

## Perceptions of Pipe Smokers - Hypothesis or Hyperbole?

Ben Rapaport and Bruce Harris

[pipesandtobaccosmagazine.com/2011/06/perceptions-of-pipe-smokers/](http://pipesandtobaccosmagazine.com/2011/06/perceptions-of-pipe-smokers/)

'For the times they are a-changin'. (Bob Dylan captured the spirit of 1960s social and political upheaval with this song back in 1964. We are reprising it in 2008!) Why? We need only take note of the dramatic change in ambiance at The Pheasant Run Resort Convention Center in St. Charles, Ill., site of the 2008 Chicagoland International Pipe and Tobacciana show. The Illinois statewide smoking ban forced our community to smoke, according to signs posted at every entrance, 15 feet beyond the resort's property, or in a temporary tent erected next to the now-smoke-free exhibition hall, the Mega Center. And of the 473 guest rooms, resort management graciously designated 81 rooms (17 percent) to accommodate smokers.

Yes, the times are a-changin' in many ways for *all* who smoke. And has the stereotype of the pipe smoker changed along with these changin' times? More to the point, was what's been said or written about pipe smokers throughout the years accurate and true to form? Reflecting on the near-distant past, Peter Carlson reminisced in "Bowled Over No Longer" (*The Washington Post*, June 19, 2005) with a depiction of who we once were:

It was a world of wise, contemplative men who sat and smoked and read serious, leather-bound literature, as well as a world of rugged outdoorsmen, canoeists and fly fishermen and clipper ship captains who puffed their pipes as they pored over nautical charts before sailing 'round the Horn.

Carlson portrayed a rugged man of an idyllic epoch, pretty much the universal view of yesterday's pipe smokers. Do you believe that every pipe smoker of that era fit this type, breed or class, as Carlson claimed? Laura Mansnerus doesn't concur. Thirteen years earlier she went on record, proclaiming, "... more than a hundred psychological surveys that sketch a profile of the perfectly true-to-type American smoker ... [meaning *all* smokers, we presume] as extroverted, adventuresome, angry, impulsive, intolerant of rules, agitated by both tedium and stress, prone to divorce and auto accidents." [i] Ouch, that hurts! Is Carlson's description on the money? If yes, then who we are today befits that old cliché, "one size fits all." Or is Mansnerus's description accurate and true to form?

Probably not! If both Carlson and Mansnerus are wrong, then who, exactly, are we? One acceptable answer is that pipe smokers are discrete individuals with their own distinctive, idiosyncratic character; grouping and classifying us, because of what we smoke, is just plain wrong. The majority of written evidence, however, seems to suggest that we were then and are now either hardy he-men or elitist, ivy-league, cerebral, button-down nerds. For sure, a few, some, many of us are square pegs trying to fit into round holes—and that’s not so bad— but it is certain that, collectively, we are unlike all who enjoy those other tobacco products. Pipe smokers have traditionally been considered *different*, and membership in this convivial fraternity was (and still is, we believe!) something special. Could it be that those old-time pipe smokers never really had this unique identity, or maybe they did, but has this generation of smokers lost it? Are we now viewed as just a bunch of old puffers, indistinguishable from cigar and cigarette folk? This was not always the case.

## **COMPLIMENTARY THINGS WRITTEN AND SAID**

Whenever and wherever there’s dialogue about smoking, especially about pipe smoking, it is inevitable that you’ll find at least one description of the ‘model’ pipe smoker. Ubiquitous perceptions of puffers are as common as the corncob pipe, yet serious, evidentiary studies to support this characterization are scarcer than straight-grain briar. Where, how and why these rather uniform, positive descriptors have taken hold is a mystery.

Not only has there been a continuum of praise in print for the pipe, but also as a group pipe smokers have been typecast in the press as cerebral, philosophic, steady, dependable and deliberate. The encomiums abound. “A pipe is the fountain of contemplation, the source of pleasure, the companion of the wise; and the man who smokes, thinks like a philosopher and acts like a Samaritan.”[ii] An anonymous writer in 1926 had this to say: “A pipe suggests sturdiness and honesty, a cigarette dilettantism.”[iii] During the halcyon 1940s there was no shortage of perceptions and stereotypes. “The observation is often made that pipe smokers are all of a certain temperament, that not just any man can be a pipe smoker ... most of them are solid, steady, rather easy-going people who have more than the average amount of patience.”[iv] Writing in the

same publication, Doris Henderson polled a number of female students at the University of Missouri for their perceptions. Again, the pipe smoker was seen as masculine, intellectual, casual, dependable and patient.[v] Similarly, Alan Farnham conjectured that pipes imply amiability, thoughtfulness and other qualities attractive to women.[vi] According to Corey Ford, “Are Pipe Smokers People?” (*Saturday Evening Post*, July 11, 1959), “Pipe smoking adds that tweedy appearance that women adore,” and “[a] pipe smoker smells like all the things a woman idolizes in a man.”

