their existence and the ways in which we respond to them are essential to this analysis. Stereotypes did and do exist in common discourse, culture, and media. Scripted characters are often not nearly as complex as humans are. Thus, *Mad Men's* depiction of Peggy, a scripted character, as more complex than the stereotype of a "meaningless secretary," just like women in the real world, is notable and refined.

As a woman trying to gain power in a male-dominated workplace, Peggy is constantly faced with the relationship between gendered expectations of talk and power. Therefore, it is essential to understand how power is performed. In her book *Talking Power*, Lakoff states that "we all manipulate language, and we do it all the time" (Lakoff 17). Furthermore, she claims that this manipulation of language is often used to demonstrate or assert our power:

Everything we do in the course of a day communicates our relative power, our desire for a particular sort of connection, our identification of the other as one who needs something from us, or vice versa (Lakoff, *Talking Power* 17).

Over the course of this thesis, it will become evident how Peggy's language serves both as a tool to communicate and solidify her power and as a constraint that confines her to the gendered, powerless stereotypes set up for her.

While language can certainly be used as a tool for the performance of both gender and power, it is essential to note that, in practice, not everyone has an equal opportunity to wield this tool. Several sociolinguistic studies have been done on male and female interaction in the

workplace, including “Communicating Gendered Professional Identity: Competence, Cooperation, and Conflict in the Workplace” by Caja Thimm et al. After an overview of existing sociolinguistic theories and their own study, Thimm and her collaborators conclude that:

It seems, then, that men are allowed to use an explicitly powerful style, but similar behavior by women does not elicit the same kind of approval...The results suggest that stereotypical expectations restrict women’s interactional behavior more than men’s.

Whereas men are allowed a wide variety of styles, women very often are not. (532).

Mad Men’s writers accurately capture this conclusion with Peggy’s journey across the seven seasons. We’ll see that when she attempts to use an “explicitly powerful style” of speech, she gets punished. In the latter part of the twentieth century, as women began to populate and hold higher positions in the workplace, they were faced with Lakoff’s double-bind and the decision of whether or not to make stylistic changes in their speech.

In linguistics, style refers to the different manners of speech we employ, across a spectrum, depending on the context we are in and who our audience is. For example, I speak differently with my housemates in our living room than I do with my professor in office hours. In a commentary on Lakoff’s work, linguist Sally McConnell-Ginet acknowledges this phenomenon:

Certainly, women beginning to move into positions of authority in workplaces were often struck by the conflict between modes of talk needed there and those they and their mothers might employ at home or at dinner parties. And they often encountered hostility and resistance from coworkers, not only men but also other women, if they spoke (and acted) as if entitled to exercise authority (138–139).

Early work in studies of language and gender propose a “deficit model” of women’s speech—that language typically used by women is somehow deficient in comparison to language typically used by men. As such, many women attempted to ameliorate this deficiency by assuming authority and speaking like men because “a direct, assertive style of speech, commonly associated with masculinity, [was] largely viewed as the appropriate language style for the public sphere” (Mills, Location 2295). Such studies on real-world language use are helpful because they delineate and illuminate the linguistic complexities that creators of media must address in writing “fundamentally believable” characters. In order for Peggy’s character to reflect a realistic 1960s working woman, *Mad Men*’s writers had to, whether knowingly or unknowingly, take note of the multifarious gendered expectations that exist for women and their speech.

In fact, there were real-world institutional attempts to help women embrace a more stereotypically masculine and explicitly powerful style. Linguist and scholar of politeness theory Sara Mills talks about such institutional attempts:

Assertiveness training programmes developed for women in the 1980s and 1990s often focused on changing women's language styles, so that, instead of displaying what was characterised as deference and indecision, the woman speaker projected an image of herself, through her language, of being confident and assertive (Locations 2296–2297).

Assertiveness training was a bit of a fad for feminism that faded away relatively quickly as a result of its both its ineffectiveness and a negative reaction to its sexist advice that “implicitly boil[ed] down to ‘talk [more] like a man’” (Cameron, “Gender and Language Ideologies” 454). Men didn’t particularly like that women were trying to be more assertive and focusing less on

pleasing them; assertiveness training actually proved to make it harder for a lot of women to get things like promotions and approval from male superiors.

Similar to the history of assertiveness training, Peggy's usage of an explicitly powerful style of talk does not sit well with her male coworkers. However, this doesn't mean she is entirely unable to use language in order to gain power because "the strategic use of elements of powerless talk [or "women's language"] may in some circumstances be an advantage" (Thimm et al. 546). In other words, Peggy eventually employs some elements of a powerless style, or one more closely in line with "women's language," in order to manipulate her male coworkers by strategically meeting gendered expectations in order to solidify her power and get what she wants.

In order to study how Peggy's power and the performance of her femininity become evident through her language, this thesis employs the sociolinguistic methodology of discourse analysis, and specifically conversation analysis. This approach looks at key features of conversations that differ in various discourse and among different speakers, or interlocutors, in relation to their power and positionality. Such features include: openings, closings, reciprocity and turn-taking, topic initiation and control, hedges and boosters, direct and indirect speech, commands, and asking and answering questions (Lakoff, *TP* 42). The ways in which each of these features function in discourse change whether the conversation is considered polite, cooperative, or competitive. For example, for women, adhering to the conventions of polite conversation includes "attenuat[ing] or reduc[ing] the strength of the utterance" by using hedges³ like *I think*, *sort of*, and *perhaps* as a "wish not to impose" (Holmes 74–75). Hedges are also

³ Hedges are sometimes referred to as softeners.

features of Lakoff's "women's language," likely because women are expected to be more polite in conversation than men.

For each chapter of this analysis, I have chosen and transcribed pivotal scenes throughout the series where the relationship between Peggy's power and femininity is being established, questioned, restructured, or complicated because "power in conversation [is related to] but not directly dependent on power in the external world" (Lakoff, *Talking Power* 50).⁴ For the purpose of this project, "the external world" here is analogous to the fictional world of *Mad Men*. Peggy navigates gendered expectations both in the professional world and in her personal relationships. Chapter Two analyzes Peggy's journey as she acquires professional roles and the institutional power embedded in the workplace of Sterling Cooper. As institutional power often informs personal relationships, Chapters Three and Four focus on Peggy's close interpersonal relationships with two of her associates—her male mentor Don Draper and female coworker Joan Holloway, respectively. These chapters explore the complicated set of expectations that exist in language use for intimate male-female relationships and female-female friendships.

Additionally, each chapter aligns with different kinds of discourse styles of sociolinguistics. Chapter Two focuses on important scenes where Peggy moves through career ranks in the advertising industry and navigates Lakoff's double-bind as depicted in *Mad Men*. Central to this chapter are features of politeness and "women's language," such as hedges, turn-taking, and asking questions. Chapter Three analyzes key scenes where power is being negotiated between Peggy and her mentor Don Draper. This chapter examines power dynamics

⁴ In linguistics, close transcription of conversation requires not only transcribing the dialogue, but also taking note of elements such as, length of pauses, volume of speech, intonation, interruption, emphasis, inbreaths and outbreaths, the lengthening of syllables, and visual descriptions of the scene. Refer to the "Figures" section (ii) for the transcription conventions and notation used in this analysis.

in intimate talk and focuses on features such as commands, topic initiation, direct speech, and questions. Finally, Chapter Four analyzes the construction of Peggy's friendship with Joan Holloway despite the superior-subordinate relationship they are placed in; here, features of cooperative conversation, such as progressive topic initiation and minimal responses are considered. Together, these three chapters reveal that Peggy isn't simply either a "meaningless secretary" or a "humorless bitch," who is "damned if she does, damned if she doesn't." Peggy is so much more.

Chapter Two

“You Young Women Are Very Aggressive”: Peggy’s Attempts at Gaining Institutional Power through Language

In the previous chapter, I introduced that double-bind that exist for women who are restricted by Lakoff’s “women’s language.” If a woman does adhere to the conventions of “women’s language,” she is subject to being labeled as “less than a person” with a submerged identity. If she refuses to adhere to the conventions of “women’s language,” she is subject to being labeled as “less than a woman” who is rude and bitchy. This chapter explores Peggy’s movement both within and outside of this double-bind, specifically with regards to her changing power as her career grows across *Mad Men*’s seven seasons.

In order to track changes in Peggy’s speech, I have selected and transcribed scenes in which Peggy attempts to gain authority and to navigate it once she has it: asking for a desk, asking for a raise, directing subordinate male copywriters, and eventually assuming power over the man who was her superior in the beginning. Additionally, I look at how power functions in Peggy’s language for significant presentations of ad campaigns that she gives: her first pitch to her male co-workers, her first successful pitch to clients, a particularly unsuccessful pitch, and the final most important pitch of the series.

In the first section, while Peggy is a secretary, she generally adheres to the gendered stereotype of the “meaningless secretary,” via usage of “women’s language” and polite speech. In this section, the effect of Peggy’s linguistic adherence to feminine stereotypes subjects her to one constraint of Lakoff’s double-bind: “less than a person” with her creative ideas not taken seriously (*L&WP* 41). In the second section, while Peggy is a copywriter, she attempts to break

the gendered stereotypes of the “meaningless secretary,” by adopting stereotypically masculine speech. Peggy’s male coworkers and clients do not respond well to this shift. Peggy’s adoption of stereotypically masculine speech subjects her to the other constraint of Lakoff’s double-bind: “less than a woman” and “ridiculed and subjected to criticism as unfeminine” (41). In the final section, when Peggy becomes a renowned creative executive, she manipulates gendered expectations by using features of “women’s language” and polite speech in strategic and indirect manners in order to both be taken seriously and not be labeled as “unfeminine” or rude. This section reveals that Peggy is presented as transcending Lakoff’s double-bind, subverting gendered stereotypes and expectations, and simultaneously performing femininity and power. I hypothesize that because the writers of *Mad Men* write Peggy’s journey through language in the workplace in these ways, whether they are aware of it or not, viewers are left with a new kind of model for how we can depict women in media using speech to build and maintain authority in male-dominated work environments.

“I Didn’t Mean to Be Impolite”: Peggy’s Language at Her Start with Sterling Cooper

On Peggy’s first day at Sterling Cooper as Don Draper’s secretary, she wakes up her boss, Don, because one of his subordinates, Pete Campbell, is there to collect him for a presentation of an ad campaign to a department store. In this exchange, Peggy uses several features of “women’s language” and polite speech such as formal addresses and indirect speech. According to Lakoff, “indirectness can function as a form of politeness” because it “[minimizes] the potential for conflict and confrontation” that politeness is designed to avoid (*TP* 34). Peggy attempts to “[minimize] the potential for conflict” in this conversation:

PEGGY: [whispering] Mr. Draper. Excuse me, Mr. Draper. I'm *sorry* to wake you but Mr. Campbell is outside.

DON: [pause, waking up] He doesn't know I'm sleeping in here, does he?=
 PEGGY: =No, sir.=

DON: =That's good. [looking around] Who are *you*?=
 PEGGY: =I'm Peggy Olson, the *new* girl.

DON: [pointing towards door, standing up] Can you go out there and entertain him?
 PEGGY: [following Don] [long pause] I know it's my first day and I don't want to seem uncooperative, but [outbreath] do I have to?

DON: I see your point.
 PEGGY: [approaching Don] I brought you some aspirin.

Don: [taking aspirin] Send him in.

(*MM*, S01E01, "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes")

Peggy employs polite speech here with her usage of addresses like "Mr. Draper," "Mr. Campbell," and "sir." Additionally, she uses several softeners, features of Lakoff's "women's language" and polite speech that "reduce the strength of [her] utterance[s]," when she explains how she doesn't want to go speak to Pete: "I know it's my first day," "I don't want to seem uncooperative"; she backs up her claim and softens her utterance so as not to impose (Mills 74–75). She also uses the indirect question "do I have to?" rather than an assertive⁵ such as 'No, I will not.' The usage of softeners and this indirect question allow Peggy to communicate without being seen as assertive. Once Pete enters the office, Peggy continues to be polite and speak within the confines of "women's language," despite her discomfort with the situation:

PETE: [opening door, entering] You look like a hundred bucks! Ready to go *sweet-talk* some retail Jews?

DON: You are tough to take first thing in the morning Pete.=

PETE: =I've never had any complaints. Speaking of which, who's your little friend here?
 DON: [gesturing towards Peggy] She's the new girl.=

PETE: =You *always* get the new girl. Management gets all the perks. Where are you from honey?=
 PEGGY: [whispering] Mr. Draper. Excuse me, Mr. Draper. I'm *sorry* to wake you but Mr. Campbell is outside.

DON: [pause, waking up] He doesn't know I'm sleeping in here, does he?=
 PEGGY: =No, sir.=

⁵ The linguistic term "assertive" is used as a noun throughout this analysis to refer to declarative statements.

PEGGY: =Miss Deaver's Secretarial School.

