

CHAPTER FOUR

THERE SHOULD BE AN “I” IN *MAD MEN*: INDIVIDUALISM AND ISOLATION, INDIFFERENCE, AND INADEQUACY

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Mad Men may be the first primetime drama since the American Broadcasting Company network’s *thirtysomething*, which aired from 1987 to 1991, to fully capture the angst associated with the banal routines and inane developments of everyday corporate and family life. In both series, relatively well-to-do members of advertising agencies and their families find themselves to be unsatisfied, self-defeating, and ineffectual in both relationships and careers. In each, characters are far more willing to complain about or bemoan their problems than to actually solve them. The 1980s-era Michaels, Elliotts, Nancys, and Hopes of *thirtysomething* orbit around a strong cluster of reliable longstanding friendships; the 1960s-era Dons, Rogers, Petes, and Peggys of *Mad Men* only revolve together as necessity dictates, while spinning separately on their own axes.

Mad Men’s characters are immersed in solitary palls of oppression that make for somber yet riveting viewing. They often suffer in silence through their despair and suffering. Critic Nicole Ankwowzki (2009) claims, “Part of the message of *Mad Men* is how sadly repressed all these people were.” When they do emerge from their self-imposed confinement to give voice to their miseries, they are likely to be ignored, shrugged off, or met with ineffectual comforting.

Our analysis of the coping and consolation skills and tendencies displayed on *Mad Men* reveals, with only some exceptions, predominant themes of individualized isolation, indifference toward others, and inadequacy in comforting. These findings are problematic when considered within the context of evidence supporting George Gerbner’s cultivation theory

(Gerbner et al. 1986). Gerbner discovered that people who watched greater amounts of television during the 1970s and 1980s, and thus saw copious amounts of violence, were more scared to be out in their cities and neighborhoods than were those who watched less television. If persistent everyday exposure to televised violence creates for heavy viewers Gerbner’s “mean world syndrome,” then might not rabid fans of *Mad Men*, confronted with a dense lattice of remote seclusion and loneliness, apathy and disinterest, and clumsy incompetent caring, across scores of episodes, succumb to a similar change in perspective and perception? They may devolve to not only accepting but also endorsing or even enacting the social degeneracy displayed by Draper, Campbell, Sterling, and colleagues. Our analysis of the insufficient coping and social support in *Mad Men* is informed by pertinent psychology and communication literatures.

The Psychology and Communication of Coping and Comforting

The *Mad Men* series may be examined for the extent to which its characters productively cope with experiences of upset and distress and effectively comfort those of others. Coping is the process of dealing with and managing anything considered to be upsetting. When life’s difficulties are endured, we tend to cognitively appraise them. According to psychologist Richard Lazarus’ (1991a, 1991b) appraisal theory, negative emotions arise *not* from events that happen to us but instead from our appraisals, or cognitive evaluations, of the upsetting nature of those events. Susan Folkman (1986), along with Lazarus and their colleagues, contends that there are two kinds of coping: *problem-focused* (i.e., actually acting to deal with the problem that is causing the stress) and *emotion-focused* (i.e., managing the emotion or cognition associated with the stress). In many cases, when a solution for the problem triggering the stress is evident and feasible (e.g., paying a mechanic to fix one’s car), then problem-focused coping option is enacted. However, communication scholars Brant Burleson and Daena Goldsmith (1998) note that in emotionally charged and/or distressing situations, especially those where the stressors are unlikely to change easily, the emotion-focused strategy of *positive reappraisal* may be the most effective. Positive reappraisal involves recognizing some good in the bad as in the proverbial “making of lemonade when life hands you lemons” (e.g., appreciating the exercise you get walking while your car is in the shop).

Research by psychologist James Pennebaker (1997a, 1997b) has examined another coping mechanism. Pennebaker has demonstrated that distressed individuals come to more functional understandings of their situations and experience enhanced health when they write or speak about their feelings in a process he has labeled “*emotional disclosure*” (Pennebaker and Beall 1986). The process of putting one’s thoughts into words, and those words into a coherent narrative, may help to make a distressful event more understandable and acceptable to the individual who constructs the narrative account (Clark 1993; Harber and Pennebaker 1982).

Fortunately, we are not usually alone to cope with our problems. Instead, we turn to others for social support and its most communicative aspect, comforting, which Burleson (1984) defined to be “the type of communicative behavior having the intended function of alleviating, moderating, or salving the distressed emotional states of others” (64). Much of the research on comforting has focused on the sensitivity of various messages and specifically on how they “explicitly acknowledge, elaborate, and legitimize the feelings and perspective of a distressed person” (Samter, Burleson, and Murphy 1987, 280). It seems clear then, that an analysis of the coping and comforting evident in *Mad Men* is best informed by the identification of *emotional disclosure* and of *problem-focused* and *emotion-focused coping* (i.e., *positive reappraisal*).

Identifying Instances and Determining Themes

Mad Men offers take-home messages concerning how people cope with their stress and how they comfort others who are upset. To identify the types of coping and comforting performed in the series, both authors watched the first 85 episodes of seasons one through seven, and noted opportunities to cope or comfort. Characters’ responses were labeled as either exemplars or non-exemplars of *emotional disclosure*, *problem-focused* or *emotion-focused coping*, and *positive reappraisal*. Coding of the opportunities for, attempts at, and outcomes of, coping and comforting attempts produced three major themes:

1. *Individualism and Isolation*: Characters are concerned solely or predominately with themselves and their own outcomes; some start with little connection to others and most distance themselves physically and emotionally, or sever ties altogether with, those they love and/or work with.

2. *Indifference*: Characters care little to not at all for the plight and feelings of others and offer indiscernible amounts of assistance, empathy, and sympathy.

3. *Inadequacy*: Characters offer comforting and social support but the attempts to console are futile and/or underappreciated.

Individualism and isolation. Perhaps the most noteworthy characteristic among the men and women of *Mad Men* is their fierce individualism. They are almost unfailingly self-centered and devoid of true intimacy with those around them. They are guarded with their histories, information, and emotions. They orchestrate events and outcomes while focusing only on their own well-being and often do so at the expense of others. When push comes to shove and they reach landmarks in their lives, they opt to return to their natural states of solitude.

Don Draper, co-head of creative at Sterling Cooper & Partners is the living embodiment of these isolationist tendencies. His checkered, hidden, and (re)constructed past is a slowly revealed sub-plot throughout the early seasons of *Mad Men*. His prostitute mother died birthing him as Dick Whitman in Illinois, and he is raised in rural Pennsylvania, by a distant father and at a bordello by his stepmother. He later understands this upbringing to underlie his incessant infidelity to his marriages.