Bradley C. S. Watson shares his view in his “Up in Smoke”: The pipe “reminds us of tweed jackets, deep voices, manual labor, brogues, fathers, grandfathers.” Here’s something from the December 1977 issue of *SAN ANTONIO Magazine*, “Puffing a Pipe, Smoke It Right and Avoid the Bite” by Greg Davenport: “Pipes are associated with men who are unhurried, calm, and in control of the situation.” W.E. Mattner Jr. authored “The allure of a pipe smoker,” in *Retail Tobacconist*, July-August 1992, in which he stated: “Give a Pat Paulsen type of man a pipe and he becomes erudite, dashing and above the norm.” Really? Not surprising is the following from Dayton Matlick, chairman of *Pipes and tobaccos*, commenting in *USA Today* on Dec. 10, 1996, in “A rekindled passion for pipe smoking takes hold”: “Cigarette smokers are more Type A personalities. They want a quick hit. But pipe smokers are more Type B, meaning they’re relaxed, contemplative.” In 1997, Michael P. Foley, then a Ph.D. candidate in theology at Boston College, wrote spiritually about smoking in “Tobacco and the Soul” (*First Things*, April 1997, Number 72, 14). In his view, “cigarettes correspond to the appetitive part of the soul,” cigars “correspond to the spirited part of the soul,” and “the pipe corresponds to the rational part of the soul.” (Think Sherlock Holmes?) Thus, he concludes, this is why pipe smokers are depicted as wise figures. This might have been true for some a while back, but without casting aspersions on our pipe-smoking contemporaries, we both know lots of pipe smokers who would readily admit to being not-so-wise figures! This kind of similarly patronizing stuff can be found in books that have absolutely nothing to do with smoking. For example, the following is from a quite unexpected source, “How to Try a Jury Case: A Lawyer’s View,” a chapter in *The Litigation Manual* (John G. Koeltl and John S. Kiernan [eds.], 1999). A lawyer, describing his court experience, recounts that he had read an article about the tobacco industry from which he extrapolates

the common biases and the hasty, initial impressions—i.e., stereotyping—of jurors and witnesses:

They found that people equated the fat cigar with the crooked politician, the gambler, the Mafia, the hood, and the B-movie villain. In addition to finding out about the fat cigars, they also found out that when females go to the store to buy a pipe for their boyfriends, they always buy a curved pipe. When the male goes, he buys a straight pipe, but a curved pipe reminds women of a kindly old professor, the old philosopher, old granddad, solidarity, understanding, that kind of thing.

OK now. So, taking our lead from Messrs. Koeltl and Kiernan, the next time you're standing next to a Mafioso or a corrupt politico who's smoking a Corona, and you happen to be puffing on your calabash, be comforted because, according to these two, that special lady in your life who bought you that bent pipe considers you to be a pillar of society, a man of distinction, a seasoned veteran. Utter nonsense!

Dr. Harlan K. Upmann likes to make comparisons. In his "The Arthur's Hall Guide to Manly Tobacco Use," he assigns tobacco products a manliness rating from 0 to 10, and by this ranking, like so many other talking heads, he stereotypes their users: cigarettes = 0.5; cigars = 5.0; snuff = 6.5; pipes = 7.0; chewing (smokeless) tobacco = 9.5; and nasal snuff = 10! In his view, "Pipe smokers are generally considered intelligent and refined, but not pompous or egotistical. They may not be muscle-bound manly men ... but pipe-smoking men have been behind some of mankind's greatest academic and intellectual heavy-lifting." Nice of him to say these things about us, but we two take Upmann's manliness quotient with a large grain of intellectual salt. After all, using *his* metric, Arnold Schwarzenegger, California governor and committed cigar smoker (5.0), would be a girlie-man—a pejorative term Arnold coined—and pipe-smoking (7.0) Albert Einstein would be rock-hard and ripped!

