Article

Nostalgia for Pre-Digital Media in Mad Men

Television & New Media
14(6) 546–559

DOI: 10.1177/1527476412451499
tvnm.sagepub.com

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Abstract

The article examines how old imaging technologies figure in AMC's Mad Men, including the Kodak slide projector and the Super 8 home movie, and more broadly speaking, postwar advertising and ideals of home and family. It links the nostalgia for these old media to contemporary masculinity and the ephemeral nature of new media in order to question what significance the baby boom era holds today.

Keywords

photography, advertising new media, home movies, nostalgia, baby boom, television

Mad Men, a television melodrama set in 1960s America, is wildly successful, resonating powerfully with American viewers since its debut in 2007. It solely brought AMC out of the netherworld of hundreds of cable television channels and into the limelight of must-see-television and "quality networks." Set in the golden years of television, *Mad Men* prominently figures pre-digital imaging technologies and mobilizes old media, in the forms of the 8-mm camera, the Kodak slide projector, and Polaroid photography to narrate a nostalgia for the baby boom past while at the same time highlighting (through the point of view of its protagonist Don Draper) the contemporary loss associated with the end of boomer generation dreams. Using theories on nostalgia and the interarticulation between collective memory and screen technologies, the article focuses on three scenes foregrounding each of the pre-digital media to argue that *Mad Men* uses old media in order to self-reflexively question contemporary popular constructions of boomer nostalgia. This analysis distances "nostalgia" from its negative, escapist, or regressive connotations and instead defines it as a highly complex and nuanced form of historical narration that constructs itself as collective and recuperative. *Mad Men* is far from a simple bemoaning of a lost era. Instead, it is a

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reflective critique of the construction of the idyllic boomer family and interrogation of how it was formulated to begin with. The primary argument of the article is that *Mad Men* uses the temporal phenomenologies and cultural histories attached to old imaging technologies to offer a meta-commentary on contemporary nostalgia for boomer America and its significance at this historical moment, which has to do with the current media transition to digitality and associated waning of "golden age" America and destabilization of analog/"authentic" images of nation, home, and family.

The central character, Don Draper, is a New York advertising executive with a burgeoning career and picture-perfect family in the suburbs. However, his numerous extramarital affairs and the mystery surrounding his back-story cast an ugly shadow on this rose-tinted image. I'm using "boomer" to refer to the period between 1946 (marking the end of World War II and the rise in U.S. birth rates) and 1964 (marking the advent of important countercultural movements like Second Wave Feminism and Civil Rights). This article argues that the character uses pre-digital media to negotiate the historical changes around him. The series' brand of boomer nostalgia offers a meta-commentary on media history and highlights the historical and social constructedness of domestic fantasies of home and, by extension, the constructedness of historical narratives and popular historical memory. It does so by suggesting the interchangeability between boomer era advertising and private photography as complex and overdetermined expressions of domestic desire, nation, and memory. The series links pre-digital media to Don's historical location on the cusp of countercultural change and the multitemporal meditation that nostalgia offers. In doing so, the series invites a historical parallel to be drawn with the contemporary transition from analog to digital imaging technologies and coincident nostalgia for a self-admittedly constructed memory for boomer America. The series' portrayal of old media suggests that the two are related. At stake are understandings of how popular media informs national identity, how historical narrative functions to accommodate change, and lastly, how television nostalgia serves an important cultural function.

How is *Mad Men*'s version of the "boomer" dream specific to its historical and media context? The digital transition has dramatically altered boundaries between work and home with the rise of telecommuting, omnipresent interpersonal communication, the growth of dual-income households, and the necessity of joint parenting. As the evolving housing crisis continues to reshape suburbia and contribute to these dramatic shifts in family and home environment, popular memory of baby boom America holds particular significance as both representative of a bygone era and yet a persistent, albeit artificial, aspiration. Boomer America represents the Camelot era before a "crushing" of boomer dreams by the countercultural revolution and Vietnam War. The popular memory of 9/11, the ultimate decline of America as a global economic power, the broadening income gap of the 1970s onwards, and the economic recession of the late 2000s are also embrocated in the *bitter* part of this bittersweet image of pre-decline America. *Mad Men* is, by extension, working through these historical narratives of loss (albeit primarily for white, straight masculinity), both those of the distant past and recent times.