Dick sees no future for himself, an unloved and abused hayseed. In Korea, he switches nametags with the unrecognizable corpse of Lieutenant Donald Francis Draper and assumes his identity to forge a new life. Whitman is buried literally and figuratively as the new Don benefits from a trade of divorce for a house in California with the understanding Draper widow, Anna. He becomes free to escape his past by relocating in New York City. A fur salesman who duped Roger Sterling into hiring him at Sterling Cooper, Don took the world of advertising by storm and married a model, Betty Hofstadt.

Don goes to great lengths to hide his past from everyone other than Anna, and especially so from Betty. He rejects a multitude of opportunities to disclose about his childhood or past, with deflections such as, “It’s a sin of pride to go on about yourself.” Don’s inner turmoil is obviously amplified by fears about being discovered. Anxiety attacks and illness plague him when the secret is endangered by an FBI security clearance process instigated by the potential of North American Aviation as a client. The conniving Sterling Cooper account executive, Pete Campbell, discovers Don’s secret but fails in a blackmail scheme, as senior partner Bert Cooper is unimpressed with the revelation.

Otherwise, Don keeps everyone at a distance. When his estranged brother Adam finds Dick/Don after years of suspecting he was still alive, Don bribes him with five thousand dollars to go away and leave his current life alone. Adam subsequently hangs himself in despair. It is perfectly representative when Sterling Cooper media buyer, Harry Crane observes, “Draper? Who knows anything about that guy? No one’s ever lifted that rock. He could be Batman for all we know.” A large part of Betty’s angst, beyond her typical 1960s suburban housewife, “mother’s little helper” syndrome, is her nearly complete lack of knowledge about who her husband really is or was. During young daughter Sally’s party, which Don emotionally skirts behind the lens of a movie camera, he is sent off for birthday cake and disappears, never returning to the confused family and guests. Then, many hours later, he shows up with a dog for Sally to Betty’s mystified reaction “I don’t even know what to say.” His detached fathering style is illuminated years later when he admits to second wife, Megan Calvet that, until recently, he always had to fake love for his three children and worried that his own father had done the same.

Don’s isolation is augmented by his individualism. Probably in compensation for past insecurity, he asserts his alpha dog status at nearly every turn. In a renegade move that shocks his colleagues, Don responds to Sterling Cooper Draper Pryce’s firing by Lucky Strike cigarettes with placement of a full page ad in a New York newspaper proclaiming the agency’s moral imperative to refuse any further representation of tobacco companies. He later fires Jaguar, unable to stomach the behavior of Herb Rennett, head of the Dealers Association and a member of Jaguar’s agency selection committee. This inspires fury from Joan Harris who was promoted from office manager to junior partner for denigrating herself and sleeping with Rennett to help secure the car account. When Don is scolded for habitual lateness to meetings by new co-head of creative, Ted Chaough, he gets Ted drunk just to embarrass him at the office.

Ever aware of what he wants and how to get it, Don proposes on a whim to Megan Calvet, agency front desk receptionist who functions also as a temporary but proficient caretaker of his kids on a trip to California. They are married, she is promoted to the copywriting staff, and for the first time, Don puts the agency on a back burner. He shows up late, misses meetings, has sex with Megan in his office regularly, and whisks her off on daytrips with little notice, causing even Megan to be upset at job responsibilities she must shirk as a result. This selfishness ends, not when senior partner Bert accuses Don of being on “love leave,” but when Megan decides she would rather resume her quest to be a working actress than toil in advertising, despite her talent for it.

Though Don had resisted his womanizing and cheating ways for a while with second wife, Megan, he reverts and becomes absolutely smitten with apartment neighbor, Sylvia Rosen. Don commands Sylvia to wait in a hotel room for him, lying still, with nothing to do while he travels and returns; Don dresses her up and orders her to immediately remove the clothes. It is only then that she puts an end to his dominating ways by ending the affair, though it is reborn later. Don, at the expense of professional and social capital, arranges to save Sylvia's teenage son, Mitchell, from being drafted to almost certainly die in Vietnam. Newly her hero, Sylvia relents and sleeps with Don again and it is difficult to tell whether he was truly beneficent or self-serving. In any event, his relationship with Sally is harmed irreparably when she accidentally spies him poised over Sylvia.

Don Draper's isolation is perhaps best symbolized by his graphic pitch to Sheraton for promoting its Royal Hawaiian Hotel property. An empty suit of clothes lies on a beach with the tagline, "Hawaii: The Jumping Off Point" representing a man who has left it all, abandoning his previous life. And that life becomes ever more isolated as he is put on indefinite leave by Sterling Cooper and Partners and sits at home in New York, while Megan languishes in California, unaware that he is not working. On the return trip home after a short visit with her, Don tells an attractive stranger on a plane that he is a terrible husband and "a broken vessel."

Though Don is best known for his lone wolf status, there are plenty of other characters who can be accused of only "looking out for number one." Pete Campbell is, plain and simple, a self-centered cad. In any scene in which he appears, Pete is likely to be scowling, pouting, throwing a tantrum, or demeaning someone else, all because of some personal or professional affront he has perceived. Early in the series, his shoddy behavior toward, and occasional passes at, Peggy Olson leave her confused and unsure about him. Pete rudely seeks sex with a random woman at his bachelor party. Further, Pete manipulates the distress of a naïve au pair to bed her, while his newlywed wife Trudy is away for a short vacation. He is enormously insensitive to Trudy's desire for a child. As they are tested for fertility, Pete heartily celebrates the news that he is "viable," completely unaware that it means that Trudy may not be. He tries to reappraise this as good news, "So, Dr. Stone can blow up your ovaries or whatever his cutting edge plan is." When Trudy objects to his boorishness, Pete exclaims, "You had to know this was a possible outcome" as though that was of any comfort. When Trudy instructively asks him to "express some concern," Pete instead demands, "Either you

make it through this thing or keep it to yourself. I'm giving you that option."