Men of letters and science, in particular, have also extolled the virtues of pipe smoking. Lin Yutang, writer and inventor, has been quoted as saying: "The man with the pipe in his mouth is the man after my heart. He is more genial, more sociable, has more intimate indiscretions to reveal, and sometimes he is quite brilliant in conversation, and in any case, I have a feeling that he likes me as much as I like him." (We'll agree to some, but not all, of this paeon to the pipe smoker.) In *Shandygaff*, Christopher Morley argued: "[Pipe] smoking is an intellectual exercise. It calls forth the choicest qualities of mind and soul." Supposedly Einstein

had said: “I believe that pipe smoking contributes to a somewhat calm and objective judgment in all human affairs.” As early as the 20th century, artists have been adept at creating specific images of their subjects by the way they smoked. It is said that the skilled artisan is able to differentiate the pipe smoker from other types of smokers. Benno Tempel, the Van Gogh Museum curator, writes, “It is striking that the pipe, cigarette and cigar have come to represent such strong archetypes in art that these images are now generally socially accepted. In general one can say that the pipe and the cigar both correspond to figures of authority, but unlike the cigar the pipe stands for thoughtfulness and calm.”

Just about every book written for the pipe smoker includes all the expected accolades for pipe smokers. In his 1962 book, *Weber's Guide to Pipes and Pipe Smokers*, Carl Weber describes the typical pipe smoker:

We are all aware that the pipe smoker belongs to a breed apart from other men. His pleasures are contemplation and relaxation; he does not rush, he is not nervous. His joys are the casual and meditative ones, those of the fireside, the easy chair, and the good book. The pipe stands as a symbol of this type of man, easily recognized by his even frame of mind, his unhurried approach to life's problems.

Many a tobacconist believes this stuff too. The following is from a 2005 interview with the owner and staff of Georgetown Tobacco in Washington, D.C., “But there's something charming about pipe smoking—an appealingly retro air of reflection and relaxation, a uniquely masculine mystique that's somehow large enough to include tweedy professors and Maine hunting guides, detectives and novelists, Santa Claus and Gen. MacArthur, Albert Einstein and Popeye the Sailor Man.”[ix] Santa Claus and Popeye? Great ... a fat guy in a red suit who makes his appearance at Christmas and a comic strip character with one good eye as our role models! Pipe manufacturers are no less guilty. One esteemed company, Peterson, has capitalized on this image for years. Peterson pipes are known as, “The thinking man's pipe.” And who can forget Orlik Tobacco's advertising slogan, “Smoked by all Shrewd Judges”? Had enough of this blather?

## **WHO MIGHT BE TO BLAME?**

If you'd like to point the finger at Madison Avenue advertising agencies as the culprits for promoting this image of a pipe smoker as

someone rich and famous ... and contemplative, they may have played a significant role, but they are not alone. In the four-year run of the monthly *Pipe Lovers*, the majority of its covers bore the face of a pipe-smoking celebrity more often than it depicted the average, pipe-smoking Mr. John Q. Public. Twenty years later, in the only two issues of *Wonderful World of Pipes* magazine (1970 and 1971) the editorial staff repeated this anachronistic blunder by including portraits of Barrymore, Crosby, Einstein, MacArthur, Twain, Vallee and other well-known personalities, pipe in mouth or in hand. It was the 1970s, and nearly all these heroes of Pipedom (having also appeared in *Pipe Lovers*) reappeared in this early 1970s magazine—they were called “The VIPS” —but they were dead people. This magazine was truly out of touch with the times. No doubt, the large majority of pipe smokers then, as now, were not rich, famous or contemplative, but they were alive. And they continue to be ordinary, everyday folks who enjoy the simple pleasure of a pipe without concern for whether they fit a certain profile.

Then there’s this feeble, but good-natured attempt to categorize all smokers, labeling them according to, of all the inane standards, their appearance in children’s animated films, as Linda A. Mooney and others argued in *Understanding Social Problems* (2005): (a) the cigar smoker is tough and powerful (e.g., Sykes in *Oliver and Company*); (b) the cigarette smoker is independent, witty and intelligent (e.g., the Genie in *Aladdin*); and (c) the pipe smoker is older, kindly and wise (e.g., Geppetto in *Pinocchio*). Although written in 2005, this analogy to a wooden puppet more aptly sums the view of pipe smokers a half-century ago, but not today. We’re not sure about “kindly” or “wise,” but certainly more than half of the participants at the 2008 Chicagoland pipe festival would take issue with this “older” label. Bernard Cova et al., in *Consumer Tribes* (2007) claim that “a pipe-smoker is aware of being a member of a group of well-defined connoisseurs,” because “... the parts of a pipe and the kinds of tobacco constitute a technical jargon that only connoisseurs know and understand.” This sort of syllogistic logic allows us to claim that auto mechanics are also members of a group of well-defined connoisseurs, because they understand car engine jargon and know all about an engine’s functional parts. Pure bunk, we say!