Nostalgia is not popularly associated with self-reflective and complex memory. More often than not, nostalgia for the boomer era is colored as regressive, stagnating, and a hopeless and naïve indulgence in circuitous ruminations on the past. However, Svetlana Boym's approach to nostalgia offers an alternative theoretical grounding. Boym's *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001) traces nostalgia in post-Soviet Russian diaspora, distinguishing between restorative and reflective nostalgia, both interpreted as valid forms of memory. While restorative nostalgia longs to rebuild the home that is lost, reflective nostalgia suggests a flexibility and meditation regarding history, the present, and the passage of time rather than the recovery of a perceived truth. Reflective nostalgia can be ironic, humorous, inconclusive, and fragmentary: "The past is not made in the image of the present or seen as foreboding of some present disaster; rather the past opens up a multitude of potentialities, nonteleological possibilities of historical development" (Boym 2001, 54). As such, reflective nostalgia in *Mad Men* does not necessarily offer a declensionist view of American history but rather a negotiation of current technological and gendered transitions through reinventing and retelling the boomer past. The series does not shy away from the racial and gender oppression characterizing that era in American history and, through reflective nostalgia, the series questions the historical veracity of the idyllic image of the happy boomer nuclear, suburban family.

Mad Men highlights the constructedness of the boomer family image, first, through the 8-mm home movie. It situates the home movie's vernacular as dissonant with "reality," that is, the metaphoric failure of the boomer family image as a sustainable model. In the scene discussed here, the home movie is wedded to the happy image of the boomer-era suburban family (largely rooted in the 1950s sitcom family) as well as its very image-ness: its fantasy as an artificial memory that is not necessarily rooted in the realities of the time because it precludes gender, racial, ethnic, and class heterogeneity.[1] The episode revolves around patriarchal domestic narratives, their failures, and the relationship of these failures to historical memory at large. Home movie making itself encompasses reflections on memory and a *prospective* nostalgia, which acts as a significant vehicle in the episode to comment on how the series situates itself via historical memory for boomer America.

The Home Movie Scene: Deconstructing Nostalgia for the Boomer Home Movie

The home movie scene in "Babylon" (*Mad Men* 2007, episode no. 1) introduces and troubles depictions of the father as family historian, documentarian, and author of the domestic fantasies associated with that era. The day after one of numerous infidelities, Don wakes up at home to assemble a playhouse for his daughter's birthday party. Once guests have filled the house, he starts filming a home movie of the party. Shots alternate between a medium shot of Don filming and what he sees through the camera, which mimics an 8-mm film being projected onto a black backdrop, effectively evoking viewers' nostalgic memories of family screenings. Don accidentally captures

a new divorcee flirting with a married man. Don then crosses into the dining room where he captures another intimate moment, this time between a husband and wife. At this point, he stops filming. Don leaves the party to pick up the birthday cake and never returns, instead choosing to sit in his car beside the railroad tracks, the cake melting in the seat beside him.

Alternating shots between Don filming and his view through the camera are a familiar strategy for depicting the act of filmmaking (Dziga Vertov's 1929 *Man with a Movie Camera*). However, the strategy holds particular significance in this context because it contrasts reality and real time with fantasy and future time. Draper is constructing a home movie *in anticipation* of what he would like to see when he revisits the film years from now. Isn't this the way everyone makes a home movie? We are directed not merely by the need to record what happens at the event, but by how we want to remember that event in the future, perhaps even silently composing how we will narrate the film upon its first screening. Through filming life at home, we actively construct our own family memories. Don's perfectly composed memory is interrupted by the reminder that his marriage is not happy. The camera becomes a tool for generating and disrupting domestic fantasy. This episode revolves around patriarchal domestic narratives, their failures, and the relationship of these failures to historical memory at large. Home movie making itself encompasses reflections on memory and a *prospective* nostalgia, acting here as a significant vehicle in the episode to comment on how the series situates itself via historical memory for boomer America. In many ways, the scene thematizes the ultimate and necessary failure of the popular image of the nuclear, suburban family (that mainstream media of the time naturalized as white, heterosexual, and middle-class).