PETE: *Top* notch! But I meant where are you *from*? Are you *Amish* or something?

PEGGY: [pause] [shaking head] No, I..I'm from Brooklyn.

PETE: [looking Peggy up and down] Well you're in the city now. It wouldn't be a sin for us to see your legs. If you pull your waist in you *might look* like a woman.

PEGGY: [pause] Is that all, Mr. Draper?=
 PEGGY: [pause] Yes. [smiling] Oh, and it's time for your eleven o'clock meeting.=

PETE: =*Hey!* I'm not done here. I'm *working* my way up.

DON: That will be all. Peggy, right?

PEGGY: [pause] Yes. [smiling] Oh, and it's time for your eleven o'clock meeting.=

DON: =Oh, and sorry about Mr. Campbell here. He left his manners back at the fraternity house.

(*MM*, S01E01, "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes")

Robin Lakoff includes in her definition of "women's language," the idea that women use "less strong" expressions of emotion and thus can't freely exhibit emotions like rage or frustration (*L&WP* 44). In the above scene, Peggy's only way to display her annoyance and discomfort with Pete's treatment of her is to simply ignore him and move on: "Is that all, Mr. Draper?" Due to Peggy's inability to express her feelings and lack of power among these interlocutors, she doesn't tell Pete to 'screw off' or 'shut up,' she simply refuses to acknowledge him. What's more is that she only ignores him after several attempts to appease him and explain herself: "Miss Deaver's Secretarial School" and "I'm from Brooklyn."

Towards the end of *Mad Men*'s first season, Don Draper discovers Peggy's potential talent for copywriting and the advantage that the agency might gain in having a woman's perspective on some of their advertising campaigns. As such, he gives her a few assignments to supplement her secretarial work, including writing and presenting to the internal creative team a potential campaign for a weight-loss belt. Through her own research, Peggy discovers that the belt's benefits are not exactly weight-loss related; rather, women have been purchasing the belt because it vibrates and acts as a tool for female masturbation. Her challenge is to find a way to

create an advertisement for this product without talking about its actual benefit—a topic that is completely taboo in 1960s American culture. In the presentation of the campaign that she comes up with, Peggy exhibits the nervousness she has with this assignment and an adherence to politeness despite her nerves:

PEGGY: [approaching front of room] There's no chair. [long pause]

PEGGY: [opening product] I really wish I could have come in and prepared first.
[nervously moving things around]

DON: Sorry, this is the way it works.

PEGGY: [pause] Of course.

PEGGY: [long pause] I only have one and a carbon. That's all I had time to do. You'll have to share.

KEN: Oh come on. Just give it to one of the girls. [smirking]

OTHER MEN: [soft laughter]

PEGGY: [long pause]

DON: [lifting hand] Ready when you are.

PEGGY: [nodding] [begins pitch]

(*MM*, S01E11, “Indian Summer”)

As noted in Chapter One, in conversational analysis, linguists often consider turn-taking and which of the speakers, or interlocutors, in the conversation holds the floor. Respecting the implicit rules of turn-taking is seen as exhibiting polite speech. One way that interlocutors indicate that their turn is up, or in this case, receive knowledge that it is now their turn to speak is through silence. In this scene, Peggy waits for a long pause of silence before *every* time that she speaks. This indicates that she is respecting the rules of polite turn-taking and waiting for approval from the men in the room before speaking to avoid imposition. The male interlocutors in this conversation, Ken and Don, do not wait for Peggy to pause before responding to her utterances—they simply talk when they see fit regardless of the fact that Peggy is standing in front of the room, about to give a presentation, and she *should* have the floor. Ken and Don hold

power both because they are men and because they have higher positions; their power manifests linguistically in their choice to casually speak whenever they have something to contribute. Also notable here is Peggy's nod to Don, indicating to him that she is listening and will begin only after his approval to do so.

Peggy then gives the pitch to the men in the room. In her pitch, she names the weight-loss belt "The Rejuvenator" and emphasizes its ability to make a woman feel "young" again (*MM*, S01E11, "Indian Summer"). She ends the pitch with the statement "You'll *love* the way it makes you feel," giving the men an opportunity to joke about exactly what it makes a women "feel" (*MM*, S01E11, "Indian Summer"). The scene devolves into a 'locker room talk' style exchange among the men while Peggy stands at the front of the room in silence. Eventually, one of the men tries to include her:

FREDDIE: Mitch's wife is [pause] very attractive.

PEGGY: Oh! I.I don't know her. [looking to Don]

...

KEN: OH MY GOD! Freddie, doesn't your wife have one? [laughing]

(*MM*, S01E11, "Indian Summer")

While all the men in the room speak freely about a taboo subject around Peggy, she maintains her polite composure. Lakoff states that women tend to use "less strong" expressions of emotion such as Peggy's "Oh"; in contrast, just a few lines later, Ken, a male speaker, loudly exclaims "OH MY GOD," a much stronger expression of emotion (*L&WP* 44). Again, he is able to do so because of his status as a more powerful male in the workplace of Sterling Cooper.

As the scene ends, the men leave the presentation room and some of them acknowledge Peggy's work. Here, Peggy begins to understand the power dynamic and exhibits her frustrations about this dynamic:

DON: Now, that wasn't so bad.

PEGGY: [smiles at Don] [long pause]

DON: [leaves room]

PETE: Looks like everybody liked it.

PEGGY: [pause] I can tell.

(*MM*, S01E11, "Indian Summer")

Even though Peggy just had to endure minutes of banter objectifying women, she doesn't speak up about her discomfort when Don ends with the assertive "that wasn't so bad." She simply responds with a smile to her boss. Peggy's frustration with the situation becomes evident by her final comment to Pete after Don leaves the room: "I can tell." Instead of a gracious 'thank you' here, she responds with an assertive acknowledging Pete's comment. Pete holds less power over Peggy than Don does because he is not her boss, is in a different department, and is a bit of a laughing stock amongst the office culture. Peggy is aware of this—she knows she can make a slightly snarky comment to Pete that she couldn't make to Don, whom she gives a gracious smile. Peggy's choice to disregard politeness in her response to Pete is the first instance of her stepping out of line with no consequences; she more boldly navigates the way that power is negotiated in this space—whom she has to be polite with and whom she doesn't.

After this presentation, Don gives Peggy some tasks to revise the campaign. With all of her new responsibilities, Peggy begins to feel a bit overwhelmed with her secretarial work for Don and the copywriting. So, she goes to Don with a few requests, this time using some features of "women's language" to manipulate Don's gendered expectations:

PEGGY: [knocking]

DON: Come in.

PEGGY: [door opening] [long pause] Mr. Draper, I don't want to seem ungrateful, but I think I could serve Sterling Cooper and you better, as a copywriter, if I had my own desk.

DON: You have a desk.

PEGGY: [long pause] But now I have radio spots.

DON: Peggy, the conversation of a raise is not inappropriate at this moment but do *not* be *timid*. You *presented* like a man. Now *act* like one.

PEGGY: [pause] I want five dollars a week more.

DON: [chuckling] Jesus, what do you make?

PEGGY: Thirty five dollars a week.

DON: Well that's a fifteen percent kick! [smilin, shaking head, walking away]

(*MM*, S01E11, "Indian Summer")

Again, in this conversation, Peggy respects the conventions of turn-taking with her pauses, while Don doesn't wait for the pause. Peggy also uses what Lakoff calls a "superpolite form" here: "I don't want to seem ungrateful, but I think I could serve Sterling Cooper and you better, as a copywriter, if I had my own desk" (*L&WP* 80). While "men carelessly blurt out whatever they are thinking," as Lakoff puts it, women "are the repositories of tact and know the right things to say to other people" (*L&WP* 80). Initially, Peggy refers to Don as "Mr. Draper," even though he has previously told her to simply call him "Don"; she is tactful and knows that addressing him in this way will appeal to his vanity. Additionally, the construction is filled with softeners: "I don't want to seem ungrateful," "I think," "I could," and "if I had." These lighten the force of her eventual request for her own desk. She could have simply stated 'I need a desk,' but she dances around this assertive with the polite usage of hedges. However, it is crucial to note that Peggy perhaps uses these features here in order to manipulate Don and get what she wants from him by meeting his expectations for how she should speak.

While Peggy attempts to manipulate some features of "women's language" in the latter part of this scene, it doesn't exactly work out for her. In her work on language and power, Lakoff notes that "for the nonpowerful, directness is dangerous in part because it involves responsibility both for an utterance and for getting a proper response to it" (*TP* 32). Peggy, who in this exchange is "nonpowerful," does not use "directness" for these "dangerous" reasons. On the

other hand, though, “indirectness is [also] dangerous because it can be misunderstood” (Lakoff, *TP* 32). As demonstrated, Peggy ultimately chooses “indirectness” and politeness, but it results in her request being “misunderstood.” Later on the episode, it turns out that Peggy was actually just looking for someone to take over some of her secretarial work while she “attend[s] to [her] assignment”; she is not asking for a raise as Don assumes (*MM*, S01E11, “Indian Summer”).

When Don tells Peggy to “act like [a man],” she doesn’t fully adopt stereotypically masculine speech like commands, direct speech, and assertives in order to correct Don and clarify that she really just wants some help. Instead, she simply politely follows his command and plainly asks for a raise. While Don may think that she is now “act[ing] like [a man]” with this request, he proves that he doesn’t actually approve of her speak in this manner with his responses: “Jesus, what do you make?” and “Well that’s a fifteen percent kick!” Both of these utterances indicate that he won’t take her seriously even if she speaks like a man—he gets to make jokes in response to her requests because he has the power to.

In this section, I examined Peggy’s adherence to “women’s language” with features like softeners, superpolite forms, and weaker expressions of emotion. Additionally, I noted polite style in following the rules of turn-taking, obliging to commands, and acknowledging superiors. Peggy’s adherence mirrors a woman’s real-world navigation through Lakoff’s double-bind. As Lakoff suggests, strict adherence to “women’s language” within this male-dominated workplace results in Peggy not being taken seriously. Don misunderstands her, Pete underestimates her, and the men make jokes at her expense with no punishment. Moving forward, does Peggy follow Don’s command to “act like [a man]”? If so, how does she fare within the other constraint of the double-bind? In the next section, I analyze scenes where Peggy navigates her authority as the

series progresses, expanding upon the idea that adopting stereotypically male language will not be effective for Peggy.

“Women Usually Want to Please”: Peggy’s Failure in Adopting Men’s Language

Don Draper, creative director at Sterling Cooper for the majority of the series, is known in the fictional advertising world of *Mad Men* for his emotional, deeply reflective pitches to clients and novel ideas for ad campaigns. Because of his powerful position and the reputation that precedes him, he is able to get away with a lot of professionally dubious behavior when dealing with clients. For example, when a client expresses reservations or concerns with a campaign that Don pitches, he usually strongarms the client into believing that his idea is the best idea for their company, even if he presents a mediocre ad campaign. This aggressive, overconfident, grandiloquent strategy that employs direct speech and commands seems to work time and time again for Don in winning over clients. Eventually, Peggy, his protege of sorts, picks up on this behavior and attempts it herself when a particular client voices apprehension about an ad campaign during one of her presentations. In other words, she follows Don’s command to “act like [a man],” specifically him. In this section, I outline some features of this strategy and its effectiveness for Don and then examine Peggy’s adoption of a similar set of features and its subsequent ineffectiveness for her.

In the first season, Peggy’s capacity for copywriting is discovered when a group of secretaries are asked to give their input on some Belle Jolie lipsticks for a client. She makes a few comments in the brainstorming session that grab the attention of some of the male copywriters and she is brought into the creation of Belle Jolie’s ad campaign. Don and Freddie

are still the ones to give the pitch to the clients, of course, but they present some of her ideas.

When the client isn't too impressed with the initial campaign, Don speaks up:

KENNY: I'm not telling you to listen to anyone, but this is a very fresh approach.=
 DON: =It's okay, Kenny. [standing up, packing up things] I don't think there's much else to do here but call it a day. [extending hand] Gentlemen, thank you for your time. [pause]
 CLIENT: Is that *all*?=
 DON: [smirking] =You're a nonbeliever. Why should we waste time on Kabuki?
 CLIENT: [pause] [shaking head] I don't know what that means.=
 DON: =[sternly] It means that you've already tried your plan, and you're *number four*. You've enlisted my expertise, and you've *rejected* it to go on the way you've been going. I'm not interested in that. You can understand.
 CLIENT: [pause] I don't think your three months or however many thousands of dollars entitles you to refocus the core of our business.=
 DON: =[sternly] Listen, I'm not here to tell you about Jesus. You already know about Jesus. Either He lives in your heart or He doesn't. *Every* woman wants choices, but in the end, none wants to be one of a hundred in a box. She's unique. She makes the choices, and she's chosen him. She wants to tell the world, "He's *mine*. He belongs to me, not you." She marks her man with her lips. He is her *possession*. You've given every girl that wears your lipstick the gift of *total* ownership.
 [long pause]
 CLIENT: Sit down.=
 DON: =[sternly] No. [pause] Not until I know I'm not wasting my time. [pause]
 CLIENT: Sit down.