When Trudy wins the argument about living in the suburbs for the good of their daughter, Tammy, Pete is resentful at the commute he must endure into Manhattan. He rallies for an apartment to save on his wear and tear and to, secretly, host his illicit affairs. In the meantime, Pete uses the train and its parking lot to find his next conquest, Beth Dawes, the wife of insurance salesman Howard, a fellow rider. He is upset when a teenager he hits on at driving school is enamored with another teenager instead of him. Pete sleeps with prostitutes when clients request trips to bordellos. He is miserable when Beth tries to save her own sad marriage rather than leave it for Pete. Pete's snarky asides enrage the usually implacable Englishman, partner Lane Pryce, leading to actual fisticuffs in a meeting with Don, Roger, and Bert. Pete also gets beat up by the train attendant when he refuses to calm down after a confrontation with Howard. Pete lies about his "car accident" injuries to Trudy who kindly relents on the apartment issue to save him from harm. Despondent about having to take his turn from brother, Bud, in caring for his widowed and slightly demented mother, she takes him to task for it, scolding, "You were a sour little boy and now you're a sour little man. You've always been unlovable."

Pete is never more pernicious than in his dealings with senior partner Roger Sterling after the formation of the Sterling Cooper Draper Pryce agency. Long the master of the three-martini lunch for smooth talking potential clients, Roger accurately perceives that Pete's ambition is to elbow him out as top account executive and even beyond daily relevance to the agency. Roger sulks away when Pete steals the credit by announcing to public clamor the possibility of winning the Chevrolet account in Detroit. He denigrates himself to Don as the "professor emeritus of accounts." Roger even admits at times to Pete that he is happy to sit back and watch the money roll in when he is actually disturbed to have shown faith in, and originally hired, the man that is gleefully making him obsolete.

Though not to the extent exhibited by Don and Pete, other characters can be rightfully accused of at least occasionally putting their own interests first. Peggy Olson may be the second most prominent character in *Mad Men*. She struggles through affairs with co-workers and a pregnancy that culminates in her extended absence from work and an adoption. At the end of the third season, Don, who gave her an initial shot at copywriting from her secretary's desk, admits that he sees her as an extension of himself. She goes on to a variety of more and less successful copywriting adventures but eventually has enough of Don's mentoring and the

rollercoaster power dynamics it entails. On the basis of one flattering "feeling out" lunch with Ted Chaough, Peggy throws away her association with Sterling Cooper Draper Pryce to join Cutler Gleason Chaough.

A number of additional secondary characters exhibit similar patterns of self-interest. When Pauline Francis, her stepfather's mother, breaks her ankle tripping over Sally's phone cord, Sally tells Don and Megan it was on one of younger brother Gene's toys. When Betty discovers she may have a life-threatening tumor, the fate of her potentially motherless children does not occur to her until Don brings it up. Lane Pryce seems the hero to Joan when he suggests that she pursue a junior partnership rather than a cash bonus for securing the Jaguar account by sleeping with Herb Rennett, but he does so only to maintain the cash flow needed to give himself a holiday bonus and escape from terrible debt pressures. When actress colleague, Emily, politely asks for Don's help securing a TV commercial audition via Megan, Megan instead uses the idea to benefit herself thus finally launching her languishing career.

On *Mad Men*, even moments of long-delayed enlightenment and lucidity lead to separation and isolation from others. After maintaining his secret life for many years, Don is finally forced to reveal his full past to Betty when she finds her way into his stash of old photographs, hoarded cash, and divorce papers signed by Anna Draper. He claims he can explain, pours himself a drink, ignores that Sally's schoolteacher, Suzanne Farrell, is outside waiting in his car, and reveals his transition from Dick to Don. This is the turning point wherein Betty finally begins to seriously consider the overtures of her suitor, Henry Francis, and distance herself from Don to the point of filing for divorce. Within a few years of her marriage to Henry, Betty is again wandering aimlessly around the (now larger) house and has only food to turn to for comfort. Also, after Roger is pressured into trying LSD by his second wife, Jane, at a dinner party they wind up at home deeply disclosing to each other their feelings and frustrations. When she awakens, he holds Jane to their drug-addled agreement to divorce.

Indifference. Among a cast of characters so utterly self-involved, it is of little surprise to observe their near complete indifference to the plight and suffering of those around them. When others face difficulty or duress, Don and his colleagues fail to notice, dismiss them and their troubles, or refuse to support them. They are also wholly ungrateful, disrespectful, and unappreciative with regard to those in their innermost circles.

When faced with the travails and personal burdens of others, Don Draper is often vaguely supportive if not unsympathetic. For instance, senior copywriter Freddy Rumsen, a contemporary of partner Roger

Sterling's father at the agency, allowed the wining and dining of clients to burgeon into full-blown expressed alcoholism. When he urinates in his trousers and passes out during a meeting to plan a big presentation to a client, the bosses decide to fire him. They offer Freddy a paid leave of absence but it is clear that he is finished. In the same agency offices besotted with martinis, old-fashioned, and vodka gimlets, a zero-tolerance policy of not handling one's drink is enacted. Roger pokes fun at Freddy, "There's a line and you wet it." Don ends the association with a half-hearted consolation "It's not an ending. It's a fresh start."

Whereas Rumsen's alcoholism is in full view, art director Salvatore Romano, always resplendent in his three-piece suits and pinky ring, struggles with latent homosexuality. He forces he-man heterosexist remarks into conversations to match his buddies but also attracts the interest of several gay men. Don accidentally spies an unclothed bellhop in Sal's room on a business trip but chooses not to address the incident explicitly, instead baiting him on the plane ride home with his newly invented tagline for client, London Fog, "limit your exposure." Later, Sal turns down a workplace advance by another married man, Lee Garner, Jr., son of the CEO of the huge client, Lucky Strike cigarettes. Garner demands that Sal be fired and Don complies. In doing so, Don shakes his head in wonder at "you people," tells Sal that he must take the fall in this case, and dismisses him with a less than consolatory "you'll do fine."

Moreover, Don fires Lane Pryce on the basis of a no tolerance position when the otherwise honorable Lane is caught extorting money to extricate himself from an embarrassing debt. When Lane anguishes about what he will possibly do next, Don coldheartedly tells him to inform others that "things" just did not work out at the agency bearing his name. Within days, Lane hangs himself in his Sterling Cooper Draper Pryce office. Always putting the business before the relationships eventually haunts Don, as his peers at Sterling Cooper & Partners place him on indefinite leave when his drinking, power trips, and maverick behavior escape his control and jeopardize the agency and its accounts.

Don's wives benefit little from his care or concern in good times or bad. Betty, fed up with raising children virtually by herself, Don's infidelities, and her own suburban malaise, loses feeling in, and control of, her hands on occasion, even suffering a minor car accident as a result. For lack of a physical diagnosis by doctors, Betty seeks psychiatric help, to Don's chagrin. Don questions whether psychiatry can help, as it assists only those who are unhappy; Betty could not possibly be unhappy with all that he has provided for her. His diminishment of her problems is completely de-legitimizing. Don also shuts down Betty's emotional

responses with alarming frequency. As she reminisces about her own mother on Mother's Day, Don scolds her, "Betts, don't. No melancholy." When she claims that she is modeling her psychiatrist's perspectives on grief, Don criticizes, "Mourning is just extended self-pity."