**NOT ANTI-SMOKE ... JUST ANTI-PIPE**

There is another dimension to this thesis, that which is written or said in a condescending and, often, malicious manner. Again, if you conduct the right kind of research, you'll find plenty of stuff maligning the pipe smoker, and it started much before the anti-smoking movement got under way. Here are three examples. In a faded, reproduced article on file from a 1975 issue of *Esquire* magazine, "I Hate a Man Who Smokes a Pipe," John McCarthy writes: "In advertising and fiction, the pipe smoker is a revered, romantic, entertaining, contemplative chap. Men hail him, women love him. His presence is enthusiastically welcomed everywhere. No social gathering can be complete without him. Actually, nobody likes a pipe smoker, except perhaps another pipe smoker."

It's hard to determine if Irwin Ross's "Caution: Pipe smoking may be hazardous to your I.Q." that appeared in the *Chicago Tribune* some time ago was a tongue-in-cheek satire or a fact-filled tirade against the pipe smoker. He wrote:

For generations, pipe smokers have been able, as a class, to hide their defects behind their principal avocation. They have built up a tremendous lore which has gone unchallenged outside. They have, figuratively, obscured the issue behind clouds of smoke. Now, however, modern science has torn the veil of hypocrisy from the mess, and in this atomic age we are viewing the whole fantastic structure in its true light. Here, based upon surveys and research from laboratories and from the field, is what we have learned about pipe smokers.

Without so much as identifying the surveys and research used, he charged that pipe smokers were slow-witted, criminally inclined, snobs, indolent, physically unfit and bad-tempered, and he ends his screed with "Let the briar beware." And here's a recent claim that should raise your ire: "The pipe smoker takes too long to say anything; he is solemn and self-important; and the smell of his pipe keeps away women." [x] It appears that rather than having identified *discriminators* to distinguish us from those users of other tobacco products, this handful of pundits chose to *discriminate* against us.

## **SCIENTIFIC OR UNSUBSTANTIATED EVIDENCE?**

What is it about the pipe smoker that has generated such curious interest? Why have pipe smokers evoked such strong mental and visual images? We have encountered no similar survey or examination of the

cigar or cigarette smoker in our research during the same time frame. It doesn't take a genius to know that those who partake of the pipe are necessarily more involved with the ritual of smoking than are cigarette or cigar smokers.

But why have we been singled out and placed under a socioeconomic and intellectual microscope to be dissected, branded and labeled? Is it possible that, regardless of age, gender, nationality, creed, religion, physical attributes and other uniquely individual characteristics, we are so alike because we smoke a pipe? Many smokers and nonsmokers alike seem to think so!

These aforementioned widely held, and sometimes controversial, perceptions of pipe smokers beg at least two questions. The first question is: Are these perceptions based on fact, and if so, what scientific evidence supports (or refutes) them? Second, have these perceptions changed over time? And here's an important follow-on question: Are these perceptions still accurate today? Let's look at the evidence.

More than 25 years ago, two California psychologists conducted an in-depth look into some commonly held perceptions of pipe smokers and cited three studies dealing with them. They posited that there was empirical evidence supporting the view of the stereotypical pipe smoker. The authors referred to more than a dozen different adjectives to describe us. The first of three less-than-scientific studies mentioned by Beaumier and Camp appeared in the *Wonderful World of Pipes*. In that article, Burton Shean, citing a study that appeared in the *British Medical Journal*, concluded that it supported the beliefs that pipe men are quiet, deliberate, introverted, contemplative, solid and kind. That same year, a *Time* research report lent credence to the positive female/male pipe smoker connection. That is, women perceived pipe-smoking men as more masculine than both men who did not smoke a pipe and men who smoked cigarettes.

But Shean's article and the *Time* magazine report barely scratch the surface in fully understanding and empirically documenting the general stereotypes of pipe smokers. In 1973, the now-defunct pipe company Venturi Inc. commissioned a more detailed and exhaustive scientific study investigating the social image of pipe smokers.[xiv] Eleanor Criswell, a California psychologist, was given the task to answer several questions, among them, perhaps the two most important: "How do others see the pipe smoker?" and "How does the pipe smoker see himself?" Based on



responses from 760 questionnaires, Criswell found that the traditional image of the pipe smoker was supported. That is, pipe smokers were perceived (in order of strength of perception) as stable, capable, mature, intelligent, dependable and kind. Conversely, adjectives least likely associated with pipe smokers included selfish, sloppy, arrogant and conceited. In addition, self-perceptions of pipe smokers were consistent with how others viewed them. What do you have to say about this, Ms. Mansnerus and Mr. Ross?