While home movies are meant for private distribution and consumption, public pressures certainly inflect home movie making. The temporal shifting that occurs during filmmaking includes the filmmaker's projection of how future generations and perhaps anonymous viewers will see and judge the contents of the film. Future viewers may include family members seeing the film the next day or the odd collector who buys the film at a garage sale fifty years hence. The prospective nostalgia experienced by the filmmaker and participants anticipates future critical viewers who act as the voices of social appropriateness, cultural values, and what constitutes the "genuine" family moment. Making the home movie is, therefore, as much a process of negotiating these social pressures as it is the hurry to capture a prized intimate moment. The home movie is set up for the *temporal richness* of the nostalgic experience. It also engenders an inherent self-reflection on the historical situatedness of concepts of family happiness.

Home movie making collapses time and makes its participants conscious of the movie's convergence of past, present, and future. Annette Kuhn says that the family photo or home movie holds "the promise of a brighter past in the future if we only seize the chance today to consume the raw materials of our tomorrow's memories. This past-in-the-future, nostalgia-in-prospect, always hooks into, and seeks to produce, desires hinging on a particular kind of story—a family story with its own forms

of plentitude" (Kuhn 1991, 25). Similarly, *Mad Men* itself examines past, present, and future *simultaneously.* That is, the home movie, as a narrative trope in film and television, encourages an awareness of multiple temporalities at once. The home movie generates an awareness toward its own temporal trialectic: (1) the *future*—the filmmaker watches events as they happen through the camera from the point of a view of a projected future. At the same time (2) there is the palpable *present* being captured, which (3) also occupies the status of the *past* from the point of view of the projected future self.[2] The polysemy of future, past, and present echoes Boym's idea of reflective nostalgia, which embeds an awareness of the relationship and distance between past and present, and present and future. The temporal simultaneity that occurs makes filming the home movie, appearing in the home movie, and watching it later on inherently nostalgic experiences because home movies engender a consciousness of remembering the present event from a future point of view. In the scene, the multitemporality of making and watching home movies illuminates the contradictions within nostalgia itself between the popular longing for the past and the coincident awareness of its artifice or reliance on the highly choreographed media formats, like photography and the home movie, that claim to represent it faithfully.

In *Mediated Memories in the Digital Age*, José van Dijck argues that home movies are shaped by historically situated attitudes toward family and memory. Home movies' formal and narrative conventions evolve to adapt to new technologies as well as changes in popular perceptions of the family unit. She argues that the 8-mm camera is wedded to the idyllic 50s sitcom family in American memory because "the growth of the suburban family in the 1950s is inextricably intertwined with the emergence of television and of home movie cameras as domestic symbols of individual wealth and social cocooning. As television entered the private homes of the 1950s, images of screen families started to fill living rooms across America and shaped the concept of the nuclear family unit" (Van Dijck 2007, 133). She also observes how the 50s sitcom blurs the lines between real life with screen reality, thus encouraging home movie makers of the time to capture their families in similar kindness. Because of the privileged role *Mad Men* gives old screen technologies as narrative and self-reflective devices, the associations between the 50s sitcom and American home movie, and the series' self-critical narrativization of the "loss" of this idyllic image, the sitcom family is the absent presence effectively haunting *Mad Men*'s home movie scene and, arguably, the series as a whole.

Van Dijck links a change in home movie aesthetics in the 1960s, which favored more cinema vérité camerawork, to the contemporaneous rejection of the idyllic boomer era nuclear family (also reflected by the replacement of the Cleavers with more realistic and dysfunctional television families, including the Bunkers from *All in the Family* (1968–1979) and the Louds from *An American Family* (1968, episodes no. 1–12). Therefore, Van Dijck's history of home movie aesthetics links representations of family not only to changes in technology, but changing media discourses on family. In this history, the boomer years similarly stand for a mythic golden age of family cohesion as well as the home movie itself. In this sense, *Mad Men* demonstrates

nostalgia for old home movie aesthetics and reveals the choreography demanded of the Drapers in order to maintain the media illusion of the idyllic boomer family.