Megan, wife number two, is unable to fully enjoy life with Don. She goes to great efforts and expense to create a surprise birthday party for him, though the surprise is ruined by Roger and Jane Sterling's tardiness, and even sings *Zou Bisou Bisou* to him in front of his friends and colleagues. Don, used to being cool and in control, does little to hide his discomfort and embarrassment and ungratefully scolds Megan afterwards. When Megan finally reaches some success in her acting career, Don, smarting over her departure from the opportunities he fostered for Megan in his business, is never very happy for her. He leaves her on set at the scene of her big break in a television commercial to start scanning for affair partners in a bar. He is bemused, if not annoyed, when fans of the soap opera, *To Have and To Hold*, recognize her from her recurring role as a maid (and her twin sister). Homesick from work, Don flips past Megan's blonde-wigged visage on the screen as if he could not be bothered with her.

Though Don loves Megan and likes and admires his apartment neighbor, the heart surgeon, Arnold Rosen, he sneaks in to sleep with Rosen's wife, Sylvia, whenever he sees the doctor leave the building. At least he is only unable to show his respect for Dr. Rosen. Others escape Don's mere perception altogether. He says, "Hello, you" to Ken Cosgrove's wife, never having bothered to remember Cynthia's name. When embroiled in an argument amidst a small rivalry over the Snow Cone account with copywriter Michael Ginsberg, Don condescends to Ginsberg, "I never think of you at all." Similarly, Don's replacement at Sterling Cooper & Partners, Lou Avery, rejects the work and opinions of Peggy, who is used to contributing greatly to copy projects, "I guess I'm immune to your charms."

Joan can also be cold and indifferent to others, though it is probably due to her desire to be respected in the patriarchy of the various configurations of Sterling Cooper. Though Joan solves many problems and soothes many upsets among her staff of secretaries and phone operators, she is sometimes blunt and judgmental in her reactions. She walks right past receptionists sobbing in the bathroom and dismisses her roommate Carol's heartfelt romantic advances with, "You've had a hard day, let's go out and try to forget it." When Harry Crane's and Don's secretaries arrange for one to clock the other out so she can leave early to

buy a gift, Joan is merciless in their punishments, firing one and reassigning the other. Joan also “forbids crying in the break-room, it erodes morale.”

Much of this crying is inspired by the lewd sexist behavior of the men toward their pretty underlings. Often herself the object of every man’s gaze, Joan responds to Peggy’s desponding of “always being the dessert” when asked to lunch, “Men are men. You’re the new girl. You’re not much. Enjoy it while it lasts.” Even Joan’s forbearance of paternalism has its limits. When her newlywed husband Greg Harris complains about his own professional disappointment, “You don’t know what it’s like to want something your whole life and not get it,” she shatters a flower vase against the back of his head.

Roger Sterling is extremely cavalier about his relationships at least until they are threatened. His indifference to others is apparent on his psychiatrist’s couch as he wonders only about the meaning of his own life and progress as a human being. Roger was basically an absentee father to daughter Margaret. He never shows much interest in being involved in the life of Kevin, the son he fathered with Joan despite her marriage to Greg, until he is cut out of his grandson Ellery’s life by Margaret for causing him nightmares by bringing him to see the movie, *Planet of the Apes*. When Roger learns about his mother’s death, his reaction is casual, at least compared to that of his secretary, Caroline, who is distraught by the news as she delivers it to him. Roger’s grief for his mother is only manifested later, or perhaps overshadowed by, as his despair over the death of his lonely shoeshine man and the outrage he displays when ex-wife Mona brings her second husband, Bruce Pike, to his mother’s memorial service.

The deaths and grief of others is essentially shrugged away in the *Mad Men* domain. Don attends Mrs. Sterling’s memorial service after tying one on and disrupts the family matriarch’s eulogy by vomiting loudly. He and Betty pay little attention to the many signs that Sally is struggling mightily with her grandfather’s death. Pete Campbell is inconsiderate when he glibly makes fun of the writer’s block of the copywriters by summarizing that recently deceased senior partner Frank Gleason “is obviously in a better place” and when he refers to Frank and Lane Pryce as “dead as doornails” to headhunter, Duck Phillips. In fact, no one seems especially bereft at the loss of Gleason other than his longtime partner, Ted Chaough. Megan’s father, Emile Calvet, sees the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. only as confirmation of his Marxist prejudice against the capitalistic United States. Harry Crane angers Pete by being upset not so much with the loss of a great activist and father but with the loss of sponsored programming and ads that the TV coverage of King’s death causes. At the expiration of Ida Blankenship, longtime secretary, at her

desk, Roger cracks wise, "She died like she lived. Surrounded by the people she answered phones for."

Inadequacy. There are times when the principal players of *Mad Men* are not only aware of others around them but also of their disappointments and despair. Often, they refuse to console altogether; they do, however, occasionally attempt through words and deeds to be of service. Alas, their efforts at social support are partial and half-hearted, wholly ineffective and unappreciated, and/or unrewarded.

Sally's bereavement at the loss of her grandfather is an aching portrayal of a child's first personal experience of grief. Unfortunately, it is largely unattended by her parents. Due to his failing health, Betty's father, Gene Hofstadt, moves in with the Drapers and establishes a close bond with his pre-teen granddaughter. They share in enjoying ice cream, reading aloud *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, and even driving, as Sally steers while "Grandpa Gene" controls the pedals of the car from the passenger seat. He tells Sally that she can do whatever she wants with her life, just like her grandmother, regardless of what Betty may tell her. Gene passes away while at the grocery store and Betty and Sally receive the news on their front doorstep from a policeman. That evening, Don, Betty, her brother William, and his wife, Judy, commiserate over drinks in the kitchen while Sally listens from underneath the dining room table. When they all laugh at a joke about Gene's last girlfriend, Gloria, never making it to heaven, Sally barges in and demands, "Why are you laughing? How can you sit there like nothing's happened? He's gone. Nobody cares that he's really, really, really gone." This presents an opportunity for helping Sally to deal with her feelings and with mortality. Instead, Betty yells at Sally, "Stop it! Go watch TV!" Indeed, Sally's suppressed and complicated grief goes on to cause her trouble at school and to scream at night in fear that her grandfather has become a ghost in the guise of her new infant brother, also named Gene. When the loss is compounded by Betty's estrangement from Don and the breakup of their nuclear family, Sally acts out her dismay by cutting her own hair; Betty slaps her in the face, immediately, wordlessly, and viciously.

