

HOPES AND FEARS: ENGLISH AND AMERICAN STUDIES IN SPAIN



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Dpto. Filología Inglesa, Francesa y Alemana

Universidad de Málaga

ISBN: 978-84-616-6917-2

www.aedean.org

2013

Credits

This volume brings together the papers delivered at the XXXVI International Conference of AEDEAN (Asociación Española de Estudios Anglo-Norteamericanos), that was held at the University of Málaga (Spain) from 14th to 16th November 2012. The Editors would like to express their gratitude to a number of institutions and individuals for their support, work and assistance as we put together the e-book. First, we would like to thank the members of the Department of English, French and German Philology (University of Málaga) for their enthusiasm, energy and advice before, during and after the Conference. Without them, this volume would not have seen the light of day. Second, we would like to thank the Board of the Spanish Association for English and American Studies (AEDEAN) for their encouragement, patience and support. Despite our delay in completing the volume, they have always supplied much-needed moral assistance, and have shown faith in our work.

The proceedings include three keynotes, delivered by Dr. Patricia Duncker (University of Manchester), Dr. Julia Lavid (Universidad Complutense de Madrid), and Dr. Andrew Monnickendam (Universidad Autònoma de Barcelona). We have structured the e-book in three sections: Literature, Linguistics and Round tables and workshops. Following the lead of Sara Martín Alegre et al's *At a Time of Crisis: English and American Studies in Spain* (2012), we strongly believe that the ebook will contribute to the visibility of the academic work in Spain and abroad. The outstanding quality of the papers included in this volume proves that English and American Studies in Spain is a fruitful academic field, and we are confident that it will remain so despite the difficulties that the humanities, and research in general, are facing these days.

We hope you will enjoy the contents of the e-book.

Thank you.

The editors

2013

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Departamento de Filología Inglesa, Francesa y Alemana
Universidad de Málaga

ISBN

978-84-616-6917-2

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Keynotes

A Preliminary Study of Sexist Language in Matthew Weiner's *Mad Men* through the Female Characters of Betty Draper, Joan Holloway and Peggy Olson

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Abstract

This paper examines instances of sexist language in relation to three female protagonists in Matthew Weiner's television drama *Mad Men*: Betty Draper, Joan Holloway and Peggy Olson. It argues that the sexist practices depicted in this TV series, both domestically and at the advertising agency itself, have a strong effect on the configuration of the identity of these three female characters: 'the Jackie', 'the Marilyn' and 'the Career Woman'. Since *Mad Men* is set in the 1960s, the paper also devotes some thought to how sexist titles of address, such as *Mrs* and *Miss*, have been affected by language reforms and consequent shifts in language use, and how the series is perceived in this respect by its contemporary audience.

Keywords: *Mad Men*, sexist language, language reforms, gender identity, male's speech style, women's language in the workplace.

1. Introduction

Mad Men is an American TV drama set in the 1960s.¹ It takes place in an advertising agency located on Manhattan's MADison Avenue (New York). The Sixties was a period which can be characterized by features such as systemic sexism (Carveth 2011: 226), including the model of a traditional American family unit formed by "a working dad, a mainly stay-at-home mom, and one or more young children living in the suburbs" (Edgerton 2011: xxiv), and can also be seen as a "culture defined by words and images" (Riesman et al. 1950: 25) which emphasized the sexist values of American society. *Mad Men* captures well these essential elements of the decade and thus becomes an accurate portrait of the American reality of the time.

The following is a discussion of the sexist language present in the show relating to the female characters of Betty Draper, Joan Holloway and Peggy Olson. Firstly, several instances of sexist language from the show are cited in order to illustrate the powerful effect that this has on the configuration of the identity of these characters. Secondly, some thought is given to how sexist titles of address, such as *Mrs* and *Miss*, have been affected by language reform. Finally, the paper deals briefly with how *Mad Men* is perceived nowadays by modern viewers.

¹ For generous financial support, I am grateful to the Spanish Ministry of Education (FPU grant 2012/01669), the European Regional Development Fund and the Autonomous Government of Galicia (Directorate General for Scientific and Technological Promotion, grant CN2012/012). Thanks are also due to the conference participants for helpful discussion, and to Teresa Fanego and Belén Méndez Naya for useful suggestions on an earlier version.