(*MM*, S01E08, "The Hobo Code")

As with the previous section, I examine what turn-taking reveals about power dynamics between interlocutors. Each time that Don speaks, he follows up the previous interlocutor's speech act immediately without waiting for a pause to indicate that it is his turn, as indicated by the "=" notation.⁶ He establishes his power in this way for the duration of the conversation. The client accepts and respects this power dynamic even if he seems resistant to what Don is actually saying; he waits for a pause after each time Don speaks to ensure that it is his turn to speak.

⁶ See "Figures" for transcription conventions.

When the client tries to reestablish his own power towards the end of the conversation with the direct command “Sit down,” Don doesn’t cede power to the client. Instead, he still replies immediately, not waiting the pause standard to polite turn-taking, and in defiance of the client.

In *Language and Woman’s Place*, Lakoff also introduces three principles of politeness that are relevant here. First is “formality,” which is to “keep aloof” and “distance [the] speaker” (*L&WP* 88). The second principle is “deference,” or to “give options” and express hesitancy (*L&WP* 89). Finally, the third rule is “camaraderie,” or to “show sympathy” towards the other interlocutor (*L&WP* 88). In the above exchange with the Belle Jolie client, Don is violating all three of Lakoff’s general rules of politeness: formality in that he doesn’t resist imposing his beliefs on the client; deference in that he doesn’t wait for the other party to finish speaking before he does; and camaraderie in that he doesn’t try to make the client feel good and as an equal—he actually treats the client as beneath him.

Another feature of Don’s strategy is his use of detached, abstract language to distract from the client’s actual issue with the campaign. In this case, the client is originally upset because the ad doesn’t display the vast range of lipstick shades that Belle Jolie offers. Don doesn’t even address this concern, instead he just calls the client a “nonbeliever” and goes into a rant referencing vague, abstract concepts like “expertise,” “ownership,” “unique[ness],” and “choice.” By doing this, he establishes himself as having knowledge about something that the client doesn’t understand. Thus, Don commands power because the client needs something from him and the client feels obliged to trust him in order to be in on the secret.

Additionally, Don’s language here is full of direct speech acts. According to Lakoff, “giving a direct order implies a power relationship where the speaker has both the right to give

the order and the expectation that it will be carried out” (TP 30). Instead of following Lakoff’s principles of deference and camaraderie by asking the client for input, Don makes assumptions and tells the client what he thinks or feels. For example, he uses “you’re a nonbeliever,” “you’ve already tried your plan and you’re number *four*,” “you’ve enlisted my expertise and you’ve *rejected* it,” “you can understand,” and “you already know about Jesus.” Notice how when the client tries to be assertive with Don, he begins with “I don’t think your three months...[entitle] you to refocus the core of our business ” and doesn’t say: ‘Your three months do not entitle you to refocus the core of our business.’ Don never uses the phrase ‘I think’ in this conversation because he asserts that he already *knows*; he has authority over the information and the truth.

Even though Don violates terms of polite speech in conversation and is rude to the client, he still successfully sells the original campaign. In fact, the scene ends right after the client tells Don to “sit down” for a second time. The next scene cuts to the account men celebrating with the clients as they walk them out of the offices of Sterling Cooper. It is implied that this strategy works so well that they don’t even need to show the client embracing Don’s aggressive strategy. Don continues to successfully employ this strategy in many pitches throughout the first few seasons that Peggy is witness to.

In the beginning of Season Five, as Peggy starts to gain her footing at Sterling Cooper as one of the high-level copywriters, she is assigned to give a pitch to clients at Heinz for a baked beans campaign. In this scene, Peggy tries to adopt some of the strategies that Don used in the Belle Jolie pitch:

PEGGY: The *fire* is primal. [pause] [gesturing to art] These kids, they *all* come there alone, and gathered in a circle they suddenly feel included. **THEY’RE SAFE FROM WHATEVER IS OUT THERE**, in the night, in the darkness. It’s the beans that brought them *together* on that cool night at the end of the summer. [smirking, making eye contact,

nodding] [revealing artwork, giving time for client to read, smirking confidently] Home is where the Heinz is. [nodding]

[long pause]

CLIENT: I wish someone was eating beans.

STAN: [pointing] That guy is.

PEGGY: [not moving, arms crossed confidently]

(*MM*, S05E05, “Far Away Places”)

Here, Peggy interacts politely with the other interlocutor by smiling, nodding, and making eye contact. However, these gestures may also indicate confidence in the work that she is pitching, an attribute uncharacteristic of “women’s language.” While she isn’t as flippant as Don was in the Belle Jolie pitch, she speaks directly, without key features of Lakoff’s “women’s language” like softeners and superpolite forms that we saw her using in the first section. She speaks loudly,⁷ with emphasis, and without hesitation. Notably, she does not politely respond to the client’s every need; in fact, Stan, the male artist, responds to the client’s concern, “I wish someone was eating beans,” while Peggy stands there confidently, almost defiantly, with her arms crossed. When the client and Peggy start to interact, she imitates Don’s direct, assertive style of speech a little more brazenly:

CLIENT: I did ask for college students.=

PEGGY: =I *know* that Raymond. [nodding, placing hands in pockets] And we want you to have *everything* you asked for.=

CLIENT: =Well stop writing down what I asked for and try to figure out what I *want*!

PEGGY: [giving straight-face, seemingly angered, making eye contact] [pause]

KEN: Raymond, I *saw you* when she was talking. You were *off* somewhere.

CLIENT: It's very sentimental. I have that memory! That's *for me*, that's not for kids.

[turning and talking to Ken]=

PEGGY: =[leaning to side to enter client’s vision] Kids *have* memories. [deep breath]

[chuckle, smirk] And so do the homemakers who *make a home* with Heinz.=

KEN: =Raymond can you *see* how *passionate* she is?

CLIENT: [looking from Ken to Stan]

⁷ Capitalized letters are standard linguistic notation for louder speech. See “Figures.”

STAN: Photography will *really* capture the fun on their faces and the glow.

CLIENT: [turning to Ken again] Did Don sign off on this?=
 PEGGY: =[sternly] DON *loves* this work. Maybe Don doesn't understand what you
 wanted either.=

KEN: =Let's not speak for Don.

(*MM*, S05E05, "Far Away Places")

Here, Peggy attempts to adopt the same violation of turn-taking that Don did in the Belle Jolie pitch. She quickly responds to all of the client's remarks before waiting for a pause indicating her turn, thus violating Lakoff's principle of deference in polite conversation. Additionally, she answers the client's concerns even when he does not voice them to her, interjecting her place and using powerful language. She uses some assertives such as "I know that Raymond," "kids *have* memories," and "DON *loves* this work." Again, she tries to use assertive, powerful, and direct language like Don in order to establish her authority over the information. The notable difference here, though, is how the other interlocutors respond to Peggy's violation of the conventions of polite discourse. The client doesn't wait for her to pause at the end of her statements either, immediately interjecting with an imperative: "Well stop writing down what I asked for"; he fights against Peggy's assertive speech by using his own. He frequently turns to the men in the room, Stan and Ken, to answer his questions rather than directing them towards Peggy. This indicates that the client is unwilling to cede power from himself to Peggy, and if anyone has power in the room other than himself, it is the other men.

Stan and Ken don't give Peggy power either; they constantly jump in and address the client's concerns rather than ignore them like Peggy does. Notice that in Don's takedown of the Belle Jolie client, none of the other men in the room interrupt him or try to defend the position of the client; it is implied that all of the power in the room belongs to Don. Here, because Peggy is a

woman, she is unable to boast Don's reputation and has less institutional power; she enters the pitch with limited authority and we'll see that her flagrant attempts to grasp it using Don's strategies don't bode well for her. Peggy continues to be assertive:

CLIENT: I'm *sorry* I'm not a word person like you people.=

PEGGY: =Sure you are, and your words are always [sternly] "I don't like it." And I think you're right, [approaching client] we *don't* understand you. [pause, making eye contact] Because you *do* like it. [cocking head] I think °you °just °like °fighting [slyly].=

KEN: =Peggy you're being oversensitive.=

PEGGY: = [leaning over table, coming closer to client] Do you know how *often* people come in here and look at work and *feel* something? Almost *never*. *YOU* have to run with this. IT'S *YOUNG* and it's *beautiful* and *no one* else is gonna figure out how to say that about *BEANS*.

CLIENT: [turning to Ken] Can you believe this girl! [pause]

KEN: I don't know. [pause] Can *you*? [pause]

CLIENT: [turning back to Peggy] Miss, you're lucky that I have a daughter or I wouldn't be so understanding [sternly].

PEGGY: [looking down] [pause]

KEN: Raymond, they're frustrated but they're not through.

CLIENT: I'm frustrated too.

(MM, S05E05, "Far Away Places")

Peggy continues violating the conventions of turn-taking by quickly interjecting before waiting for a pause. Additionally, she makes several assertives about the client, assuming how he feels and thinks, actually implying that he is being devious and unnecessarily adversarial. For example, she uses "Sure you are," "your words are always 'I don't like it,'" "you *do* like it," "I think °you °just °like °fighting,"⁸ and "*YOU* have to run with this." Even though she does use the hedge "I think," and expresses hesitation with the use of quieter speech, overall, she follows a very similar strategy to Don in *telling* the client what they want or feel rather than *listening* to the client. As Lakoff notes, "the powerful have less to fear through directness: they don't have to

⁸ Degree symbols are standard linguistic notation for quieter speech. See "Figures."

worry so much about being rude...and they don't have as much reason to worry about being found to be in error" (*TP* 32). Don can be direct and tell the client what to do because he is powerful and it doesn't matter if he is "rude" or "found to be in error." For Peggy, because she lacks important structural power, these worries are a little more salient and threatening—she could be labeled a "humorless bitch," or she could even lose her job.

Peggy also tries to use Don's strategy of distraction with the use of abstract language here. Amidst her assertions, Peggy talks about subjects like "you[th]," "beaut[y]," and "feel[ing]" rather than addressing the client's concrete concerns with the ad. She tries to use this dramatic, sensationalized language to establish herself as the source of knowledge on the subject of advertising like Don did with Belle Jolie, but it is ineffective. The client snaps back at her and Ken has to fix the situation. In fact, after this altercation between Peggy and the Heinz client, she gets removed from the Heinz business at the request of the client; another copywriter is assigned to try again with a new pitch to the same client.

After the meeting is over, Stan, the artist who was in the room with her produces the comment that this thesis opened with: "I've gotta admire you, that was a *completely* suicidal move. Women usually want to please" (*MM*, S05E05, "Far Away Places"). Peggy does not respond to this; rather, she just commands Stan to "give [her] sketches of the talking beans" (*MM*, S05E05, "Far Away Places"). The scene ends with Peggy clearly frustrated that her attempts to establish power and strongarm the client don't work for her like they do for Don. Notably, though, she does employ direct, stereotypically masculine speech in commanding Stan once the client leaves the room. Even after her failure is using this style of language with the client, she uses it with Stan—and it is effective: he obliges. This is another indication of Peggy's

growing understanding of the negotiation between power and language here: who she can command and who she can't, when it will be effective and when it won't be.

In this section, Peggy's usage of stereotypically masculine speech, characterized by assertive conversational tactics, commands, and grandiloquent diction, got her fired from a campaign and left her with some angry superiors. Essentially, as Lakoff puts it, in Peggy's "[refusal] to talk like a lady, she is ridiculed and subjected to criticism as unfeminine" (*L&WP* 41); the client replies with "Miss, you're lucky that I have a daughter or I wouldn't be so understanding," and Stan says "women usually want to please." Here, Peggy is subject to the other constraint of Lakoff's double-bind; she is "less than a woman." Because this attempt to imitate Don and adopt men's language is not effective for Peggy, the writers leave us wondering how she will approach her high-level position in the next portion of the series. Will she continue trying this method? Or will she try to speak differently to sell campaigns? In the next section, I explore how Peggy navigates her power successfully, speaking in a way that does not necessarily conform to either Lakoff's "women's language" or Don's stereotypically masculine speech.

"Every Great Ad Tells A Story. Here to Tell That Story Is Peggy Olson": A New Kind of Powerful Women's Language

Mad Men's writers indicate that Peggy understands that Don's strategies aren't going to work for her because she is a woman and the men that she interacts with in the workplace have pre-existing expectations for her behavior; they expect her to adhere to the stereotype of women who "want to please" (*MM*, S05E05, "Far Away Places"). Thus, the writers play with this stereotype in a way that lends to Peggy's success. In this final section, I explore how Peggy is

depicted as finding a middle-ground between “women’s language” and stereotypically masculine speech, in which she manipulates features of “women’s language” in order to establish the same kind of power that a man would achieve using stereotypically masculine speech in her position.