There are multiple smaller cuts of unsupportiveness where momentary prospects for comforting are neglected. Don never attends filming of Megan's soap opera scenes until a love scene arouses his jealousy and need to control and supervise. When separated by his business travel, Don and Megan converse on the phone about the riots and police brutality at the Chicago Democratic National Convention and Megan registers her alarm. Don blows it off by saying that as a Canadian, "you can't even vote here" in America and apologizes meekly when she reminds him that she

lives here. Don happens upon Dr. Rosen in the building elevator to find him crushed at the realization that he will not be the transformative historical figure to perform the first human heart transplant. Rosen requests support in the form of a drink together. Despite Don's adoration for him and all the wrongs he has secretly enacted upon him, he turns down this chance at commiseration, claiming he has work to do, though that never derails him from anything he actually wants to do.

After the merger between Sterling Cooper Draper Pryce and Cutler Gleason Chaough, staff must be trimmed. Roger takes particular glee in firing Burt Peterson for the second time in their careers and instead of soothing the blow, rubs it in with "no one fought for you." Roger also brings Ken Cosgrove's fear of unsupportiveness to life. Ken hides his science fiction writing from colleagues behind the pseudonym, Ben Hargrove, sure that he will be ridiculed if not sanctioned. Upset that his own memoir never won acclaim, Roger demands that Ken focus on his agency work and cease his fiction writing immediately. Even the most minor of characters can be counted on to fail to offer support. Peggy, fearful of break-ins and attacks in the slowly redeveloping neighborhood where she invested in a brownstone building, is startled by live-in lover Abe Drexler and accidentally stabs him. In the ambulance, Abe speaks of his demise and Peggy tells him that he will live. Looking for additional reassurance from the medic riding along, she receives only a shoulder shrug. Abe, a journalist, reappraises the incident as great material for an article but then expresses disgust at Peggy's values and timidity and breaks up with her.

Sometimes, consolation is offered but there are defined boundaries to the scope of support. Megan reveals to Sylvia that she has suffered a miscarriage and feels horrible guilt for being relieved at not having to decide about whether to abort the pregnancy. Sylvia empathizes with Megan about the miscarriage, as she has also had one but states her inability to sympathize with abortion considerations. Megan concludes, "I just feel so shitty, I'm sorry I brought it up." Don feigns support for Megan when she reveals the miscarriage to him, proclaiming that he will abide by her wishes about children. However, Don is actually preoccupied with his affair with Sylvia. He later travels to California to "relax" Megan over her various professional rejections in favor of other actresses but implies she is at fault, "Megan, you know they're getting rejected too. Maybe they're just handling it better than you."

Arlene, Megan's senior actress and wife of Mel, the head writer of *To Have And To Hold*, walks across the city ostensibly to help Megan with her trouble capably playing her roles as twins. She instead hits on Megan,

who with Don had earlier turned down a swinger tryst offered by Arlene and Mel. Rejected again by Megan and scolded for "taking advantage of the situation," Arlene calls Megan "a tease." Pete Campbell is happy to take over the Chevy responsibilities after Ken is physically marred by the yokel exploits in Detroit. Feigning sympathy for Ken as he formally begs off the account, Pete is accused by Bert Cooper of shedding, "Crocodile tears! How quaint."

Even as characters sincerely attempt to help one another, the results can be pitiful. Many supportive efforts are doomed to inefficacy, often fueled by the inadequate skills of their providers. Don's most earnest attempts at support are usually of the problem-focused coping variety. Recognizing his belittlement of Betty's situation when he said she already had everything she could want, he comes home and tells her he realized she did not have everything and presents her with a new watch. While this is moderately pleasing to Betty, Don achieves less success with a trinket from Rome, which they had just enjoyed together. Despondent to be back home in the town and among the friends she actually "hates," the Coliseum bracelet charm serves only, in Betty's words, as "something to look at when I tell the story about the time we went to Rome." When Betty emerges from her bedroom while their children watch coverage of the JFK assassination, Don orders her to "take a pill and lie down" so he "can handle the kids." Don tells them to turn the TV off and that "everything's going to be okay," though he seems to doubt it. Apparently, this is Don's go-to move, as years later when Betty, now his ex-wife, frets about her own health, she makes him say "everything's going to be okay," which is what he always says. Cliché support phrases are prevalent in *Mad Men*. Don responds to Megan's failures at distinguishing her two characters on the soap with, "tomorrow's another day." In rebuffing Peggy's implicit come-on of revealing her recent break-up with Abe, Ted soothes, "there's someone out there for you." Abe offers only "what're ya gonna do?" when Peggy fails to get the apartment she loved.

Throughout their marriage, Don's diminishment of Betty's problems is de-legitimizing and thus ineffective as comfort. Don also shuts down Betty's emotional responses with alarming frequency. He demands, "Stop thinking about that" when Betty ponders her widowed father's new romantic involvements. Don even manages to belittle third parties while brushing off the concern of others. As his son Bobby openly fears for the safety of his stepfather Henry with the rioting after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., Don smirks, "No one's gonna do that. Henry's not that important."

In terms of addressing his own distress with emotional self-disclosure, Don is pretty much a closed book. Exceptions to this rule transpire but usually with less than stellar results. Don suffers the consequences when he finally reveals his past to Betty and his relationship with Sally is usually harmed as she catches glimpses of his present nature as well as his past. Dr. Faye Miller rewards Don for his faith and trust in her with his secrets but she is tossed aside. The one instance in the entire series that sees Don feeling compelled to come clean about his past blows up terribly in his face. After winning over the executives of the Hershey Chocolate Company with false tales of his father and the candy bar that is the “currency of affection” and the “childhood symbol of love,” they respond that he must have been “a lucky little boy.” Unable to abide his own lies, Don reveals to the executives and his colleagues in attendance that he was an unloved child raised in a brothel and that no boy need be advised of the wonder of Hershey with an advertising campaign. This becomes the final straw in the partners’ decision to place Don on indefinite leave.