The labels ‘the Jackie’, ‘the Marilyn’ and ‘the Career Woman’, coined by Krouse, will be used throughout, since these three female prototypes can be easily understood as applicable to the characters of Betty Draper, Joan Holloway and Peggy Olson, respectively (Krouse 2011; McDonald 2011, among others).

Prior to this discussion, the issue of what is understood by *sexism* in the literature should be explored. Mary Talbot (2010) points out that the term itself was not coined until the end of the 1960s, although earlier expressions criticizing male sexist attitudes towards women, such as *male chauvinism*, existed. In 1985, Kramarae and Treichler published *A Feminist Dictionary* in which the word *sexism* is defined as “behaviour, policy, language, or other action of men or women which expresses the ... view that women are inferior” (1985: 411); two years later the social psychologist Nancy Henley classified sexist language forms into three types: a) language that ignores women, b) language that depreciates women, and c) language that defines women narrowly. In what follows, instances of these three forms of sexist language, as reflected in the discourse surrounding Mrs Draper, Joan Holloway and Peggy Olson, will be examined in relation to the configuration of the identity of these three characters.

2. Mrs Draper: ‘the Jackie’

The character Mrs Draper in *Mad Men* is usually associated with the public persona of Jacqueline Kennedy. Mrs Draper is Don Draper’s wife, and due to her restricted role as a housewife she suffers from what has been called “the nineteenth female disorder” (White 2011: 149), commonly known as *hysteria*.

In the very name of this character we find the perfect example of ‘language that ignores women’. Mrs Draper’s original name is Elizabeth Hofstadt, and her housewife-friends and even her husband most often call her Betty, Betts or Birdy. However, to other characters in the series, as well as to viewers, she is generally known as *Mrs Draper*, a mother, a trophy wife and a tool to assist Don in his successful career as an advertising man. The restricted role of Mrs Draper is clearly represented in the episodes ‘The Benefactor’ (2: 3) and ‘The Color Blue’ (3: 10; see passage below), in which Don asks Betty to be “shiny and bright” in order to “charm” his clients:

(DON DRAPER) Listen. How do you feel about Lutèce Monday night?
(MRS DRAPER) Lutèce? Pleased, I guess.
D: And you get to meet Jimmy Barrett.
M: Why?
D: Business. Hunt Schilling from Utz Potato Chips and wives.
M: Is this one where I talk or I don’t talk?
D: You need to *charm* him. I need you to be *shiny and bright*. I need a better half.
(3: 10; emphasis mine)

It is also worth noting that one of the features that draws parallels between Betty Draper and Jackie Kennedy is the former’s divorce from Don Draper. As with Jacqueline, who was first known as Jackie Kennedy and subsequently as Jackie Onassis, Betty, on divorcing Don Draper, becomes Betty Francis. Both women thus become Mrs Someone Else on successive occasions, women defined in relation to the men they marry, without whom they seem to be nothing.

3. Joan Holloway: ‘the Marilyn’

The next character is Joan Holloway, often defined by literary critics as 'the Marilyn'. Following the Second World War, women in the United States became more economically independent and as a consequence of this they were less likely to accept discrimination and sexist language (Mills 2008: 19). Nevertheless, the self-supporting character of Joan Holloway is a clear exception here. She is unconcerned by male sexist language, and instances of 'language that depreciates women' can constantly be found not only in the discourse of male characters when addressing her, but, more significantly, in her own discourse throughout the five seasons of the show aired thus far. Her use of such language is partly a matter of her being "the stereotypical hyper-sexualized secretary" (Rogers 2011: 156) from the 1960s who "uses her sexuality to get ahead" (Berila 2007: 162). This can be seen in the following excerpt, from the pilot episode of the series, where Joan tells Peggy Olson how to dress in order to please the men at the agency:

Now try not to be overwhelmed by all this technology [referring to an electric typewriter]. It looks *complicated*, but the *men* who designed it made it *simple enough* for a *woman* to use. And listen, don't take this the wrong way, but *a girl like you, with those darling little ankles, I'd find a way to make them sing. Also, men love scarves* (1: 1; emphasis mine).

Attention should also be paid here to the use of the adjectives *complicated* and *simple* to refer to men and women respectively, thus conveying the general assumption that women are in possession of inferior intelligence to men.