In the end of the fifth season of *Mad Men*, Peggy tells Don that she is going to quit her job at Sterling Cooper to accept a position as creative director at Cutler Gleason & Chaough, a competing ad agency on Madison Avenue.⁹ At the beginning of Season Six, Peggy navigates her new position of power and struggles a bit with telling her subordinates that they are failing to come up with strong taglines for a new ad campaign:

PEGGY: °Have a seat. [nodding] [long pause]

STAFF: [moving towards couch]

PEGGY: No don't. [sternly]

STAFF 1: What's wrong with them?

PEGGY: The strategy is Clearasil stops blemishes that keep you from having fun. That means *no one should be having fun* [shaking head)]. [long pause]

STAFF 3: [nodding] °Okay, so we'll just start over.

PEGGY: [inbreath] Just a minute [outbreath]. [standing up, smiling] I don't want you to think that just because I have high standards [outbreath] that means I'm not happy with you, especially, you know, the way you are. [pause] [outbreath] The way you are has nothing to do with the fact that the work needs work.

STAFF 1: Thank you coach. We'll try our best.

PEGGY: [smiling, awkward gesturing] There you go.

(*MM*, S06E02, “Collaborators”)

Even though this might seem like a simply awkward scene, there is a notable shift here in Peggy’s speech from both the first section with “women’s language” and the second section with the imitation of stereotypically masculine speech. For example, she still uses commands such as “No don’t [sit down]” and assertives such as “*no one should be having fun.*” She speaks sternly and shakes her head to indicate her disappointment. However, she complicates these assertive

⁹ This scene is further analyzed in Chapter Three.

gestures with others that have a more polite, positive nature such as smiles, nods, and pauses. Additionally, Peggy uses some hedging language such as “I don’t want you to think that just because...” and “you know” interspersed with the more assertive language. The phrase “you know” here is interesting because it encourages collaboration and invites the subordinates to have an opinion, rather than simply telling them what is fact. Peggy softly criticizes her subordinates’ work: “The way you are has nothing to do with the fact that the work needs work.” She doesn’t say ‘I need you to produce better work for me’ or ‘You need to work harder on this,’ rather she takes the responsibility away from both parties and ascribes it to something inanimate: “the work.”

The result as an effective performance of power for: Peggy’s subordinates wait for a pause after her instruction to ensure that it is their turn to speak and they listen to her, indicating their understanding of their assignment: “Thank you coach, we’ll try our best.” She is able to maintain her power while still adhering to the conventions of Lakoff’s polite discourse: formality in that she doesn’t impose too much of her will upon her subordinates; deference in that she opens the floor for other interlocutors to contribute; and camaraderie in that she stands at the same level as them, treating them like human beings who are bound to make mistakes, not as inherently less than her.

In the final season, Peggy continues to manipulate features of “women’s language” in order to achieve the effects that Don might get using his more assertive style of language. The last important ad campaign of the show is SC&P’s attempt to win over clients at Burger Chef, a fast food chain restaurant based in California. At this point, Peggy is creative director and thus gives the final presentation, but the partners decide to have Don introduce her in order to benefit

from his renown in the advertising industry. Peggy’s final presentation is in stark contrast to both her first presentation of the weight-loss belt and her failed presentation with Heinz. Here, she manipulates features of “women’s language,” principles of politeness, and cooperative discourse in order to establish her authority on the subject without being labeled as a “humorless bitch” who is rude and unfeminine or a “meaningless secretary” who has no place sharing her expertise on an important advertising campaign. Don begins by reaffirming Peggy’s expertise:

DON: I'm gonna be bold and say that [pause] no one in this room knows more about the Burger Chef customer than Peggy Olson. [pause]

PEGGY: [smiling]

DON: She has visited *twenty* restaurants in *nine* states, interviewed hundreds, and is *obviously uniquely* qualified to craft this *modern* campaign. [pause] *Every* great ad tells a story. Here to tell that story is Peggy Olson. [looking to Peggy, pause]

PEGGY: [looking to Don, smiling, nodding] Thank you, Don. [pause] That's a lot to live up to [deep breath], because I certainly can't *tell* a better story than the one we saw last night. [pause, nodding]

PEGGY: I don't know what was more miraculous: the technological achievement that put our *species* in a new *perspective* or the fact that all of us were doing the same *thing* at the same *time*. [pause] Sitting in this room, we can still feel the pleasure of that connection because, I realize now, we were *starved* for it! [pause]

PEGGY: We really were. [pause] And yes, we'll feel it again when they all return safely. And yes, the world will never be the same in some ways.

(*Mad Men*, S07E07, “Waterloo”)

Peggy’s initial utterance in the above presentation is a polite expression of gratitude and an acceptance of Don’s role in giving her the cue that it is okay for her to speak. She continues with “That’s a lot to live up to,” a softener that adheres to Lakoff’s principle of deference with its humble nature. Additionally, she uses several collective pronouns such “we” and “us” that have two effects. First, they establish a more collaborative setting where the client is part of the conversation. Second, they indirectly limit Peggy’s authority so it doesn’t seem like she is directly imposing her personal beliefs onto them—something that did not serve her well, as

demonstrated in the previous section. Peggy’s usage of polite forms and indirectness here is strategic; she wants the clients to buy into her story without them labeling her as a woman speaking out of turn. She continues using a similar strategy throughout the presentation and it proves successful:

PEGGY: But *tonight*, I'm going to go back to New York, and I'll go back to my apartment and find a ten year old boy parked in front of my TV eating dinner. [smiling, pause]

PEGGY: Now, I *don't* need to charge you for a research report that tells you that most television sets are not more than *six* feet away from the dinner table. And that dinner table is your battlefield and your prize. [pause]

PEGGY: [making eye contact] This is the home your customers really live in. This is *your* dinner table. [pause] Dad likes Sinatra, son likes The Rolling Stones. The TV's *always* on, Vietnam playing in the background. The news *wins* every night. [pause]

PEGGY: And you're starving [shaking head] and not just for dinner.

PEGGY: [long pause, standing up, approaching artwork] What if there was another table, where *everybody* gets what they want, when they want it? It's *bright* and *clean*, and there's no laundry, no telephone, and no TV. And we can have the connection that we're *hungry* for. [pause]

PEGGY: There may be chaos at home, but there's family supper at Burger Chef. [smiling, long pause]

CLIENTS: [wiping tears, eyes watering]

CLIENT: That's beautiful. [shaking head]

PEGGY: [laughing] That's nice to hear! Because that's the name of the spot. [revealing artwork]

(*Mad Men*, S07E07, “Waterloo”)

Peggy continues to express humility and soften her assertions with the phrase “now, I *don't* need to charge you for a research paper that tells you...” She doesn’t demand authority over information and truth in the same way that Don did in the previous section; rather, she suggests to her clients that they also have access to this knowledge. She continues to use collective pronouns like “we,” limiting her authority and creating a collaborative atmosphere. Peggy’s

manipulation of polite conventions and indirect assertions here ultimately results in tears and an affirmation of “That’s beautiful” from the client.

In this scene, it becomes evident that Peggy is capable of transcending Lakoff’s double-bind. She is neither “less than a person” nor “less than a woman,” neither the “meaningless secretary” nor the “humorless bitch.” Instead, she strategically uses features of Lakoff’s “women’s language” in order to both meet the gendered expectations of the men around her—she isn’t too assertive for a woman—and subvert the same expectations—she can simultaneously be a woman and have an important contribution.

Throughout the sixth and seventh seasons, Peggy continues to try out these different strategies to construct a more nuanced semblance of power. The writers demonstrate that Peggy doesn’t have to entirely abide by gendered expectations in order to appease her male audience, but she also doesn’t need to abandon “women’s language” entirely in order to be taken seriously. Peggy’s ability to construct such power and success using a combination of these forms of language acts in opposition to Lakoff’s claim that “a girl is damned if she does, damned if she doesn’t” (*L&WP* 41). Peggy does refuse to talk like a lady in some cases, but ultimately isn’t “ridiculed and subjected to criticism as unfeminine;” in the instances where she does use “women’s language,” she is not “ridiculed as unable to think clearly, unable to take part in a serious discussion,” rather she manipulates it to get what she wants (*Lakoff, L&WP* 41). The writers of *Mad Men* present Peggy as a new kind of career woman, one that can succeed in the 1960s by neither losing her womanhood in going through assertiveness training programs nor being confined by stereotypes of women during her time in always being timid and unsure of herself.

Chapter Three

“Peggy, Listen to Me,” “Don, Listen to Me”: Peggy & Don

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, Peggy’s language undergoes notable fluctuation as she navigates her growing authority and burgeoning career as a female copywriter. The writers paint a sophisticated picture of her complicated journey towards understanding how she must talk based on who she is interacting with in order to advance in the workplace. Ultimately, Peggy is shown transcending Lakoff’s double-bind and manipulating certain features of “women’s language” and polite speech in order to achieve career success and be simultaneously powerful and, in some respects, stereotypically feminine.

While Chapter Two focuses heavily on important career moments of Peggy’s authority, this chapter explores Peggy’s most important personal relationship that influences her eventual success in advertising. Don Draper, male protagonist and acclaimed creative genius of *Mad Men*, is the first to ask Peggy for her insight on an advertising campaign while she is his secretary. As creative director, he ‘discovers’ her talent and quickly entrusts her with significant responsibilities in the creative department at Sterling Cooper. According to Peggy, “Everyone¹⁰ thinks [she] slept with [him] to get the job. They joke about it, like it’s so funny because the possibility was so remote” (*MM*, S04E07, “The Suitcase”). Despite the fact that Don and Peggy are one of the only male and female duos in the show that are never intimately involved, they do maintain a very close friendship and mentor-mentee relationship; their conversations seem to be more personal than that of actual romantic or heterosexual partnerships in the series.

¹⁰ “Everyone” here refers to the other employees at Sterling Cooper (or later referred to as SCDP and SC&P), as well as the New York advertising community at large. Executives sleeping with secretaries is a common phenomenon in the world of *Mad Men*; after all, Don cheats on his first wife with a secretary and a different secretary becomes his second wife.

In an attempt to understand Peggy and Don's close interpersonal friendship and his role as her male mentor, boss, and eventual counterpart in the workplace, this chapter analyzes the linguistic construction of power in their relationship. While Chapter Two links power and success, this chapter examines power in terms of need: how language functions when Peggy needs Don, and vice versa, whether it be for emotional support or work-related tasks. As Peggy and Don are both intimate friends and work colleagues, they need each other in several different situations. In such moments, the person who needs something lends a kind of power to the person that they need that thing from. For example, I consider a scene where Don needs Peggy's support at a new agency and another scene where Peggy needs Don's guidance and support after she unexpectedly has a baby outside of marriage. In both scenes, power is being negotiated and performed. Sometimes, Peggy adheres to gendered expectations that she should cede all power to Don. In other instances, she defies gendered expectations by using assertive language or manipulating "women's language" (or "powerless language") in order to get what she wants from Don. In the end, the writers depict Peggy and Don's relationship as transcending these two kinds of relative manifestations of power; instead of simply abiding by or refusing to abide by gendered stereotypes, they are portrayed as being friends and who holds the power isn't as essential to their relationship.

In order to understand the scripted portrayal of Peggy and Don's intimate friendship, I must consider linguistic theories about male-female relationships in the actual world. According to "Interaction: The Work Women Do," a seminal study performed by linguist Pamela Fishman, "there is an unequal distribution of work in conversation," as women "labor hardest in making

interactions go” (98). Fishman looks at specific linguistic phenomena in her dataset such as asking questions, making statements, and topic control to make the following conclusions:

While women have difficulty generating interactions, they are almost always available to do the conversational work required by men and which is necessary for interactions.

Appearances may differ by case: sometimes women are required to sit and “be a good listener” because they are not otherwise needed. At other times women are required to fill silences and keep conversations moving, to talk a lot. Sometimes they are expected to develop others’ topics, and at other times they are required to present and develop topics of their own. (99)

While her study collected data from three heterosexual romantic couples, she suggests that “these patterns [may] appear in other hierarchical relations, like bosses and workers,” so they may be applicable to Don and Peggy’s working relationship, as it is fictionally depicted (94). However, their relationship isn’t necessarily typical of average “bosses and workers,” as Peggy and Don consistently rely on each other outside of their work. Notably, we never really see either Peggy or Don have successful romantic partnerships or other friendships until the end of the series; Peggy is the only constant substantive relationship in Don’s life as is Don for Peggy. For these reasons, I have chosen to apply some of Fishman’s findings, which are regularly cited in more recent studies on gender and talk in the workplace, to the linguistic analysis of power in Peggy and Don’s relationship. In accordance with Fishman’s findings, does Peggy “do the shitwork [of conversation] and not complain” (99), giving authority to Don, or does something more complicated occur between these two? As discussed in Chapter One, women are often placed in powerless or subordinate positions, and thus are not expected to use an explicitly

powerful style. Throughout this chapter, Don will use this stereotypically masculine style, while Peggy is faced with finding a different way to subtly construct her power and get her needs met.