Mediated Memories suggests that technology and memory are codeterminative, reiterating the inherent multitemporal aspects of home movie making. Van Dijck argues that home movies are mnemonic exercises in consuming the present, past, and future. She writes, "In addition, home movies are never simply found footage of the past: each time, they are reviewed or recycled, they are edited by the brain" (Van Dijck 2007, 126–27). In addition, Van Dijck highlights the temporal conflations in home movie making as well as its screenings. The scene from *Mad Men* strategically uses these conflations in order to form a meta-commentary on its own boomer nostalgia. The temporal consciousness that occurs through Don's home movie draws awareness to the series' nostalgia for boomer white America, the construction of patriarchal narratives, and the inevitable failure of these narratives.

Like the home movie itself, *Mad Men*'s nostalgia anticipates the close of "Camelot Era" America, critically looks at the past, and self-consciously and therapeutically constructs fantasies of the past while acknowledging that they are only partially grounded in reality. Don's struggle to maintain the illusion of the functional family through media reinforces that the intact boomer family only exists in popular memory of old media.[3]

The Kodak Scene: Advertising and Private Photography in Nostalgic Memory

Questioning nostalgia for boomer America and the role advertising plays in them are major themes in the series. They receive particular attention in the Kodak scene from the season one finale. Draper designs a campaign for Kodak's slide projector. Don's marriage is on the rocks at this point in the series. As Don puts together his Kodak pitch, he looks through the box of photographs his brother sends him earlier in the episode, photographs that provide the key to his family origins and true identity. Don is the son of a prostitute who is adopted by his biological father and stepmother at birth. The Whitmans are fiercely religious and, while they take him in because they are struggling to conceive at the time, Mrs. Whitman never grows to love Don. They later have another son, their natural born child, whom Don resents throughout childhood. When Don is fighting in World War II, his commanding officer is killed and Don switches dog tags with him, assuming his identity in a desperate move to dissociate himself from his painful childhood and rural life. In the first season, Don's adult brother tracks him down and sends him the box of deteriorating photographs. Don offers him money to leave town and never contact him again. His brother hangs himself in a hotel room the night before the Kodak pitch. Don's pitch is a moving monologue about nostalgia to slides of his personal family photos of Betty and the kids.

> Technology is a glittering lure but there is the rare occasion when the public can be engaged on a level beyond flash, if they have a sentimental bond with the product. . . . In Greek nostalgia literally means the pain from an old wound. It's

> a twinge in your heart far more powerful than memory alone. This device isn't a spaceship, it's a time machine. It goes backwards and forwards. It takes us to a place where we ache to go again. (*Mad Men* 2007, episode no. 13)

The speech articulates Don's nostalgia for his family when it was intact and the series' meta-nostalgia for the boomer family. Don also recognizes that technology has advanced rapidly in recent history and that a longing for simpler times grants the consumer an experience that the "glittering lure" of contemporary newness can't match. *Mad Men* invites a similar critique of technological development of recent years and the presumed usurping of more "authentic" experience by the digital revolution. Yet, the show cultivates a particular nostalgic yet skeptical viewing position. The series is open to the discovery that the past is filled with the same problems experienced today, and perhaps ones that have been overcome because the boomer years were not as golden as they seem.