4. Peggy Olson: 'the Career Woman'

Last but not least is the character of Peggy Olson. She is the intelligent, quiet girl who wants to be successful in the big city (Rogers 2011: 156), hence the common association of Peggy with 'the Career Woman'. In the advertising agency a dividing line can be drawn between the roles played by women and those roles played by men, and this is openly manifested in the way the characters address each other. Female secretaries address male executives by their title and surname (Mr Draper, Mr Sterling, etc.) whereas male executives address female secretaries only by their first name, and in some cases by reference to their appearance. Indeed, this is the case with Joan Holloway, who is frequently addressed by male executives as *Ginger* or *Red*. These two ways of addressing female secretaries, by first name or physical appearance, are flagrant examples of 'language that defines women narrowly'.

Despite these asymmetrical yet somehow expected forms of address at the agency, it is surprising how Peggy Olson ignores them when, on her very first day at work, she says, "Thank you, *Miss Holloway* you are really wonderful for looking out for me this way" ('Smoke Gets in Your Eyes' 1: 1; emphasis mine). Confronted with this title of address, Joan Holloway corrects Peggy: "It's *Joan*", she says, to let Peggy know how female secretaries should be addressed. Also significant in this respect is the moment when Don Draper, having decided to promote Peggy Olson, says, "*Miss Olson*, you are now a junior copywriter" ('The Wheel' 1: 13; emphasis mine); this form of address marks the beginning of a new Peggy, no longer a secretary but a member of the collective formed by male executives.

4.1 Peggy Olson and the 'unnamed' *sexual harassment* from the 1960s

Before providing some instances of sexual harassment as depicted in the series, it should be noted that the phrase *sexual harassment* did not come to light until the year 1973 and its coining helped to bring about a new understanding of gender relations at work (Farley 1978: 14). As the lawyer and writer Lin Farley explained in 1978, "[t]he phrase *sexual harassment*

is the first verbal description of women's feelings about this behavior and it unstintingly conveys a negative perception of male aggression in the workplace" (1978: 14). Furthermore, in the United States the word *harassment* encompasses not only aggression of a sexual nature but also offensive remarks about men and women in general ('U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission').

As Haralovich (2011) has pointed out, there are many instances of Peggy ignoring situations of harassment in *Mad Men* (167). The earliest of these takes place on her first day at work, when the male executive Pete Campbell asks her, "Where are you from? *Are you Amish or something?* Well you're in the city, now. It wouldn't be a sin for us to see your legs. *And if you pull your belt in a little bit, you might look like a woman*" (1: 1; emphasis mine). Following this comment Peggy tries to hide her embarrassment by avoiding Pete Campbell. Although in general Peggy ignores sexist comments, there are also some occasions on which she makes use of metaphors to express her anger towards the sexual harassment she constantly suffers at the agency, as seen when she says, "Honestly, why is it that every time a man takes you out to lunch around here, you are..., you are the dessert?" ('Ladies Room' 1: 2).

A more clear and interesting example of harassment in the series takes place in a 'brainstorming' session at the agency when all the secretaries are asked to test a new range of lipsticks ('Babylon' 1: 6). At the end of the testing session, the secretaries having tried all the lipsticks and cleaned their lips with tissues, Peggy ingeniously calls the bin filled with lipstick-marked tissues "a basket of kisses". Then she adds: "I don't think anyone wants to be one of a hundred colors in a box", criticizing the great variety of shades of lipstick. These spontaneous expressions draw the attention of the leader of the male executives, Freddy Rumsen, who likens Peggy's creativity to "a dog playing the piano" ('Babylon' 1: 6); the sexist expression *It's like a dog playing the piano* is itself a reference to Samuel Johnson's comment about seeing women in the pulpit: "A woman's preaching is like a dog's walking on his hind legs. It is not done well; but you are surprised to find it done at all" (Boswell 2008: 235; cited in McDonald 2011: 130). Similarly, Rumsen's uttering his sexist comment on Peggy's observations serves to underline the astonishment of the ad men at a woman's ability to have ingenious and innovative ideas.

4.2 Peggy's development: "stop dressing like a little girl" and adopt male's speech style

As discussed by Ainsworth and Hardy (2004), in the configuration of one's identity, context and our relationships with other people both play crucial roles for our self-definition and meaning (237). In the case of Peggy Olson, of special interest in her development are the female characters Bobbie Barrett and Joan Holloway. The former is an experienced and successful female manager who tells Peggy to "be a woman" and to treat her male boss as an "equal":

You have to start living the life of the person you want to be... you're never going to get that corner office until you start treating Don as an *equal*. And, no one will tell you this you can't be a man, so don't even try. *Be a woman*. It's powerful business when done correctly ('The New Girl' 2: 5; emphasis mine).