As demonstrated in the first section of Chapter Two, for the majority of the first season, Peggy uses stereotypically feminine language and remains “available to do what needs to be done in conversation” (Fishman 99). This is consistent in Peggy’s conversations with Don while she works as his secretary. One of the first major instances of Don needing Peggy occurs near the end of Season One, when Don officially promotes Peggy from secretary to copywriter. In this exchange, Don employs stereotypically masculine, assertive speech while Peggy uses stereotypically feminine, polite speech. This allows Don to assume power in their conversation:

Pete: PEGGY IS NOT EVEN A COPYWRITER, SHE’S A [stammering] *secretary*!

Don: PEGGY! [door opening]

Peggy: Yes, Mr. Draper?=
 Don: =Miss Olson, you are now a junior copywriter.

Don: =Miss Olson, you are now a junior copywriter.

Pete: [glaring]

Don: Your first account will be delivering Clearasil to the spotted masses.

Peggy: °What?

Paul: Don’t act surprised.

Peggy: Is *this* really happening?

Don: [pause, looking at Pete] Yes, it is.

Peggy: [pause] My goodness. I will do my *sincere* best. [shaking Don’s hand]

Don: Good to hear. Mr. Campbell here will brief you after the holiday.

Pete: [storming out]

Peggy: °Of °course.

Don: That’ll be all.

Peggy: [pause, nodding] Thank you, Mr. Draper.

(*MM*, S01E13, “The Wheel”)

While Don’s decision to promote Peggy here is made in the heat of the moment and is used as a tactic to assert his own power over Pete, a particularly whiny account man, she is granted a new status of authority nonetheless. However, authority is still ultimately in the hands of Don. He

begins with “PEGGY,” a indirect command that summons her. After Peggy heeds his call politely with “Yes, Mr. Draper,” Don responds with two assertives: “You are now a junior copywriter” and “Your first account will be...”; he *tells* her what her new job will be as opposed to *asking* her if she would like this new responsibility. As previously noted, Lakoff states that “giving a direct order implies a power relationship where the speaker has both the right to give the order and the expectation that it will be carried out” (TP 30). Don’s direct speech here indicates that he recognizes his own power in this conversation: he gets to tell Peggy what to do and he knows she will do it.

In contrast, questions cede power from the asker to the other interlocutor because they require a response, or extend an interest in what the other person has to say. According to Fishman, women ask more questions than men because “by asking questions, women strengthen the possibility of a response to what they have to say” (94). Notice that Peggy responds to Don’s assertives with two questions: “What?” and “Is *this* really happening?” According to Lakoff, “asking a question...places the speaker in a position of inferiority, one of needing something from the other person—information” (TP 30). Peggy’s “inferiority” becomes evident with her usage of questions here; she is looking for confirmation from Don to dictate the status of her own new reality. He takes this opportunity for power over her reality: “Yes, it is.”

Despite the fact that Don is insincere in this interaction and hires Peggy out of spite to frustrate Pete, as seen with lines such as “Mr. Campbell here will brief you after the holiday,” Peggy still accepts her new job with grace. She responds with “my goodness,” a phrase that Lakoff would call an “empty” construction only used by women (L&WP 78). She leaves the interaction with the polite construction “Thank you, Mr. Draper,” after he uses “That’ll be all,”

which functions as an indirect command for her to leave. As we have seen, Don asserts his power in this conversation and Peggy cedes it to him by doing the labor of asking questions and maintaining politeness while Don makes statements and commands that she accepts.

As Season Two progresses, Don retains a similar power over Peggy in their conversation. This dynamic even persists in very emotional and personal moments. For example, when Peggy is in the hospital after having her baby,¹¹ Don visits her in her weakened physical and mental condition. In this instance, Peggy is in need of someone to give her guidance about what to do regarding her unexpected child; Don fills this role:

PEGGY: Is that you? [pause] Are you really there?

DON: Yes, I am.

PEGGY: What are you doing here?

DON: You got a promotion and disappeared. Your Christmas present is sitting on your desk. I called your house and your roommate gave me your mother's number.

PEGGY: [shaking head, sitting up] Oh, God. [deep breath]

DON: Your mother told me you were quarantined. TB. [raising eyebrows] I guess that was supposed to lessen my concern. [pause]

PEGGY: [nodding, gulping] I'm sorry.

DON: What's wrong with you?

PEGGY: °I °don't °know.

DON: What do they want you to do?

PEGGY: °I °don't °know.

DON: Yes, you do. Do it. Do whatever they say. [pause, leaning forward] Peggy, listen to me. *Get out* of here and move forward. This never happened. It will *shock* you how much it never happened.

(*MM*, S02E05, "The New Girl")

Don's two utterances "You got a promotion..." and "Your mother told me..." are intriguing because they are a list of statements that are rather expository and observational in nature. While

¹¹ Peggy gains a lot of weight in the first season but is unaware of her pregnancy. She doesn't fully understand what is happening up until that point that she goes into labor. As Peggy is an unmarried woman in the 1960s, the baby is given up for adoption and only Don and Peggy's mother have knowledge of its existence at all. Don is the only person to visit her in the hospital where she is presumably kept for psychological reasons after the birth.

they aren't questions, they indirectly demand a response. Similarly, the statement "I guess that was supposed to lessen my concern," seeks an explanation from Peggy. Even in her weakened condition, she has to acknowledge his request with "Oh, God," and apologize for inconveniencing him: "I'm sorry." When Don asks Peggy questions like "What's wrong with you?" and "What do they want you to do?" they don't place him in the same position of inferiority as they did for Peggy in the previous scene. While his questions do serve as a request for information from Peggy, Don does not simply accept Peggy's "I don't know"; rather, he provides his own answers to the questions. The final utterance in this scene is filled with five commands in the span of a few sentences: "Do it," "Do whatever they say," "listen to me," "*Get out of here,*" and "move forward." Additionally, he makes a few assertives: "Yes, you do" and "This never happened." The scene ends here, as Don asserts his power and provides no opportunity for Peggy to agree to his commands, let alone contend with them. The writers indicate to us that she does oblige, however, because the subject is broached only one more time in the seven seasons of the series.

The power dynamic between Peggy and Don starts to get more complicated towards the end of the Season Three. At this point, Peggy is regarded as one of the lead junior copywriters and is Don's right-hand woman for creating successful ad campaigns. As the third season comes to a close, Sterling Cooper is sold to a larger ad agency in New York and Don, Roger, and Bert¹² decide to break off, start a new agency, and bring their loyal clients with them. Don needs Peggy to come along and join the new agency and, for the first time, she resists his demands. Power is

¹² The three partners of the original Sterling Cooper.

being negotiated here, as power only functions when it is granted. Peggy pushes back against Don's demands that she joins the new agency:

DON: Peggy, my office!

PEGGY: [exiting her office, approaching Don's secretary] What do I bring?

SECRETARY: [shrugs]

PEGGY: [entering Don's office]

DON: [shuffling papers] Shut the door. Sit down.

PEGGY: [nervously fidgeting with clothing] I know we have to roll out Western Union by New Year's. I don't have art. There's no one there.

DON: They're selling the company.

PEGGY: Again?

DON: I'm starting a new agency. I need you here Sunday evening to get your things and to help us collect whatever accounts we end up taking.

PEGGY: Really?=
 DON: =Yes.

DON: =Yes.

PEGGY: [pause] Who else is going?

DON: WHY do you need to know that?

PEGGY: Because it, it's important.=

DON: =I can't tell you.

(*MM*, S03E13, "Shut The Door. Have A Seat.")

As their conversation begins, Peggy asks questions and Don produces assertives and commands, similar to the previous scenes. As explored in Chapter Two, examining topic control, which considers who raises topics and which topics get talked about, helps reveal who holds authority in conversations. In her study, Fishman found that while women raise more topics than men do, only 38% of their topics are picked up and evolve into conversation (97). This means, that men either ignore the topics that women raise entirely or do not provide substantial engagement to keep the conversation going. Thus, those who raise topics that succeed in creating conversation, hold more power amongst interlocutors. When Peggy begins by making excuses about the Western Union campaign, Don responds with "They're selling the company," completely

ignoring her previous statement. Instead of going back to her previously mentioned topic, she supports his new topic: “Again?” Don doesn’t bother to respond to her question, and continues with “I’m starting a new agency.” Here, Don has complete control over the topics in the conversation. Next, he produces a very powerful utterance: “I need you here Sunday evening to get your things and to help us collect whatever accounts we end up taking.” The indirect command, “I need you here,” along with the use of the collective nouns “we” and “us,” assume that Peggy will oblige with no questions asked; however, she doesn’t:

DON: PEGGY, we are being bought by *McCann*. Do you know what that *means*?

PEGGY: You just assume I’ll do whatever you *say*. Just follow you like some nervous poodle.

DON: I’m not gonna beg you.=

PEGGY: =Beg me? You didn’t even *ask* me.

DON: [raising brow] Fine. I’m *asking* you.

PEGGY: [squinting] I’ve had other offers, you know, that came with a *sales* pitch about *opportunity*. Everyone thinks you do all my work. [shaking head] Even you. [deep breath] I don’t want to make a career out of being there so you can kick me when you fail.

DON: °I °guess I’ll have to talk to Kurt and Smitty.

PEGGY: I guess so. [walking out]

(*MM*, S03E13, “Shut The Door. Have A Seat.”)

After Don asks Peggy “Do you know what that *means*?” she doesn’t answer his question; instead, she calls him out on his actions. Here, she takes the first step towards asserting her authority in the conversation by producing several powerful speech acts: ignoring his question, taking back topic control, and expressing her authentic feelings. Peggy’s statement “You just assume I’ll do whatever you say,” indirectly says ‘No.’ Don reads into her indirect defiance and expresses his discomfort with her attempt to assume power: “I’m not going to beg you.” Immediately, Peggy responds with “Beg me? You didn’t even *ask* me.” In the first half of this

conversation, she makes attempts such as asking questions to indirectly get Don to ask her to join him at the new agency; when he doesn't do this, she calls him out. Remarkably, Don responds with an assertive that functions as a question: "Fine. I'm *asking* you." Even after Peggy calls him out, Don refuses to actually ask for her help; instead, he produces a speech act that describes his doing so. Aware of Don's unwillingness to give up his power and express that he needs her, Peggy states: "Everyone thinks you do all my work. Even you." Don tries to maintain his power and control of topics discussed by not responding her statements: "I guess I'll have to talk to Kurt and Smitty." Peggy responds with "I guess so," an indirect speech act that calls his bluff and basically acts as a 'no' to Don's indirect ask.

Later in the episode, Don goes to Peggy's apartment to try again. Peggy does something very powerful and aggressive in the beginning of this scene:

PEGGY: [opening door] You look awful.

DON: °Can °I °come °in?

PEGGY: [nodding]

DON: [walking in, sitting down] [long pause]

PEGGY: [shrugging, shaking head] Do you *want* anything?

DON: [pause] Yes, I do. [pause, deep breath] You were right. I've taken you for granted and I've been hard on you, but only because I think I see you as an extension of *myself*.

°And °you're °not. [shaking head]

PEGGY: [pause] Well, thank you for stopping by.

(*MM*, S03E13, "Shut The Door. Have A Seat.")

The utterance "Well, thank you for stopping by," seems like an innocuous closing, but in the context of this conversation, it is extremely authoritative. Peggy uses a polite speech act as an indirect command for him to leave. Not only does she refuse to respond to Don's confessions, she maintains her politeness and femininity while commanding Don to leave her home. Ignoring

Peggy's indirect command, Don pleads for a conversation. He opens his next attempt with another command albeit more polite than usual:

DON: °Please, sit down. [gesturing]

PEGGY: [sitting down]

DON: Do you know why I don't want to go to McCann?=
PEGGY: =Because you can't *work* for anyone else.

DON: [pause] °No. Because there are people out there who *buy* things, °people °like °you °and °me, and something happened, something terrible. [pause] And the way that they saw themselves is gone. [shaking head] [long pause] And nobody understands that. [pause] But you *do*. [pause] And that's very valuable.

PEGGY: [pause] [making eye contact, tearing up] Is it?

DON: [pause] With you or without you, I'm moving on. [pause, deep breath] And I don't know if I can do it alone. [tearing up] [pause] Will you help me?

PEGGY: [long pause] [trembling] What if I say no? [deep breath, shaking head] You'll never speak to me again.

DON: [pause] [squinting, shaking head] No. I will spend the rest of my life trying to hire you.

(*MM*, S03E13, "Shut The Door. Have A Seat.")