The Kodak scene incorporates the same mix of skepticism and longing of Boym's (2001) reflective nostalgia, which describes a recuperative adoption of the past as a lens for examining the present. Don indulges in an imaginary past but his reflective nostalgia also incorporates a reflexivity toward its construction. This reflective nostalgia extends to Don's audience at the firm and, by extension, *Mad Men*'s theoretical audience itself.[4]

But Don's newfound appreciation for his family, achieved through this media-based, advertising-driven, and very public introspection, is sadly never carried through into action. After the presentation, we see Don on the train commute home. The final scene shows him coming home and catching the family just in time to join them for Thanksgiving, but a cut to Don opening the door to an empty house reveals that this scene was only a fantasy he had on the train. The episode ends with him sitting alone on the darkened stairs of the house, the camera tracking out to Dylan's *Don't Think Twice*. Don sits in the dark of his empty home contemplating the family narratives he has carefully constructed that have inevitably failed, including the meta-narrative of his false identity as Don Draper. The use of *Don't Think Twice* and the way it is inserted into the series' narrative arc implicitly references the inevitability of large-scale change in the United States and the ultimate tarnishing of boomer dreams as they are revised by the up-and-coming Flower Generation.

The nostalgia modeled by the slide show and home movie can be extended to the series' attitude to memory as a whole, and even *Mad Men*'s memory by proxy, because they are inherently collective forms of memory making. The slide show's materiality and viewing practices are located somewhere between the family photograph and the home movie. A large part of the nostalgia for the slide show, above and beyond its historical context, is the uniqueness it imbues the family event. The slide show invites narration at the time of screening because it depends on someone pacing the slides. Either that person becomes the primary narrator or he or she paces narration to accommodate the input of others. Needless to say, 8-mm home movies are also silent and most often accompanied by similar narrative traditions. Each viewing is unique because stories are never told the same way twice. The nostalgia for these home

entertainment media has much to do with their inherent forms of group narration and participation. In these scenes from *Mad Men*, Draper is the designated narrator; however, each situation is a warped version of the nostalgic family event; one takes place in an office with people who do not know the family members, and the home movie is a carefully scripted family memory gone wrong, never brought to the full fruition of a family screening if we assume that the extramarital flirtation caught on film is reason enough for Don to hide or destroy it. The series suggests a nostalgia for a certain kind of family event and interaction. Their internal dissonances, however, speak to an acceptance that this type of family event is no longer commonplace or was never as idyllic in reality as it is in memory. During the Kodak presentation, a suspension of smoke veils the projected images, complementing this theme and Don's words on the fragility, perhaps unreliability, of personal memory. There is an incommensurability between Don's slide show narration and his real family life, which is less than content. The slide show and home movies are fantasies of familial bliss and counternarratives to reality.

Because the slide show narration is not exclusive to the photographer, different family members and friends can offer counternarrations of their own. Patricia Zimmermann and Karen Ishizuka's *Mining the Home Movie: Excavations in Histories and Memories* (2007) focuses on the oppositional possibilities of the home movie format. From Cuban American rediscoveries of childhood films that made their way to the United States, to home movies filmed in Japanese internment camps, the anthology focuses on home movies that offer counternarratives to the hegemonic white, middle-class, cohesive family unit that popular media naturalized as normal. Zimmermann and Ishizuka state that "amateur films negotiate between private memories and social histories" (2007, 4) and that

> as a cinema of recovery, home movies unsettle homogenous, unified official history by locating records as incomplete, fragmentary articulations of difference. . . . Home movies not only function as empirical evidence of otherwise lost events; they are at the same time political interventions, dreamscapes, and phantasms suggesting collisions among different spheres and contiguities across differences. (Zimmermann and Ishizuka 2007, 22)

Zimmermann and Ishizuka illuminate the political potential of home movie "dreamscapes" by assigning formal elements subversive meaning and revisionist potential. Similar renarrations occur at family screenings where other voices besides the filmmaker's can be heard and, in the process, counternarratives are mapped onto the home movie and its associated memories.

