

Lighting Up The Moment: John Player's and representations of gender in the 1950s and 60s

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John Player and Sons was a prominent UK tobacco company that was a founder member of the multinational Imperial Tobacco Company. Focusing on the 1950s and 1960s, and drawing on hitherto inaccessible holdings in the John Player's Advertising Archive, this paper will explore gendered imagery in Player's cigarette advertising and ask how considerations of gender influenced Player's marketing strategies in an era when a 'culture of smoking' (Hilton, 2000) was firmly established, when a significant proportion of both the male and female population smoked, but when new conventions and restrictions regarding tobacco advertising were first debated and then gradually implemented [1].

Research by Hilton, Tinkler, Elliot and Vaknin into the smoking habits of men and women and the context of tobacco advertising in the 1950s and 1960s have raised questions and proposed hypotheses which this paper will take up and explore further using fresh source material. Their findings on smoking habits in this period indicate an overall increase in the proportion of women who smoked (peaking at 45% of adult women in 1966) and a decline in the number of men who smoked: although male smokers continued until the 1980s to outnumber women, the gap between male and female smoking rates was narrowing. Meanwhile, the number of cigarettes consumed per woman smoker was increasing. The proportion of working-class women who smoked was also increasing as the spending power of working-class women increased; at the same time, smoking was starting to decline among women from higher social classes (Hilton, 2000; Tinkler, 2006).

For tobacco manufacturers, the challenge was to tap this mass market among male and female smokers most effectively. In practice, that could mean targeting particular brands and types of cigarettes specifically at men or at women, playing up the way in which a particular product enhanced the 'masculinity' or 'femininity' of the smoker. Tinkler's analysis of women and smoking emphasises the tobacco advertising of the 1950s that portrayed female smokers as 'sensual, elegant and beautiful', smoking cigarettes specifically designed to be 'slim' and 'elegant', and adverts of the 1960s that stressed a message of 'liberation', smoking cigarettes that were specifically 'for her' (Tinkler, 2006). But other strategies were also pursued at the same time that targeted the same brand at both sexes through an 'androgynous' message or a message featuring (heterosexual) couples sharing the same product, sometimes explicitly associating the pleasure of smoking with the pleasure of romance and sex (Vaknin, 2007).

By the 1960s, such considerations on the part of tobacco advertisers also began to be influenced by a new set of factors: the voluntary codes adopted by the tobacco industry that pledged the manufacturers not to advertise tobacco products in a way that 'over-emphasised the pleasures of smoking; featured conventional heroes of the young; appealed to manliness, romance or social success'. Two years later, a further clause was added to exclude advertisements that promoted the association between smoking and feminine glamour, independence, or charm (Tinkler, 2006). Such codes could lead manufacturers either to emphasise the 'androgynous'/universal qualities of their product, or seek more subtle or less problematic ways of promoting cigarettes specifically to men or to women.

Against the context of these findings it is therefore intriguing to examine Player's advertising and its marketing strategies from a perspective of gender. The specific questions this paper addresses about Player's marketing and advertising during the 1950s and 60s are:

- To what extent did considerations of gender shape Player's marketing strategies and techniques?

- How were women, men and heterosexual couples represented in adverts for cigarettes?
- To what extent did these representations change over the period 1950-1970, and how did they differ from pre-Second World War advertisements?