After his polite command "°Please, sit down," Don proceeds to initiate a topic, suggesting he assumes he is still in control of the discourse. Peggy immediately snaps back with "Because you can't *work* for anyone else," an assertive that functions as an insult; this is one of the first times she directly insults Don. Next, Don begins using metaphors and abstract language, similar to that of the grandiloquent and sensationalized language we saw him using with clients in Chapter Two. As Peggy holds back tears, she attempts to assert power once more with "Is it?" a question that asks Don to give her some praise or, at least, finally admit that he needs her help. Don responds by admitting "I don't know if I can do it alone" and finally asks "Will you help me?" After two conversations and Peggy calling Don out on his inability to ask for her help, this is the *first* time that Don actually invites her to join the new agency in the form of an honest question. The scene ends with a romantic line from Don, leaving the audience to assume that Peggy

agrees. Even though she doesn't ultimately say 'no,' Peggy still asserts her power over Don and gets him to do what he has never been able to before: ask for her help. This is a major turning point in the power dynamic between Peggy and Don because it depicts Peggy as a powerful female character; she is able to strategically use features of "women's language" and polite speech like questions and indirect requests in order to get Don to do what she wants.

As Peggy establishes herself as a feminine creative force in the world of *Mad Men*, other agencies begin to show interest in her talents. With her increasing independence from Don, she starts to seek out other opportunities in order to further her career. She takes an offer from Cutler, Gleason, and Chaough and informs Don of her decision to leave SCDP:

PEGGY: [approaching Don, smiling] Congratulations.

DON: [pause] You wanted to talk to me?

PEGGY: [looking confused] You're not busy?

DON: [closing door to office celebration] °I'm °not °in °the °mood.

PEGGY: [pause, shaking head] You really have no idea when things are good, do you?

DON: [gesturing towards his office]

PEGGY: [entering Don's office] I swear I don't really need to talk right now.

DON: [pause] Drink with me. [handing Peggy drink]

PEGGY: I have to talk about something °kind °of °serious.

DON: [pause, cocking head] I can't put a girl on Jaguar. [shaking head] These car guys, I just *can't*. But, you know=

PEGGY: =It's not that [shaking head]

DON: [pause] Is this about Joan being made partner?

PEGGY: What?

DON: The circumstances [shrugging], she's been with us thirteen years.

(*MM*, S05E10, "The Other Woman")

Peggy opens this scene with a polite greeting, only for Don ignore to her topic initiation and refuse to respond with a polite 'thank you.' Next, Peggy produces two utterances that adhere to Lakoff's "women's language": she makes a statement in the form of a question with "You're not busy?" and she uses a tag question with "You really have no idea when things are good, do

you?” According to Lakoff, women use these constructions to soften the intensity of their utterances (*L&WP* 47). Peggy then uses a hedge, “kind of,” that functions similarly as a minimization of force.

While Peggy produces polite, stereotypically feminine utterances here and Don makes commands like “Drink with me,” there is something different about this conversation. Don produces several fragments, which are uncharacteristic of his speech, in trying to explain himself; coupled with vague justifications like “these car guys” and “the circumstances,” it is evident that Don is nervous, is aware of Peggy’s seriousness, and is making excuses for his choices. This stands out because in previous conversations, Don wasn’t expected to give an explanation; the power dynamic between Peggy and Don has clearly changed as he feels he owes her an explanation. Next, Peggy continues with the announcement of her resignation:

PEGGY: [taking drink] [long pause] I want you to know that the day you saw something in me, [deep breath] my whole life changed. And since then, it’s been my privilege [deep breath] not only to be at your side but to be treated like a protege and for you to be my mentor °and °my °champion.

DON: [pause, sitting back, cocking head] But?

PEGGY: °But, [looking down] I think I’ve reached a point where it’s time for me to have a new experience.

DON: [pause, sly look] Really?=
 PEGGY: =I’m giving my notice. I’ve accepted another offer.

DON: [shrugging] Are you done?

PEGGY: [pause] I’m giving the customary two weeks. My last day will be the third and don’t think=
 DON: =Hold on. [pause, deep breath] It’s been *crazy* around here and I know I’ve been taking you for granted and frankly, I’m impressed. [smiling, deep breath] You *finally* picked the right time to ask for a raise.

PEGGY: [stone cold] It’s time for me to move on.

(*MM*, S05E10, “The Other Woman”)

In this section, Peggy establishes her authority by producing several assertives like “I’m giving my notice,” “I’ve accepted another offer,” “I’m giving the customary two weeks,” and “It’s time for me to move on,” all amidst Don’s questioning. However, she’s not entirely assertive and all-powerful as her statements “I think I’ve reached a point where it’s time for me to have a new experience,” and “It’s time for me to move on,” include hedges like “I think” and impersonal phrases like “it’s time” in order to soften the force of these assertives and avoid claiming ownership over her choice. She could have said ‘I am moving on’ or ‘I am choosing to have a new experience,’ but she doesn’t make herself the subject of these statements. She does not succumb to Don’s attempt to change her decision; after he initiates the idea of a raise, she does not pick up this topic and simply returns to her original choice. In the final part of the scene, the writers capture Peggy asserting the kind of power that she is capable of moving forward:

DON: [smiling] Come on.

PEGGY: I’m serious.

DON: [leaning back, looking concerned, trembling] °You’re °serious.

PEGGY: It wasn’t easy=

DON: =[shaking head, tone angry] Oh, I’m sure it wasn’t. [pause, tone more sincere] Well, good for you. Where are you going?

PEGGY: Cutler, Gleason, and Chaough

DON: [chuckling, shaking head, face flushed, getting angry again] Perfect. [pause] Okay, well, let’s pretend I’m not responsible for every single good thing that’s ever happened to you and you tell me a number, or make one up and I’ll beat it=

PEGGY: =There’s no number.=

DON: =There’s no number? HOW LONG do you want to play this out?

PEGGY: [pause] I’m sorry, but you know this is what you would do.

DON: [pause, shaking head] You don’t need to wait until the third. I’ve got a room full of freelancers out there. I’ll get by.

PEGGY: [pause, nodding] I understand.

DON: [grabs Peggy’s hand and kisses it, Peggy starts crying]

PEGGY: [pause, gulping] Don’t be a stranger. [leaving office]

(*MM*, S05E10, “The Other Woman”)

As the scene closes, Don desperately makes jabs at Peggy, but she stands by her decision to quit. Despite his growing agitation, she maintains her composure and produces several curt assertives: “I’m serious,” “There’s no number,” “I understand.” Don’s last attempt at asserting his power is by indirectly commanding her to quit earlier than she indicated she wanted to: “You don’t need to wait until the third...” For the first time, a scene ends with a command from Peggy, “Don’t be a stranger,” and no response from Don. Peggy has control of the conversation: she makes a decision to do something for herself and she stands up to Don in the process.

Prior to Peggy taking her job at CGC,¹³ Don is creative director and executive partner while she is a senior copywriter. At CGC, Peggy is made creative director under Ted Chaough, previous director who moves into a more executive role as partner. However, when CGC later merges with SCDP, Peggy maintains her title as creative director, but essentially reports to both Ted *and* Don, former creative directors of each agency. While she technically still works for Don, there is another man with the same amount of institutional power as him, Ted, who Peggy happens to be having an affair with. After Don essentially outs their affair and embarrasses Ted during a client meeting, Peggy stands up to Don:

PEGGY: [marching into Don’s office, opening door without knocking] I know *what* you did, I JUST DON’T KNOW *WHY YOU DID IT*.

DON: [pause, sitting up] Calm down.=

PEGGY: =YOU WANNA OFFER ME A *DRINK!* PRETEND LIKE YOU’RE *HELPING* A LITTLE MORE!

DON: [pause] Close the door.=

PEGGY: =Oh, of course *you* deserve privacy.=

DON: =Look, there’s still enough money for the *ad*. We’ll make it *work*.=

¹³ Ad agency Cutler, Gleason, and Chaough that Peggy works for at the end of Season Five and beginning of Season Six. This agency merges with SCDP (Sterling Cooper Draper Pryce, Peggy’s previous agency where she worked under Don) in the middle of Season Six to become SC&P (Sterling Cooper & Partners).

PEGGY: =STOP *hiding* behind the ad. I know what you did.

DON: [pause] I *saved* both of you. How do you think it *looks*?=

PEGGY: =You *hate* that he is a *GOOD MAN*!

DON: [pause] He's not that virtuous. He's just in love with you.=

PEGGY: =Well, you *killed* him. You killed the ad. You killed *everything*. You can *stop* now.

DON: [pause] [making eye contact, stone faced] I'm just looking out for the agency.

PEGGY: [pause] You're a monster. [walking out]

(*MM*, S06E11, "The Quality of Mercy")

In this scene, Peggy abandons all of the conventions of Lakoff's "women's language," polite speech, and stereotypically feminine talk. Despite the fact that Don tries to assert control with condescending commands like "Calm down," pejorative remarks like "He's not that virtuous. He's just in love with you," and the rude discourse marker "Look," Peggy does not oblige or acquiesce to his attempts at establishing authority. There is a considerable amount of latching here, in that almost every utterance from Peggy comes immediately after Don's remarks; she does not adhere to the conventions of polite turn-taking in conversation that would have her waiting for a pause after each of Don's utterances before speaking. Instead of asking questions, Peggy produces a significant amount of aggressive assertions here, coupled with emphasis and shouting: "You *hate* that he is a *GOOD MAN*!" and "Well, you *killed* him. You killed the ad. You killed *everything*. You can *stop* now." According to Lakoff, the unrestrained expression of emotion is not considered feminine (*L&WP* 44). Despite this, Peggy clearly expresses unbridled rage towards Don's inability to take responsibility and apologize for his actions. Her willingness and ability to do so indicate that the writers depict Peggy as transcending the stereotype that women can't be powerful and freely express their emotions. The Peggy who Don first promoted to copywriter at the end of Season One would have never spoken this way. Again, Peggy's relationship to power is presented as a linguistic journey.

By the final episode of *Mad Men*, Don has run away to California without telling anyone and avoided his work responsibilities back home in New York. After weeks of no communication, Don calls Peggy to indicate that he is likely not coming back and to say his goodbyes. In their final exchange, Peggy and Don's conversation is a reciprocal negotiation, indicating that their relationship is more complex than Peggy either ceding power to Don or resisting his authority. Perhaps they are being depicted as true friends—not simply a man and a woman, a superior and a subordinate. Throughout this phone call, Peggy and Don's speech does not adhere to gendered stereotypes:

OPERATOR: I have person to person call for Peggy Olson from Donald Draper.

PEGGY: This is Peggy Olson. I accept. WHERE THE *HELL* ARE YOU? [pause]

DON: Somewhere in California. [deep breath, pause]

PEGGY: DO YOU *KNOW* HOW *ANGRY* EVERYONE IS? [pause]

DON: Did everything fall apart without me?

PEGGY: It's not about that. YOU JUST *TOOK OFF*. People were *worried*. What have you been *doing*? [long pause]

DON: I don't know. I have no idea. [pause]

PEGGY: Look, I know you get sick of things and you run, but you can come home.

DON: [scoffing] Where?

PEGGY: McCann will take you back in a *second*. Apparently, it's happened before. Don't you want to work on *Coke*? [pause]

DON: I can't. I can't get out of here. [pause]

PEGGY: DON, come home. [pause]

DON: [choking up] I messed everything up. [long pause] I'm not the man you think I am. [long pause]

PEGGY: Don, listen to me. What did you ever do that was *so* bad?

DON: I broke all my vows. I scandalized my child. I took another man's name and made nothing of it.

PEGGY: That's *not* true. [long pause]

DON: [deep breath] I only called because I °realized °I °never °said °goodbye °to °you. [pause]

PEGGY: I don't think you should be alone right now.

DON: I'm in a crowd. I just wanted to hear your voice. I'll see you soon. [hangs up]=

PEGGY: =Wait.

DON: [falls to the ground in tears]

(*MM*, S07E14, "Person to Person")

Notably, both Peggy and Don share their emotions here. Peggy exhibits her frustration and rage with the loud "WHERE THE *HELL* ARE YOU?" Don expresses his melancholy and regret: "I messed everything up" and "I °realized °I °never °said °goodbye °to °you." As previously mentioned, it is considered unfeminine to express unrestrained anger; expressions of sadness and crying are not characteristic of stereotypically masculine communication. Both Peggy and Don defy these expectations here; in their final moment of friendship, they are depicted as sharing their true emotions with each other, regardless of stereotypes that might affect their individual power. Don produces hedges that lighten the force of his speech acts such as "only" and "just." He asks a question that seeks Peggy's advice and gives her control of the information: "Where?" Peggy produces most of the direct commands in this conversation: "DON, come home" and "Don, listen to me." Neither interlocutor ascribes to stereotypical models of masculine and feminine speech. In this conversation, Peggy and Don aren't negotiating who has control in their working relationship, they are being presented as intimate friends who need each other. Peggy needs a reassurance that Don is alive and well. Don needs "to hear [her] voice" and share his remorse with a friend who will listen.