Memories of home that are narrated through various media (photography, film, and memoirs) are shaped by gender, racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and national histories. In the case of a family slide show, it becomes a matter as small as who chooses, paces, and narrates the slides. Each of these levels of participation is inscribed by power dynamics of the home and of the home's cultural and historical contexts. Annette

Kuhn's *Family Snaps: The Meaning of Domestic Photography* (1991) similarly positions countermemory within domestic narratives of homes and family to argue that these narratives are overdetermined by memories of nation.[5]

Counternarrative strategies are an integral and natural part of the home movie because they are built into its visual vocabulary and social practice. In the Kodak scene, Don reframes and recontextualizes images of his family to situate them within a happy, family narrative. The content of most of the images precedes the storyline of the series (the birth of his children, his wedding). The audience does not know to what extent Don and his family were truly happy at the start of the marriage. We only know that his happy, imaginary, past family does not align with his discordant, real, present family. In fact, the nostalgia he creates at the Kodak presentation *depends* on the present *loss* of this imagined, familial bliss just as the nostalgia for the boomer past relies on its presumed naïveté and wholesomeness that have been lost. The scene illustrates the subversive potential of nostalgia itself, for, in order for there to be nostalgic longing, there must be the admission that the past life cannot be re-created. Nostalgia also admits that the memory of the former life is sweeter than it was in reality. *Mad Men*'s Kodak scene takes quotidian images of the boomer family and fantasy home life and casts them as patriarchal dreamscapes in the American imaginary and, as nostalgic objects that never existed, they are "advertising" images similar to the ones Don Draper creates at work that are caught up in historical meaning.

The scene lavishes attention on the material qualities of the slide show and film photography; however, the mobilization of such seemingly private family photographs toward professional purposes is a contradiction that highlights the cultural and mnemonic *constructedness* of popular images of boomer America. The context of Don's family photographs in an advertising pitch undermines, or at least places in question, the authenticity assigned the boomer family in memory. The emotional effect of Don's presentation relies on its specific temporal and material qualities: temporal in the very format of the slide show, which pauses on each photograph, perhaps staying longer on some than others; and material in that the slideshow, by projecting light through film, calls attention to the very materiality and also fragility of these slides. The slides exist and are visible because they are literally illuminated as physical objects, but the same materiality carries the reminder that, as physical objects, they deteriorate and die. Here, the ephemeral quality of old media is coupled with a materiality. Intermittent shots of the slides shifting in the projector and the very physicality of photography stress their materiality. The opposing fragility and durability of nostalgic objects also applies to the secret photographs of Don as a child that he keeps hidden in a box locked in his desk. Most of the photographs are black-and-white scenes of rural farm life. They reveal the secret narrative, the story that he cannot tell, and the world that he is *not* nostalgic for. The box of snapshots haunts Don because of its shear materiality as reminders of his former life and his brother's suicide.

Don's possession of the photographs and their consolidation in a shoebox locked in a desk are metaphoric for his collection, management, and erasure of pieces of his past. The family photographs he shows at the Kodak pitch are symbolic of the fantastic

past he materializes through his photography. However, the ephemerality of pre-digital imaging technologies and nostalgic memory also speaks to the irretrievability of this fantasy life. Don's obsessive management of images of himself and his family is deeply connected to his profession in advertising and his understanding of how to commodify boomer-era class aspirations. *Mad Men* binds the ephemeral/material paradox to the parallel contradictions in nostalgia for boomer America between longing and rejection, and uncertainties surrounding the authenticity of the idyllic boomer family. The paradox becomes a narrative device for the contradiction in historical memory itself.

The Polaroid Scene: Indexicality and Historical Intro/Retrospection

Later in the season, Don pays a visit to his mistress and unexpectedly finds himself in the middle of a beatnik party. While high, he begins taking photographs of guests with a camera he finds in the apartment. After taking the first picture he stumbles to the bathroom and experiences a flashback to the Depression-era, rural Pennsylvania of his childhood. When Don returns to the present he uncovers the developing Polaroid, a picture of his mistress and a friend. On studying it, he understands she is in love with someone else. In this scene, Don encounters an unfamiliar subculture and his traditional attitudes clash with the countercultural preaching of the beatniks. Don is shown experiencing history in the making—the germination of the countercultural movements of the sixties and seventies. The coincidence of this encounter with his flashback links his experience of past and present to his experience of history, from the Great Depression to the earliest hints of feminism and left-wing political unrest. Don Draper's propensity to run away from his problems and into the arms of other women is his means of breaking ties with the generation before him and his origins in rural America. The scene illustrates the way *Mad Men* binds personal memory to history at large and to the intimacy and ephemera attached to the pre-digital image. The qualities of pre-digital media that *Mad Men* highlights are rooted in present anxieties surrounding the digital transition.