Peggy, herself a target of harsh criticism from her own mother and sister due to her pregnancy out of wedlock, is frequently a provider of comfort to others, though not always with outstanding results. A focus group about beauty products brings Don’s secretary, Allison, to tears as she bemoans his insensitivity about their one night tryst. She bursts from the group meeting and Peggy consoles her by legitimizing her feelings, “People cry at these things all the time, even grown men.” It goes south quickly, however, when Allison alludes to Peggy’s similarity, implying that Peggy must have slept with Don, specifically to have escaped the secretarial pool. Peggy shocks Allison into further withdrawal by angrily responding, “your problem is *not* my problem and honestly you should get over it!” When asked twice by Don and other members of the focus group about Allison’s recovery, Peggy coldly responds, “she’s fine” both times.

Even when characters are commendably supportive, their efforts are so discernibly unappreciated and unrewarded that the take-home message for viewers may still be not to bother. For the most part, these characters are female. For instance, when acted out, Peggy’s kind intentions are also not always fully compensated. A young freelance artist, Joey Baird, is disrespectful, and extremely sexually harassing to Joan, even for the chauvinistic context of the Sterling Cooper Draper Pryce offices. He goes too far when he posts, on Joan’s window, his explicit drawing of her on all fours servicing partner Lane Pryce. Joan stands up for herself to Joey and his immature cronies, warning them that as they die alone in Vietnam, they will have been disliked by her. Encouraged by Don, Peggy defends Joan further by confronting and counseling Joey. When Joey refuses to

apologize, she fires him. On the elevator at the end of the day, Peggy anticipates gratitude from Joan who is both her subordinate and sometime mentor. Instead, Joan lashes out at Peggy for solving "my problem" that "I'd already handled" and confirming their respective office statuses as "a meaningless secretary" and "another humorless bitch."

Trudy would be the true exemplar of effective support if she were not so thoroughly unrewarded by Pete's cad-like behavior, including his uselessness at helping her cope with their infertility. Most symbolic of her wasted efforts may be the time when she flirts on his behalf with an ex-flame just to get Pete's mediocre short story published as a retort to Ken's placement in *Atlantic Monthly*. Pete is upset that Trudy's networking produces only an acceptance in *Boy's Life*. When she implies that by sleeping with her ex she may have gotten him into *The New Yorker*, he scathingly responds, "Why didn't you?" In the end, Trudy is left to raise Tammy alone, accompanied only by the knowledge that Pete and her father met up at a local cathouse.

Perhaps no one in the *Mad Men* cast is punished more for her understanding and support than Dr. Faye Miller, a market research consultant hired by the newly formed Sterling Cooper Draper Pryce in season four. After initial resistance in the name of professionalism, she falls into bed and a relationship with Don. Perceptive, sensitive, and sharply intelligent, she nurses Don through the severe panic attacks he suffers upon believing that his true identity and crimes as Dick Whitman are being uncovered by government investigators. Panting and sweating in his apartment, Don quickly reveals to Faye the history that he protected so vigilantly from everyone, especially Betty, for so many years. Faye is instantly accepting of his plight and past decisions. She reassures him, "I'm glad you told me," soothes his guilt by reappraising that he "was just a kid" at the time of his transgressions, and focuses on solutions with, "there are things you can do." One day later, recovering at the office, Don agrees to meet Faye for dinner and she devotes herself to helping, "we'll figure out what to do, I promise." As Faye leaves, he affixes a lecherous gaze to his new secretary Megan. Before long, Don has proposed marriage to Megan and Faye has become a leftover who is promptly dumped.

At one point, even Don tries to do the right thing and attains only morose results. Sterling Cooper Draper Pryce profits financially with a \$175,000 life insurance payoff after Lane's suicide. He decides to bring a portion of it, \$50,000, to Lane's widow to pay back that which Lane had invested as a founding partner. Apparently blaming him and the firm for Lane's demise, Rebecca scathingly indicts Don for attempting to provide solace only to himself with the gesture.

Exceptions. Contrary to the predominant trends in *Mad Men*, considerate caring and exemplary support are occasionally provided and received. Some characters are more skilled at comforting than others. Indeed, some of the coping options and support mechanisms recognized in interpersonal communication and psychology literatures are embodied.

Don Draper has such a multitude of opportunities to care for his contemporaries that it should not be surprising that he is capable of hitting the mark. It is even less unanticipated, given his personality that Don gravitates toward problem-focused coping, fixing and solving problems with action and counsel. Some of Don's best moments of support come in comforting Peggy, largely with the aid of his own similar experiences. At her bedside, after Peggy disappeared to deliver Pete Campbell's child, Don offers her a suggestion for behavior that draws partially from the emotion-focused coping tactic of avoidance. As he once did to transition from Dick to Don, Don advises Peggy to "Do whatever they say. Get out of here and move forward. This never happened. It will shock you how much it never happened." Based on her later behavior and the associated sentiments of her immediate family about her nonchalance regarding the forgotten pregnancy and birth, Peggy takes to this advice fully. Though in a much harsher tone, Don also counsels Peggy when she makes requests by mentoring her to stop putting her hand out and to instead "Put your nose down and pay attention to your work. You're good. Get better. Stop asking for things." After all, Don is a self-made man in every sense of the phrase.

The tragedy of Andrew Campbell's perishing aboard an American Airlines jet becomes at least a model for how effective coping and comforting might look. When Pete has just found out that his father was on the plane where all have died, he staggers into Don's office and announces it. Don reacts, "God, I'm sorry to hear that" before pouring himself a drink. Pete claims not to know what to do and Don advises, "What people do. Go home." Pete asks if he is going to cry, and Don suggests, "You just had a shock. I wouldn't worry about what you're feeling. Go home and be with your family . . . there's life and there's work." Though as directive, suggestive, and action-oriented as when he "solved" brother Adam's despair with cash, Don's problem-focused coping motivation here seems to be just the right approach for directing the first few moments of Pete's stunned grief. Even better, when Roger informs Don on the phone that Bert Cooper has passed away, Don offers the perfect empathic reaction, "Roger, I'm so sorry. I know what he meant to you."

Don also focuses on solving problems and offering suggestions when he warns Ted that he is transparent in his feelings for Peggy and even

allows Ted to take his spot in California to save himself from temptation. He progresses from telling Megan, "it's not our problem," to convincing Ted to fix Mitchell Rosen's 1A draft status dilemma; spontaneously agrees to give away Private Dinkins' bride in their beach wedding at dawn in Hawaii; takes his downtrodden son, Bobby, punished with a TV prohibition by Betty, to see the film *Planet of the Apes* twice in a row; provides shelter, food, and money (via Megan) to Anna Draper's pregnant niece, Stephanie; and advises Sally and Betty not to blame themselves for respectively, Sally's duping by the Grandma Ida burglar and Sally's drinking suspension from Miss Porter's boarding school. Don assures Sally the intrusion is his fault and knows she is later acting out against his shameful lifestyle, a fact he does not share with Betty.