Mad Men's writers depict Peggy and Don in a moment of genuine friendship, despite the competitive structural nature of their working relationship and stereotypes about how men and women should perform their power in conversation. In the beginning, Peggy is shown as fulfilling the stereotypical role of a woman in an intimate male-female relationship: "do[ing] the shitwork" (Fishman 99). Later, she refuses to "do the shitwork" and rejects her position as subordinate to Don. She does so by expressing power more directly with assertive language or

manipulating certain features of stereotypically feminine language to get what she wants from him. Admirably, *Mad Men* portrays how stereotypical expectations of male and female talk and performances of power can create competition and make it difficult for men and women who work together to be friends. More importantly, the series shows Peggy and Don transcending the very stereotypes that it sets up for them; they have formed a relationship in which he can cry, she can yell, and this doesn't impact their respective power—rather, it reinforces the authenticity of their friendship.

Chapter Four

The “Humorless Bitch” & the “Meaningless Secretary”: Peggy & Joan

Like many workplaces in the 1960s, the advertising agency in *Mad Men* is dominated by male executives, account personnel, copywriters, and artists. Essentially, all of the female employees are depicted as “meaningless secretarie[s]”—except for Peggy and Joan. Even though Joan is technically a secretary, her role in the office is distinctly more powerful than that of the other women. All of the secretaries report to her, she facilitates all meetings of the partners, and many of the male executives rely upon her to carry out important administrative, operational, and organizational duties. Eventually, she is granted a 5% partnership at Sterling Cooper Draper Pryce—a small, yet significant indication of her influence on the company.

Throughout the series, Joan and Peggy experience difficulty in both the construction and maintenance of their friendship. Neither Peggy nor Joan have many female friends and even the relationship between the two of them is not a friendship in the traditional sense. In order to understand how *Mad Men*’s writers depict Peggy and Joan’s struggles, I must examine what linguists have concluded about talk in real-world female friendship. In Fern Johnson and Elizabeth Aries’ 1983 study “The Talk of Women Friends,” they suggest that women’s struggles in forming relationships with other women may be due to their position in the workplace:

As women move out of sex-typical roles, particularly in the workplace, there are several potential obstacles to their relationships with other women. Some women find themselves almost exclusively in the company of men; their jobs afford few opportunities to meet and form friendships with women, and in some cases may set them against women either

by forcing them to compete with one another or by structurally placing them in superior-subordinate relationships (224).

Such “superior-subordinate relationships” are competitive ones where power is constantly being negotiated, similar to Peggy and Don’s relationship as analyzed in the beginning of Chapter Three. However, the placement of women in “superior-subordinate relationships” is more damaging for Peggy and Joan, as it hinges on the stereotypical assumption that women are not supposed to be in positions of power, and multiple women cannot simultaneously achieve power in the same spaces. In these kinds of relationships, “one of the participants uses linguistic form...to create or reinforce a power imbalance that would, in turn lead to further advantages” (Lakoff, *TP* 21). Potential linguistic features to “create or reinforce [this] power imbalance” may include: dominance of the conversational floor, direct and indirect commands, and controlling the topics discussed.

In a response to stereotypes about women’s speech as powerless, as analyzed in Chapter Two, scholars have attempted “to value women’s language more positively, using terms such ‘cooperative’” (Coates, “Gossip Revisited” 227). Jennifer Coates’s study “Gossip Revisited: Language in All-Female Groups,” tests this hypothesis by analyzing conversation amongst female friends. She identifies formal linguistic features that indeed indicate that women have a more cooperative, as opposed to competitive, approach to conversation (248). In this kind of cooperative conversation, female interlocutors “work together to produce shared meanings” and “[collaborate] in the production of text” (Coates, “Gossip Revisited” 248). In contrast to the aforementioned “superior-subordinate relationships,” Coates outlines some potential linguistic features of the cooperative conversation:

Women's frequent use of minimal responses and epistemic modal forms, their way of developing topics progressively, and their preference for all-together-now rather than one-at-a-time discussion, all serve the function of asserting joint activity and consolidating friendship ("Gossip Revisited" 250).

Minimal responses are utterances like "yeah" and "mhm" which indicate to the speaker that they are being listened to. "Epistemic modal forms" include hedges and other features used to diminish the force of a speech act.

Within this framework, this chapter analyzes linguistic features in exchanges between Peggy and Joan in an attempt to understand *Mad Men*'s depiction of their relationship. Is their relationship more characteristic of the "superior-subordinate relationship" or of cooperative female friendship? The answer is both and neither of these. At moments, Peggy and Joan fall into a competitive power struggle similar to what Don and Peggy experience in Chapter Three. At other times, they seem to subvert the hegemonic, masculine structures that set them in competition with one another. Essentially, *Mad Men*'s writers manage to depict the stereotype that women in the workplace are constantly in competition with each other. Furthermore, they admirably portray Peggy and Joan transcending this stereotype by engaging in cooperative conversation, as studies have shown about how women talk to each other in the real world.

In *Mad Men*'s pilot, Joan orients Peggy to her new reality as a secretary at Sterling Cooper. Their first exchange occurs as Joan leads a wide-eyed Peggy around the office floor, providing her with practical information about her new job as well as unsolicited advice regarding the culture of Sterling Cooper. In this conversation, Joan holds majority of the

conversational floor, initiates all of the topics discussed, and commands Peggy to do a slew of different tasks. Essentially, Peggy only speaks when spoken to:

JOAN: You'll be here just across the aisle from me. We'll both take care of Mr. Draper for the °time being. [pause]

JOAN: I DON'T KNOW what your goals are, but don't overdo it with the perfume. Keep a fifth of °something in your desk. Mr. Draper drinks rye. [pause]

JOAN: ALSO, invest in some aspirin, Band-Aids, and a needle and *thread*. [pause]

PEGGY: Rye is Canadian, right?=
 JOAN: =You better find out! [pause]

JOAN: He may act like he wants a secretary, but *most* of the time they're looking for something between a mother and a waitress. And the rest of the time, well. [smirking]

JOAN: [pause, approaching Peggy] Go home, take a paper bag and cut some eyeholes out of it. Put it over your head, get undressed, and look at yourself in the mirror. *Really evaluate* where your strengths and weaknesses are, and *be honest*. [pause]

PEGGY: I always try to be honest.

JOAN: Good for you.

(*MM*, S01E01, "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes")

Joan produces an abundance of direct commands in this exchange: "don't overdo it," "keep a fifth," "invest in," "find out," "go home," "take a paper bag," "cut some eyeholes," etc. Peggy's two simple utterances are in response to Joan's commands and the topics that she initiates. Peggy introduces no new information into the conversation; this is not a cooperative exchange.

Additionally, Peggy is the only interlocutor to ask a question, "Rye is Canadian, right?"; this tag question not only indicates that Peggy is unsure of herself, but it also "places [her] in a position of inferiority, one of needing [information] from [Joan]" (Lakoff, *TP* 30). Joan's production of so many direct commands indicates that she thinks she is superior to Peggy and expects that Peggy will heed her requests. This exchange continues with more commands from Joan, followed by Peggy's super-polite expression of gratitude: "*Thank you* Miss Holloway. You're really wonderful for looking out for me this way" (*MM*, S01E01, "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes").

In this scene, the features indicate that Peggy and Joan are in a “superior-subordinate relationship” where Peggy is subordinate to Joan, her superior. Contextually, this makes sense considering that Peggy is in an unknown place where Joan is a seasoned worker. However, this kind relationship between Peggy and Joan seems to persist later on in the first season, even if it is not as apparent as in the pilot episode. For example, in the fifth episode, Peggy turns to Joan for help when she catches Don having an affair and must cover his tracks in the presence of his wife. In this scene, Joan actually asks a lot of the questions, but they function as indirect commands that Peggy complies with:

PEGGY: JOAN! [grabbing Joan’s arm] °Oh °my °god, °Joan. °I °need °your °help=

JOAN: =Let go of me. [pulling away]

PEGGY: Mrs. Draper is here, and they're having their portrait taken, and he snuck out, and I don't know who to lie to.=

JOAN: =Calm down. °Just °breathe °slowly.

PEGGY: Mr. Draper is *out*, and I don't think I'm supposed to *know* where he went.

JOAN: That happens.

PEGGY: But they're taking their pictures today, and I would have *reminded* him, but he slipped out before I could. It's *his* fault. He comes and goes and never *says* anything.=

JOAN: =Where is he?

PEGGY: I make an excuse to Mrs. Draper, she could catch him in it, especially if she just leaves. Or even worse, then he'll know that I know where he was.

JOAN: *Where* is he?

PEGGY: [pause, shaking head] I don't know.

JOAN: You *do* know, and you're going to *tell* me, or I'm not going to tell you what to do.

PEGGY: I can't believe you.=

JOAN: =Well?

PEGGY: °He °sees °this °woman. He saw her the other day. He came back all greasy and calm. No. Oh, God. Now I've told you. I'm the worst secretary in the world.

(MM, S01E05, “5G”)

Similar to the previous scene, Joan uses several direct commands such as “Let go of me” and “Calm down.” More notably, though, is Joan’s use of questions as indirect commands. The first

“Where is he?” functions as a sincere request for information. However, when Peggy does not immediately respond, Joan repeats the question. This time, the illocutionary act shifts from a request to a command—almost as if to say ‘Tell me where he is.’ When Peggy does not obey, Joan produces a series of assertives: “You *do* know,” “you’re going to *tell* me,” and “I’m not going to tell you what to do.” These indicate that Joan assumes that she has the power to tell Peggy the reality of both the present and the future. Peggy doesn’t answer again, so Joan produces another indirect command in the form of a question: “Well?” She’s essentially saying ‘Tell me,’ again. Finally, Peggy complies with Joan’s commands.

Peggy’s resistance is noteworthy here. She doesn’t immediately respond to Joan’s commands. At the first question, Peggy ignores Joan. After the first indirect command, she lies with “I don’t know.” After the series of manipulative assertives, Peggy actually expresses an acknowledgment of and discomfort with Joan’s manipulation: “I can’t believe you.” Finally, after the second indirect command, she tells Joan what she wants to hear. While Peggy does start to resist Joan’s authoritative language, ultimately Joan remains in her superior position. As the scene closes, Joan gets the last word:

JOAN: Who is she?=
 PEGGY: =I don't care. Please hurry.

JOAN: [pause, lighting cigarette] Peggy, use your noodle. You're making this so complicated. You go out there, and you entertain her and her brats. Get some Hershey bars from the cart and tell her you don't know where he is and you forgot to remind him. It *is* the truth. And when he comes back, let him have an excuse. He'll *have* one. And then you just start apologizing for, well just how *stupid* you are.

PEGGY: It's probably what I would have done anyway. Oh, God, now I really shouldn't have told you.

JOAN: You shouldn't have told me. I'm not gonna tell anybody, but you shouldn't have told anybody that.

(MM, S01E05, “5G”)

In this exchange, Peggy needs something from Joan—advice. Yet, Joan also needs something from Peggy—an acknowledgment that she is in control. Joan’s indirect speech acts in this scene order Peggy to tell her something that she later asserts Peggy “shouldn’t have told anybody”; these are an attempt to establish herself as superior. For now, this attempt works, but Peggy does express resistance and an awareness of what Joan is doing: “It’s probably what I would have done anyway. Oh, God, now I really shouldn’t have told you.” In depicting Peggy’s resistance and awareness, the writers foreshadow that she might not always be as susceptible to Joan’s games. What’s important is that *Mad Men*’s writers place Peggy and Joan in a “superior-subordinate relationship,” due to the male-dominated structure of their workplace, adhering to stereotypes about women in power. Joan is the only female character that Peggy is offered as an authority on how to behave at Sterling Cooper. From the scene in the pilot episode where Peggy follows Joan around, Peggy is set up to seek Joan’s advice and approval, even if “it’s probably what [she] would have done anyway.”

Joan and Peggy both experience a lot of misogyny and sexism throughout the series. Joan, a curvier and more flirtatious woman, is often objectified and sexually harassed by the men she works with. As demonstrated in Chapter Two, Peggy is often not taken seriously by the men around her or is chided for being too assertive, or ‘bitchy.’ The two women often disagree with how they should approach these situations. Instead of displaying solidarity towards one another and engaging in cooperative conversation, the power struggle between Joan and Peggy that began above in S01E05, becomes increasingly complex and tempestuous.

About halfway through Season Four, some of the male copywriters draw an inappropriate cartoon depicting Joan engaging in sexual behavior with a male executive and post the drawing in her office window. Joan handles this by approaching the men directly:

JOAN: It's a very brave person that does something anonymously.