The Polaroid is a unique pre-digital technology in that it has a negative. It reduces the moment of the image down to a single material object, the physical photograph and nothing else. The moment Don captures between the lovers resides in time and place in the palm of his hand, in the Polaroid. Because that moment is fossilized in the body of the photograph and there is no other source image to compare it to, it holds a singular, Barthesian truth for Don. The Polaroid is the only old media to approximate the instantaneity of digital photography; however, unlike digital media, it demands more meditation during the act of shooting film because of the cost of film and the length of time it takes to develop. The Polaroid camera is not able to snap away carelessly, ingesting its environment like a digital camera. *Mad Men* attaches a tangibility to pre-digital media that can be handled, hidden, and destroyed while also highlighting

mediated representations of boomer America—unrealistic portrayals of parenthood, childhood, and suburbia found in TV, home movies, and advertising.

Photography carries associations with the ephemeral and the material. Roland Barthes suggests that the photograph, while capturing a fleeting moment in time, bears an indexical relationship to its referent because light physically reflects off the object of study and impresses itself onto the negative, creating a lithographic stone or woodblock from which all photographs are then reproduced (Barthes 1982, 5–7). The photograph, thus, has an intensely physical relationship to what it captures. Barthes does not elaborate on the memory processes of photography; however, the morality/presentness, ephemera/material bind, or what Barthes calls a photograph's "contingency" versus its indexicality, plays a key role in photography's function as a mnemonic tool. Reflective nostalgia harmonizes the admission that one can no longer return to the past (which parallels the mortality of the captured moment in photography) with the reflexive longing (which often relies on tangible and intensely sensory memory triggers like smell, taste, sound, texture, and touch, analogous to photographic indexicality). The scene highlights the resonances between photography and the phenomenology of nostalgia. Furthermore, privileging old media as conduits for boomer nostalgia suggests that the boomer period represents more than a lost American innocence for the series. Rather, it stands for a different, more physical relationship to technology. At the same time, this affective moment is undercut by the knowledge that Don is shamelessly exploiting hackneyed family moments for professional gain and advertising purposes. Or are these seemingly "authentic" private moments shaped by advertising images of the boomer family? The way the three scenes use the visual language of advertising suggests that the relationship between photographic or filmic boomer family moments and boomer-era advertising images is overdetermined. They are inextricable partners in the popular nostalgia for boomer America. Moreover, the authenticity assigned predigital media (which is undercut by the series' foregrounding the material/ephemeral paradox) is arguably just as constructed as the reified popular memories of boomer America.

The series' construction of history and memory relies on a nostalgia for old imaging technologies that, while remembered as more durable and genuine forms of technology that captured more genuine definitions of family, are situated *within the world of advertising* at the historical birth of associations between American private citizenship, nationalism, and mass consumption. Advertising, as the industrial creation of desire through images, seems to contradict the nostalgia for authentic images of domestic happiness, family screenings, and shared memories. However, in the Kodak scene from *Mad Men*, there is little difference between the private photograph and advertising images since Draper is blatantly appropriating one for the purposes of the other. Whether he believes in the authenticity of his family photos or not, he is *using* their associations with authenticity in order to promote the Kodak slide projector and differentiate *his* ad strategy from others that depend on mass produced and "inauthentic" imagery. As far as Draper is concerned, his character *does* have a personal investment in the piercing images from his private family album, but his motives are always

ambiguous. The series reveals the interdependence and blurring between the advertising image and the private photograph, particularly in terms of how boomer America is remembered. As much as Draper is portrayed a master craftsmen of his trade, he and millennial popular nostalgia for the boomer era are also victimized by these images of perfect family.