Peggy is somewhat successful as supporter to others. She listens to a myriad of secretarial complaints and usually responds with "I'm sorry" or "I'm very sorry about that" before offering some condolence or suggestion. When Pete can barely conceal his fear about flying so soon after his father was killed in an airliner explosion, Peggy reasons, "Statistically speaking it seems very unlikely that it will happen to two people in one family." She also wisely counsels Pete, terrified to announce his loss of the Clearasil account, "Pete, just tell the truth. Don't worry about the outcome. People respect that." Pete voices his gratitude for this advice. She is supportive and encouraging, even admiring, of Cosgrove's hidden second career as a science fiction writer. Peggy is also hospitable and kind to Ginsberg as he starts to unravel at the intrusion of the IBM machine and its incessant whirring into the agency offices. She is nonetheless shocked when Ginsberg accuses the computer of inspiring homosexuality among the men (thus perhaps covering for his own latent feelings) and reveals his (perhaps overcompensating) crush for her with a gift of his own cut-off nipple.

Joan's long affair with her exceedingly appreciative and smitten boss, Roger, allows her to be perceptive, direct, and successful when he is troubled. After Joan married a doctor in training, Roger leaves his wife and engaged daughter to wed Jane, a young low-level employee of Sterling Cooper. Roger calls Joan after she has left Sterling Cooper and he has survived Margaret's wedding that has been spoiled by the assassination of President Kennedy. Joan says, "I'm sorry" to his calling it a disaster but knows him well enough to say, "You're really upset" when he waxes philosophical. "What's that about?" Roger asks, acknowledging his own tendency to brush things aside lightly. Joan answers, "Because there's nothing funny about this," which completely legitimizes her ex-boss/ex-lover's emotional distress. As he is to her, Joan is always available to Lane Pryce when he is upset, except when he crosses the line and

displays affection to her with a kiss or a crude remark. Joan also senses that Peggy is slightly embarrassed when Abe's proposal to her entails only living together and Joan truly supports that news as worthy of celebration.

As admirable as Peggy and Joan can be at times when supporting others, their failures to do so are also documented above. Two far less prominent female characters, Trudy Campbell and Anna Draper, consistently portray their gifts in the art of comforting. Though karma would suggest no such thing, the mostly despicable Pete is the recipient of Trudy's many and kind efforts to support him. Trudy constantly talks him down from his petulant tantrums about workplace slights. Upset that his promotion is actually to be shared with Ken Cosgrove, Pete scoffs at the well-meaning Trudy's gift of an inkwell that bears the message, "Peter Campbell. The buck stops here." She reacts to the new development with, "I'm so sorry" and that like her father, who she esteems, Pete's ambition disallows his happiness. Still, Trudy reappraises, "This is an amazing opportunity. They believe in you" and urges, "Don't turn it sour!" When Pete loses the promotion altogether based on Ken's superior demeanor with clients, he storms home, claiming to be fired. Trudy asks whether he lost his temper and proclaims, "That's good" when he denies doing so. She also determines "That's good," that he was not asked to leave. Again, Trudy finds the bright side, referring to Pete's loyal client base, "Wait and see how it goes. You hold all the cards. It's going to be fine." Reassuring as she is, Trudy proves prophetic as well when the bosses come begging of Pete to join their mutiny and provide his clients to the newly formed Sterling Cooper Draper Pryce.

When Pete chuckles softly to himself at home the morning after his father's death, ever the monitor for the feelings of those around her, Trudy says caringly, "You laughed. What's funny?" Pete recalls that his last conversation with his father was an argument about dog breeds. Trudy legitimizes his regret, "I'm sorry you were arguing" but reappraises doubly with, "Peter, neither of you knew it was the last time. You should be thinking about the good times." "Right," Pete agrees in appreciation of having been heard and consoled.

Anna Draper, the widow of the man whose identity Dick Whitman stole to become Don Draper, embodies social support in her utter acceptance of who and what Dick/Don is. She had always allowed her platonic friend to maintain his ruse despite the profound ways it must have affected her life. On his vacation to California, wherein he will learn of Anna's terminal cancer before she does, Anna's unwavering support for him is again evident. She works into conversation phrases such as "I'm so damn proud of you" and "I know everything about you and I still love

you." When Dick abruptly announces that he must leave, fearing that he would reveal the secret diagnosis her family is shielding Anna from, she calmly agrees, "Of course, I want you to do everything you want to do."

Following Don's lead, some characters display sporadic talent of the problem-focused variety. Peggy offers to work all weekend for Ted so that he may attend to Frank Gleason's funeral and she forges a note about a phone call from Avon contact, Andy Hayes, to save Joan from admonishment by Pete and Ted for meeting Hayes without Pete. Peggy relates to art director Stan Rizzo's loss of his cousin Robby in Vietnam, "I am so so sorry to hear that. I've had loss in my life" and recommends to him that, "You can't dampen it with sex and drugs."

To assuage daughter Margaret's sorrow at losing her grandmother, Roger offers her a jar of River Jordan water his mother employed for the baptisms of Sterlings. Hoping for more financially significant inheritances, Margaret though thankful, forgets to take the water with her. Prostitute Aimée Swanson cares for the ill teenager Dick Whitman when no one else will go near him though who exactly she is serving when she "takes his cherry" is unclear. Less literal mutual back-rubbing materializes between accounts man Bob Benson and Joan when Bob makes sure that Joan is cared for at the emergency room where she suffers with an ovarian cyst; Joan later saves him from the Sterling Cooper Draper Pryce-Cutler Gleason Chaough merger layoffs.

Duck Phillips, former short-term director of account services at Sterling Cooper turned headhunter, is called in when Pete Campbell struggles with uncertainty about his status and prospects for longevity with Sterling Cooper & Partners. Among other things, Duck advises Pete to above all, "manage family" as Campbell's home-front shenanigans are detracting from his career. Similarly, Freddy Rumsen, of all people, sets Don back on course. Now a freelance consultant to several agencies including SC&P, Freddy recognizes Don's alcohol-fueled plunge to obscurity as akin to his own. Don, wounded by demotion and assignment of low-level copywriting tasks, drinks to soothe his ego and Freddy entreats that instead, "you have to do the work." The next day, Don starts to do exactly that.