Some light is shed on Player's marketing strategies by a small collection of business records that form part of the Player's Advertising Archive. This collection includes some analyses of branding and the house name of Player's conducted by advertising and marketing agencies such as Mather and Crowther Ltd and Conrad Jameson Associates. These sources sustain the notion that strategies were adopted that *both* took account (through particular products and branding) of particular gendered tastes *and* (through other products and campaigns) sought to transcend the appeal to a particular sex. Studies of Park Drive (a Gallaher's brand) smokers revealed that women chose certain cigarette brands due to their smoothness and mildness of taste and aesthetics such as smaller or thinner cigarettes. This helps illuminate why Player's aimed their tipped cigarette advertising specifically at women. Further evidence from 1969 concerns the proposals for the No. 10 brand, a brand that appears to have been aimed primarily at women, who at the time accounted for 56% of No. 10 smokers. However, there were other brands hitherto associated with male smokers and images of 'masculinity' that underwent some 'rebranding' in this period to make their appeal less specifically male-focused. Mather and Crowther's proposals for a new campaign for Navy Cut cigarettes (1959) not only identified over 50% of tipped smokers as women, but also that the under-25 demographic was an untapped market for Navy Cut. Mather and Crowther accordingly suggested a campaign aimed at neither gender, targeting smokers of both sexes equally. This may plausibly help explain the 'People Love Player's' campaign of the 1960s which used couple images on advertisements. A 1966 investigation into Player's house name by Conrad Jameson Associates also confirmed this point of view, asserting that the sailor so typical of Navy Cut adverts was perceived as overly masculine and should be replaced by something more androgynous.

Taking these insights into account, the paper will go on to analyse a range of adverts for particular brands from the 1950s and 1960s paying attention to their gendered imagery, the degree to which advertising appeared to be targeted at one sex or the other, pursuing a more couple-focused and/or 'androgynous' message, or leaving out representations of people smoking altogether in favour of images only of the product, and any evidence of patterns of change over time during these two decades. These adverts (predominantly point of sale materials) will also be compared to their 1920s and 1930s counterparts.

The Bachelor brand, which was one of the first from Player's to introduce a tipped variety, was, along with Player's No. 3, the most female centred in terms of advertising. Depicting sophisticated and affluent women in furs and gowns at society parties with cigarette and drink in hand, the imagery of the point of sale materials for Bachelor provides us with information about who the brand was being aimed at. The slogans such as 'A Tip For Smart Women' and women declaring 'I prefer the taste of Bachelor Tipped' also contribute to this sophisticated and confident representation of the 1950s woman. However, by the 1960s the dominant imagery of Bachelor Tipped advertisements had become more male- and couple-focused, with working-class men gathered around a car engine and middle or working-class men and women at social events 'Lighting up the moment' with Bachelor cigarettes. No. 3 was a premium brand of 'extra quality cigarettes', using similarly sophisticated imagery but with the slogan 'For Special Occasions'. No. 3 and Bachelor will be discussed in detail in the paper as prominent examples of representations of women in Player's advertising.

One of the most famous and established Player's cigarette brands, Navy Cut, also moves to a couple focused advertising strategy during the 1950s and 1960s after decades of more male-focussed maritime and naval imagery. Illustrations of a woman lighting a sailor's cigarette with the slogan 'Whatever the pleasure, Player's complete it' and an enduring campaign around the catchphrase 'People love Player's' both show the dominance of suggestive courting images. Not only were Player's advertising to couples but importantly both genders, depicting neither at the expense of the other.

Player's Gold Leaf brand, meanwhile, underwent a major image revamp during the 1960s, with advertising images becoming focused entirely on men. Representations of suited men inviting consumers into their club ('Join us') were undoubtedly aimed at the wealthier middle classes who wanted a quality cigarette at a mid-market or premium price. Their target audience were told that Gold Leaf 'Give real pleasure' and were 'For real smokers'.

The paper will conclude by drawing together the evidence from the business correspondence as well as the range of adverts used for a number of different brands in the 1950s and 1960s. It will highlight the contradictions and paradoxes involved in marketing a product that could be, but was not

necessarily, designed and targeted at one sex or the other, and could easily be promoted as an item that enhanced personal appeal, 'image' and sexual identity, at a time when tobacco advertisers were exhorted precisely not to associate smoking with romance, glamour or sexual prowess.

Notes

1. The John Player's Advertising Archive is currently being explored and developed as part of a Knowledge Transfer Partnership between the University of Nottingham and Nottingham City Museums and Galleries. Underused and difficult to access in the past, this archive of over 20 000 advertising and packaging materials and business records is a rich resource containing images and records that support marketing and advertising research.

References

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