Conclusion

At a meta-level, the scenes discussed construct and then subvert a popular fantasy of baby boom America. Through Don's deconstruction of his domestic dreams, the series suggests a parallel deconstruction of the national, media-informed imaginary of America's Golden Age. *Mad Men* associates old media technologies, their image formats, and viewing conditions with the constructedness of personal memory and historical memory. Through the camera, Don is able to negotiate how his time is changing about him, his inability to maintain the separation between work and home, mistresses and family, and between his temptation to escape the truth of a historical past and the desire for a domestic fantasy that is not real and never was. Through the meta-historical, self-reflexive tactics the series uses to treat old media and domestic fantasy, by extension, *Mad Men* positions itself as offering the same introspective and retrospective value.

The home movie, Kodak slide projector, and Polaroid have, built into their formats, the very gap between self and image, between now and then that enables the critical distance for deconstructing images of familial happiness. Through this, they also deconstruct and question modes of memory making, narration, and counternarration. The way the series integrates these media formats, their cultural histories, and their inherently nostalgic phenomenologies into its narrative blurs the lines between advertising and authentic images of happiness, between history and the media event, and between presumably "better" technologies and their digital equivalents. In doing so, the series questions how we remember, the validity of our domestic fantasies, and how we experience history in the making—how we participate in a memory making of the present through screen technologies. It also foregrounds the historical situatedness of definitions nation, family, and media, declensionist narratives and collective memory itself as the series emphasizes points of fissure in the presumably "collectively" shared boomer narrative. The domestic fantasies cultivated and reinforced through advertising, and these particular imaging technologies, remain mutually dependent both then and now in how we remember and narrate baby boom America and project those images onto what we desire for ourselves, what we determine to be parts of the past better left behind, and what we assume we have lost.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Notes

1. I use theory in the Todorovian (1970) sense, which posits fantasy provides a moment of hesitation inviting the viewer to consider the credibility of both the fantastic and its real counterpart. In *Mad Men*'s case, Don's fantasies serve to question the retention of the idyllic boomer family as a viable aspiration.
2. For other definitions of projective nostalgia, see Forgacs (2007).
3. Don's masculinity is deeply tied to his use of photography and movies for interrogating his historical present, past, and future. The part the camera plays in this scene relates to the culturally inscribed role assigned fathers as family documentarians and memory makers. A Bell and Howell internal marketing study found that fathers were twice as likely to have produced home movies than mothers. See "Investors Forum: WGN-TV Suggested Material for Leisure Time Discussion," *TS*, November 1961, 3, Bell and Howell Corporate Archive in Zimmermann (1995). This is to say, the idea and memory of the boomer father plays as great a role in this scene as the memory of white boomer America. This confirms the overwhelming body of academic literature on how popular representations most often designate men as controllers of technology and women as objects of display (Mulvey 1975). In her work on American home movie making, Patricia Zimmermann (1996) describes how the camera is used as a tool for the patriarchal control and management of Otherness through formal conventions like the zoom, the panorama, and the imposition of linear narrative on organic, private interactions. There is an association between the male-headed household and the home movie as a tool of patriarchal management of the home environment, family memories, and the image of family happiness. However, *Mad Men*'s home movie scene significantly questions these associations. The camera enables the mediated confrontation between Don and his own infidelity as the home movie clearly contrasts socially sanctioned and unsanctioned exchanges. Historically, women have been active participants in home movie making and writing family histories and narratives. But more important to this discussion than the historical truth behind the gender politics of camera operation in the home, is the way that boomer home movie making is remembered and constructed in Mad Men and other nostalgic depictions—that home movie making is associated with men in popular media.
4. For similar revisionist interpretations of nostalgia, see Ball 1998; Guffey 2006; Sprengler 2009.
5. Kuhn (1991) explores the politics of the maternal editing of unwanted family memories that falls under the feminine-coded responsibilities of maintaining the family album (i.e., the elisions of the unflattering photo, of significant others who have since been divorced, or of any family dynamic not in keeping with dominant definitions of the functional family. These feminine-coded "postproduction" manipulations of family history through rewriting and editing the family album are perceived as more passive-aggressive than the male-coded editing that occurs during filming, but they nevertheless offer an outlet through which women in the family could reclaim ownership of family narration.

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