The emotion-focused coping device of achieving positive reappraisal of formerly distressing events makes a few appearances among the show's seven seasons. When his secretary, Caroline, is distressed at the passing of his mother, Roger hands her a drink and notes that at 91 years old, her death is hardly a surprise. He recalled that she had been noting each Christmas as her last for many years. After his mother's tumultuous memorial service, his ex-wife, Mona sits with Roger as he bemoans being

such a disappointment to everyone in his life. She reframes it as “everyone *loves you*” and worries about what you think of *them*.

With the death of their own mother, apparently tossed from a cruise ship by her caregiver-turned-husband, Pete and brother, Bud, are aghast and furious. Upon learning how much money it will take to ensure a full investigation and location of the body as well as to press prosecution, they cool on the idea considerably and console each other. Bud reappraises, “she’s in the water with Father” who died in a plane crash and Pete agrees, “She loved the sea.” Pete benefits from a new assessment of a stressor, albeit a misguided one, when he and his father in law, Tom Vogel, also a client representing Vicks Chemical, bump into each other at a “party house on Lex.” Pete frets about the business and his marriage until Ken Cosgrove compares the situation to having seen his high school teacher at a dirty movie, “it’s mutually assured destruction,” and thus nothing to worry about. Neither Pete nor Ken could have predicted that Vogel was willing to push the button.

More pedestrian support efforts are also applied to good effect. Bob Benson calms down Ginsberg during a minor freak out about capitalism and a business meeting by bolstering his esteem, “Manischewitz is good people. Pull yourself together and be the man I admire.” Just listening is good enough for Pete when Joan attends to his frustrations about being responsible for his mother’s care and having to choose between “his home and *a* home.” Despite the racist tendencies of Roger and Bert Cooper, who worry at separate times about the appearance of an African American woman fronting the agency as the receptionist, there is a warm sense of simply being there for black employees in the wake of the King, Jr. assassination. Peggy and Joan each hug secretaries and express sorrow, and Don allows Dawn to work, despite an offer to go home because that is what she wants. Even Pete finds chivalry in the event, calling his estranged wife, Trudy, just to offer to literally be there for her and Tammy, who is actually too young to be upset. Of course, Pete also stands up against Harry Crane’s mercenary take on the television programming chaos that ensues.

Our final example of welcome and appropriate support also embodies standing up for someone else. It comes from one of the quirkiest and quietly strange characters of all. Glen Bishop, a young Ossining neighbor of the Drapers early in the series, survives a crush on Betty and her odd responses to it, to be a long-distance confidant and mentor of Sally as an adolescent. Sally, visiting Miss Porter’s boarding school as a prospective student, is pressured by her dorm hosts to procure alcohol. She summons Glen from the Hotchkiss School who is driven by his friend, Rolo. Boozed

up, Glen pairs off in an adjoining room to make out with one of the host girls, leaving Sally with Rolo, who proceeds to make unwanted advances on her. When she cries out, Glen physically attacks Rolo, standing up for Sally’s honor, and jeopardizing both his hookup and his ride in the process. Noble as this is and from such an enigmatic character to boot, Glen’s action is, by its very nature, both problem-focused and damaging to another human being; thus it is archetypal *Mad Men*.

Individualism and Isolation, Indifference, and Inadequacy in *Mad Men*

The opening credit sequence for every *Mad Men* episode won the 2008 Emmy Award for Outstanding Title Design and has been the focus of much popular and scholarly interpretation. The animation evokes Hitchcockian movie references but for many it is reminiscent of Associated Press photographer Richard Drew’s “The Falling Man,” a picture of a 9/11 victim plummeting alongside a World Trade Center tower to his death. A silhouetted figure, clearly that of Don Draper, arrives at his office only to witness it and all of its contents slip away and fall. Next, Don is falling among the skyscrapers of the city that are emblazoned with vintage advertising images. The music consists of a simple repetition sinking into lower registers. *Mad Men*’s characters, especially Don, are losing control, status and privilege, descending from their heights, and each is making the fall utterly alone.

The extent of exposure of contemporary fans to the 1960s-set AMC melodrama, *Mad Men*, is likely to cultivate their beliefs, values, and even standards for practice with regard to relating, coping, and comforting in times of duress. Therefore, determination of the sort of behavior portrayed on the series is more than just an academic exercise. Indeed, on the show, throughout seven seasons, the amount of isolation, studied nonchalance towards others, and both failed and futile coping and comforting, far exceeded instances of adequate social support. Sadly, characters frequently refuse to acknowledge or discuss their own experiences and feelings and when they do, they are likely to be met with indifference, de-legitimizing responses, and/or well-intentioned comforting messages that do not succeed.

When comfort is proffered effectively in *Mad Men*, it tends to involve anticipation and legitimization of targets’ feelings and cognitions. Simple expressions of sympathy and empathy such as “I’m sorry” or the sharing of similar experiences are employed profitably. Positive reappraisal was, as expected, one of the most capable devices of both comforting and

coping found in the episodes. Problem-focused coping, such as offering suggestions for action, or even undertaking action on the behalf of another in need, was somewhat commonly portrayed but also mixed in its efficacy for alleviating negative feelings.

Of course, the sex of characters and the era in which they are portrayed may be factors that shaped these findings. Scholarship suggests that men are most likely to employ problem-focused coping, that women are better equipped to express emotions and to console others than men, and that both sexes appreciate and prefer person-centered comforting (Burlison 1982; Kunkel and Burlison 1999). The men of *Mad Men* are largely ineffectual at the communicative and psychological skills of interest. The major exceptions lie in the successful efforts of Don Draper, which represent a miniscule portion of his attempts at comforting. Betty Draper is mostly as incapable as her husband at consoling self or other; Peggy Olson provides moments of simple sympathetic support, while Joan Harris is effective despite a blunt judgmental style. Faye Miller's and Anna Draper's support of Dick/Don take the shape of unconditional acceptance. Trudy Campbell is a comforting connoisseur who deftly assists her undeserving husband in navigating the upsets of his career and home life. Optimistically speaking, it would be this minor female character whose behavior is modeled by the *Mad Men* faithful of both sexes.

Research has very little to say about how coping and comforting has evolved, or even whether it has changed, across the decades. Whereas the characters of *thirtysomething* gave whiny voice to the angst of their contemporary 1980s audience, those of *Mad Men* lived half a century ago in an era that gave rise to the greatest social tumult and change in our nation's history. Will current viewers assess the characteristics and lessons of *Mad Men* as related to, and worth emulating in, the current context or will they brush these off as archaic artifacts of an old-fashioned era?