STAN: It's a very brave person who does that. It's still illegal in many states, you know.

COPYWRITERS: [chuckling]

JOAN: [long pause] I can't wait until next year when all of you are in Vietnam.

You will be *pinning* for the day when someone was trying to make your life easier. And when you're over there, when you're in the jungle, and they're *shooting* at you, remember you're not dying for me because I *never liked* you.

COPYWRITERS: [looking stunned]

(*MM*, S04E08, "The Summer Man")

Joan believes that assertions of her contempt for these men are sufficient punishment for their behavior. She later tells Peggy that she "had already handled it" (*MM*, S04E08, "The Summer Man"). However, Peggy does not find this solution adequate, so she takes it upon herself to fire the copywriter who drew the cartoon, Joey. At the end of the work day, Joan and Peggy find themselves in the elevator together on their way out of the office. They engage in a fairly heated power struggle over the day's events:

PEGGY: [smiling] I don't know if you heard, but I fired Joey.

JOAN: I *did*. Good for you.

PEGGY: [pause] Excuse me?

JOAN: Now everybody in the office will know that you solved my problem and that you must be really important, I guess.

PEGGY: What's wrong with you? I defended you.=

JOAN: =You defended *yourself*.

PEGGY: [pause, shaking head] Fine. That cartoon was disgusting.

JOAN: I had already handled it and if I had wanted to go *further*, one dinner with Mr. Kreutzer from Sugarberry Ham, and Joey would've been off it and out of my hair.

PEGGY: So? It's the same result.

JOAN: You want to be a big shot. Well, no matter how powerful we get around here, they can still just draw a cartoon. So, all you've done is prove to them that I'm a meaningless secretary and you're another humorless bitch. [elevator opening]

JOAN: Have a nice weekend. Good night, Peggy. [exiting]

PEGGY: [remaining in elevator, looking stunned]

(*MM*, S04E08, “The Summer Man”)

Peggy initiates the topic of firing Joey by asking a question in the form of a statement. Because Joan acts in an HR role and manages a lot of the employees, she already knows Joey has been fired. Thus, Peggy’s statement here indirectly asks: ‘why haven’t you said anything about Joey?’ Joan responds with “Good for you,” which is a polite construction but it functions impolitely here. Contextually, Joan *should* say something like ‘Thank you.’ Her choice not to adhere to polite expectations is an attempt at asserting authority. Peggy’s “Excuse me?” in response expresses agitation and indirectly commands Joan to ‘Explain [herself].’ Joan produces a few assertives referencing the state of the situation, to which Peggy states: “I defended you.” Strikingly, Joan quickly follows up with a correction of Peggy’s assertive: “You defended *yourself*.”

Following Joan’s correction, Peggy backs down and her utterances serve as explanations and excuses to Joan for her behavior. Joan brings up the familiar double-bind, Lakoff’s “damned if she does, damned if she doesn’t” principle, with the naming of the “meaningless secretary” and the “humorless bitch.” Following this, Peggy no longer attempts to defend herself and Joan has the last word again: “Have a nice weekend. Good night, Peggy.” Here, these polite constructions function as a solidification of her powerful position as the arbiter of truth.

In the final season, Joan is subject to sexual harassment during a meeting that the two women have with clients. Afterward, Peggy and Joan are in the elevator again, arguing over the events. This time, Peggy has the last word and her speech exhibits some more dominant features:

PEGGY: Should we get lunch?

JOAN: I want to burn this place *down*.

PEGGY: [deep breath] °I °know. They were awful. But *at least* we got a *yes*. Would you have rather had a friendly *no*?

JOAN: I don't expect you to understand.

PEGGY: *Joan*, you've never experienced that before?

JOAN: Have you, Peggy?

PEGGY: I don't know. You can't have it both wa::ys. You can't dress the way you do and expect —

JOAN:—How do I *dress*?=

PEGGY: =LOOK, they didn't take me seriously, either.

JOAN: So what you're saying is I don't *dress* the way you do because I don't *look* like you. And that's *very, very* true.

PEGGY: YOU KNOW WHAT? You're *filthy* rich. You don't have to do anything you don't want to.

JOAN: [exiting elevator]

(MM, S07E08, “Severance”)

As the women awkwardly stand in the elevator, Peggy does the work of initiating conversation between them with a question: “Should we get lunch?” Peggy’s topic does not get picked up. Instead, Joan expresses her anger: “I want to burn this place down.” Notably, Joan’s frustration here is unrestrained, unlike a polite, stereotypically feminine expression of anger. Assuming that she understands Joan’s anger, Peggy responds with “I know.” With her indirect assertive “I don’t expect you to understand,” Joan basically says ‘No, you don’t know.’

The push-pull negotiation of power in this exchange continues when Peggy asks: “*Joan*, you've never experienced that before?” With this question, Peggy implies that Joan should both expect this treatment and deal with it. When Joan throws the question back at her, Peggy does not provide her with an answer. Refusal to respect the other interlocutor and answer their question asserts a kind of dominance. As Peggy starts making statements about Joan’s clothing, Joan then asserts her own authority by interrupting Peggy with another confrontational question: “How do I *dress*?” Once again, Peggy does not back down or respond to Joan’s question. Joan

begins to call Peggy out on the indirect nature of her speech: “So what you're saying is I don't *dress* the way you do because I don't *look* like you.” Peggy lashes out by yelling at and insulting Joan: “YOU KNOW WHAT? You're *filthy* rich.” Joan does not respond and—like in the previous elevator scene—is the first to leave the elevator. This action serves as a kind of speech act here because she does not engage with Peggy’s insults. Her silence functions as an extremely powerful move.

As demonstrated, Peggy and Joan’s conversation indicates that the writers do set them in a “superior-subordinate relationship.” Joan is not always the superior, however. Peggy and Joan’s conversations are depicted as competitive; they each produce speech acts and perform power in an attempt to assume the superior role. This depiction aligns with stereotypes about women and power in the workplace and makes sense with how Peggy and Joan are pit against each other in their office. However, the writers also provide some other depictions of Peggy and Joan’s relationship, indicating that women’s relationships are probably not that simple.

In the final episode of Season Four, Don abruptly gets engaged to his secretary at the time, Megan. Peggy enters Joan’s office to discuss the unexpected engagement. In this exchange, Peggy and Joan engage in progressive topic development in order to come to an agreed upon conclusion:

PEGGY: [knocking on Joan’s open door]

JOAN: [smoking cigarette, smiling] Whatever could be on your mind?

PEGGY: [rolling eyes, shutting door, approach Joan’s desk] Can you believe it?

JOAN: Happens *all* the time. They're all just between marriages. You know that.

PEGGY: [taking one of Joan’s cigarettes, lighting it]

JOAN: He'll probably make her a copywriter. He's not going to want to be married to his *secretary*.

PEGGY: *Really?* Is that what he meant? "She *admires* you"? Jesus. [sitting down]

JOAN: That's the way it works for some.

PEGGY: You know, I just *saved* this company. I signed the *first* new business since Lucky Strike left, but it's not as important as getting *married*. *Again*.

JOAN: Well, *I* was just made director of agency operations. A *title*. No money, of course. And if they poured champagne, it must've been while I was pushing the mail cart.

PEGGY: A pretty face comes along, and everything goes out the window.

JOAN: Well, I learned a *long* time ago to not get all my satisfaction from this job.

PEGGY: That's bullshit.

JOAN: [chuckling]

PEGGY: [smiling]

(*MM*, S04E13, "Tomorrowland")

Throughout this cooperative conversation, there are gradual, as opposed to abrupt, shifts in ideas and each interlocutor contributes to the conclusion. Coates explains that "[joint production] involves both the right to speak and the duty to listen and support" ("Gossip Revisited" 235). Joan allows Peggy to add her anecdotal contribution: "You know, I just *saved* this company." Similarly, Peggy listens to Joan's anecdotal contribution: "Well, *I* was just made director of agency operations." Joan's statement echoes Peggy's, with the phrase "I just," indicating that she listened to Peggy's statement, agrees with its merit in the conversation, and will produce a similar one. Likely due to the cooperative nature of this conversation, Peggy feels comfortable stating "That's bullshit" at the end of this conversation. Joan's portrayal as laughing indicates that she agrees with Peggy's final conclusion. Additionally, Joan's laugh gives permission to Peggy to disagree with her—something that did not occur in any of the previous conversations where the "superior-subordinate relationship" took hold. Finally, the laugh acknowledges Peggy's right to curse, something that would be considered taboo in Lakoff's original observations about "women's language" (*L&WP* 34).

Peggy and Joan's ability to bond, engage in cooperative conversation, and thus, move towards strengthening their relationship indicates just how subversive these two women are.

Despite their placement into a “superior-subordinate relationship” by the male-dominated power structures in their office, the advertising industry, and the 1960s at large, these women find ways to reach common ground and collaborate in conversation. Moreover, the choice made by *Mad Men*’s writers to depict these women engaging in both kinds of conversation, is refined and progressive, as it transcends stereotypes and captures the complicated dynamics of female friendship. Acknowledging the effects that male-dominated workplaces can have on female relationships is crucial. Perhaps even more important is showing that women do indeed subvert these effects, giving them space to simply chat, share a cigarette, call something “bullshit,” and laugh it off.

Conclusion

This thesis has explored the ways in which *Mad Men*'s writers use linguistic patterns and shifts to set up a fictional depiction of very real and stifling stereotypes for women and to create a narrative where Peggy breaks these stereotypes. According to scholars on the role of language in the media, scripted language is crucial to creating characters and building plots. If the writers had chosen to start where the series ends, they would begin by depicting Peggy as both powerful and using some feminine language. Instead, the writers realistically present Peggy's arc as a linguistic journey, one where she navigates the ever-changing expectations that are placed upon her, as well as actively changes the expectations the viewers are set up to have for her. For Peggy, femininity and power are dynamically codependent: her performances of them constrain, complement, and challenge each other throughout the series. Throughout *Mad Men*'s seven seasons, Peggy's speech indicates that the writers understand the interrelated nature of femininity and power for her character; she figures out how to use sexist stereotypes to her advantage and is able to maintain her womanhood and assert her power in order to achieve success.

In a larger project, it would be valuable analyze the language of other female characters in *Mad Men* who negotiate femininity and power: Joan Holloway, Betty Draper, Megan Draper, and Sally Draper, who, in their own ways, transcend the stereotypes of promiscuous secretary, bitter housewife, idealistic actress, and silly little girl respectively. It would be interesting to see if these women's speech patterns are as dynamic and nuanced as Peggy's. If so, *Mad Men* would perhaps stand out from other dramas of the "Third Golden Age" of television in its sophisticated and complicated depiction of female characters.

The series treats the story of Peggy with care, respect, and adequate preparation. Scholarship on the women of *Mad Men* has stated that “it seems to be only the women characters who experience what we might call growth or development”; this thesis affirms this claim with regards to Peggy and demonstrates that her “growth and development” is constructed in part through linguistic shifts. She isn’t just another foil to the male anti-hero who sits at the core of the “Third Golden Age” of television. In other words, these writers manage to depict how women in the 1960s had to constantly negotiate between expectations, personal ambitions, stereotypes, and femininity in the workplace; language could be both a tool and a constraint for this kind of negotiation.

But, to what extent is this a reality that only applies to women in the 1960s? Do women still have to navigate these stereotypes in the workplace today? While much has changed in the professional world for women, stereotypes about how women should talk remain. For example, scholar Deborah Cameron’s blogs address stereotypes about how women speak with vocal fry, or creaky voice (“A response to Naomi Wolf”), and overuse the word *just* (“Just don’t do it”). Perhaps such prevailing sexist stereotypes explains how a series depicting the seemingly more misogynist and stifling working world of the 1960s remains accessible and timely for critics and viewers alike. Maybe this is why *Mad Men* achieved such critical acclaim and resonates with so many Americans. These hypotheses suggest the importance of continuing the study of how women and their language are depicted in the media. In television shows and movies about contemporary women in the workplace, does the same kind of linguistic negotiation with sexist expectations exist? How do writers portray women’s language in their professional and personal

relationships today? Has much really changed? In what ways do media depictions of how women talk feed—or help break—stereotypes?

Much like the advertising world that Peggy Olson works in throughout *Mad Men*, the media and entertainment industries are male-dominated to this day. In 2017, women held just 30% of “key storytelling roles in television,” such as creators, directors, writers, and producers (Haggard and Heldman). As we demand a stronger presence of women in the media, we must take a closer look at the minutia, the language of women—both in the real world and on the screen. How can we better construct female characters that feel authentic and are ambitious? Beyond this, how can we create authentic characters of other marginalized identities? How will we write dynamic stories of queer, poor, immigrant, and non-white perspectives? We certainly have a long way to go in creating media that is representative of and celebrates the diverse set of narratives that characterize our country. A good place to start is actively learning the differences in how we use language and how, or if, these differences are depicted in the media.

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