The latter, Joan Holloway, tells Peggy that if she wants to be taken seriously she needs to "stop dressing like a little girl" and "learn to speak the language of the creative staff" ('Maidenform' 2: 6).

As the series unfolds, Peggy indeed learns how to combine these attitudes, becoming more feminine in the way she dresses and more aggressive in the way she speaks. However, although Peggy's discourse becomes more aggressive, in the perception of the men at the

agency her aggressive speech sounds “cute” no matter what. This is reflected in ‘The Mountain King’ (2: 12) when Peggy goes to the male executive Roger Sterling and requests her own office. In this scene, excerpted below, we should bear in mind both Sterling’s sexist use of the term of affection “Honey” to diminish the importance of Peggy’s request from the outset, and also his use of “Ginger” to address one of the secretaries working at the agency:

(ROGER STERLING) What do you want?

(PEGGY OLSON) I need to speak with you.

R: *Honey*, I have a 6: 30 dinner reservation, and unless you want to pull me there in a rickshaw, I have to get going.

P: Well, I am a copywriter.

R: Why, did I call you something else?

P: No. I don’t know if you’re aware but I brought in the Popsicle account today. On my own.

R: Hey, *Ginger*, did you hear about this? I gotta go.

P: Wait. I need my own office. It’s hard to do business and be credible when I’m sharing with a Xerox machine. Freddie Rumsen’s office has been vacant for some time. I think I should have it.

R: It’s yours.

P: Really?

R: You young women are very *aggressive*.

P: I didn’t mean to be impolite.

R: No, *it’s cute*. There are thirty men out there who didn’t have the balls to ask me.

(2: 12; emphasis mine)

5. Conclusion

Peggy Olson and Joan Holloway are both “familiar female characters that relate to women today” (Rogers 2011: 156). However, they exhibit contrasting attitudes towards the sexism of the period. Joan Holloway uses both her own sexuality and language that depreciates women to get ahead, whereas Peggy Olson shows anger and abhorrence at the sexist attitudes of the male executives, yet achieves her professional goals through hard work and the adoption of male’s assertive speech style. Many studies have shown that a masculine style of speech and behaviour are associated with leadership (Kent and Moss 1994), thus it seems understandable that Peggy Olson felt the best way to have a voice in the workplace and fulfill her career aspirations was by adopting this form of typical male behaviour.

Regarding the extent to which overt sexist language has changed in corporate America, Hellinder and Bussmann (2001) pointed out that since the 1980s there have been a series of language reforms aimed at achieving gender-fair terminology and changing unequal gender relations (19). Some of these reforms were achieved thanks to the work of feminist writers who compiled lists of sexist words in dictionaries and called for institutions and people to avoid sexism in language. *Inter alia*, they criticized the use of husband’s name for married women and the use of the sexist titles of address *Mrs* and *Miss*, encouraging instead the use of the neutral form *Ms*. As Sara Mills (2008) explains, since there was not equivalent distinction between married and unmarried men, *Ms* was introduced in the English language in the 1970s “to give women the option of choosing to represent themselves as something other than married or unmarried” (64). It is worth mentioning that in the United States, the use of the neutral form *Ms* in professional contexts has achieved a great deal of success whereas in Britain “this is treated with some suspicion, as a title used only by divorced women, feminists, lesbians, ‘manhaters’ and women who are living with men without being married to them” (Mills 2008: 64; for similar comments see Sunderland 2006; Talbot 2010).

Finally, it is noteworthy that despite overt and indirect forms of sexism of *Mad Men*, the series has been extremely successful, having won many awards (fifteen Emmys and four Golden Globes, among many others) and is currently heading for its sixth season. But what is it that makes *Mad Men* so attractive to viewers? Some critics talk about nostalgia for the ‘bad old days’ (‘Establishing *Mad Men*’ 2008; Krouse 2011). However, those ‘bad old days’ seem to me very much alive in an America where the Equal Rights Amendment has not yet been passed. Thus, the sad reality is one of a continuing inequality in the payment of men and women, as well as a serious underrepresentation of women in positions of power in corporate America, including Madison Avenue.

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