Despite the proliferation of these hackneyed and trite generalizations that continue to define, catalog, even institutionalize the pipe smoker, nary an independently sponsored or tobacco industry research effort has concretely demonstrated that these perceptions are valid, or that the personality of the pipe smoker has ever truly fit this mold. All the previously mentioned attempts to paint an accurate picture of us decades ago, as best we can determine, were conducted without a sound scientific research methodology or generally accepted survey standards. That is, they lack independent funding, well-thought-out hypotheses, randomized survey samples, non-biased interview techniques, pre- and post-testing, and rigorous analyses of the data collected. Taking this into consideration, can there be any validity to these assessments, these evaluations, these representations?

Of late, understandably, there is hardly any complimentary commentary about smokers in general. Are the times a-changin'? You bet! Given the prevailing anti-smoking sentiment, it is highly doubtful that all those earlier positive perceptions of pipe smokers would be credible today. In fact, any that might appear in print about us nowadays are probably as virulent and caustic as those written about cigarette smokers. In a recent issue of *Pipes and tobaccos*, Ernest Quintiliani reported results of his social experiment of phantom puffing.[xv] One can only imagine that if given a questionnaire to complete, the folks bothered by Mr. Quintiliani's unlit pipe would not view him too kindly.

## **A CALL FOR CRISWELL REVISITED**

Now to the second question: Are these very perceptions of pipe smokers still valid in our current anti-smoking climate? Given the dearth of experiments and studies during the last few decades, it is difficult to know how the pipe smoker is perceived today, but it might be fun to speculate.

More than speculation, it would be informative—and revealing—if an *independent* survey, similar to the Venturi-sponsored Criswell research effort, were conducted to see the likely changes between, say, 1973 and today. Several research possibilities present themselves. The most straightforward would be to replicate her study; we have a copy of the Criswell survey. Simply administer the same questionnaire, asking people to rate pipe smokers against a list of adjectives. It would be interesting to note if perceptions have significantly changed in the last 30-odd years, and if so, determine the reasons why. Or, present respondents with two distinctly different photographs of a man (or a woman, if the gentler sex would not mind), and ask the respondents to rate each (using the same adjectives as Criswell). Half the respondents would rate the photo of a pipe-smoking man, and the other half would rate a photo of the same person without a pipe. An endless stream of research questions could be developed to glean comparative data. For example, would males and females rate the man in each photograph differently? Do smokers and nonsmokers have different perceptions of pipe smokers? Would age, marital status, occupation, education or other such individual personal data skew the responses? How about women pipe smokers? Are they perceived in the same way as men? After all, they smoke a pipe for the same reasons that men do ... because they like it. Would varying the make, price, age or shape of the pipe alter the results? According to Foley, to a degree, this may be the case. “Pipes with curved stems or shanks resemble a question mark in appearance and thus betoken a more intellectually erotic life, while straight shanks represent a less piquant, more humdrum species of wisdom sought,” writes Foley. Finally, would pipe *collectors*, rather than pipesmokers, receive the same or different rankings?

One might ask, “Why bother?” Is this a futile exercise with no practical or useful outcome? If we had an up-to-date survey, would the results, regardless of the revelations or conclusions derived, be important? If so, to whom and to what end? Could such perceptions impact us negatively? On occasion in the past they certainly did. At a time, it could have kept you off the New York Yankees baseball team. Say what? Former Yankees manager Joe McCarthy did not allow players who were pipe smokers on his ball club. Why? He believed pipe smokers were complacent people, and he did not want any complacent players wearing the pinstripes. Although his perception was, in baseball parlance, way off

base, social psychologists have long known that our perceptions impact the way we behave toward and react to others, either individually or in groups. Broad-based group perceptions are often simplistic, inaccurate and harmful.

We have pondered the puzzlement of pipe-smoker generalizations for a few years, and we have to believe that others have questioned the validity of these often pithy and cutesy characterizations about us. Some may find them offensive and insulting. There is one obvious way to confirm or refute this questionable conventional wisdom. In *P&T*'s inaugural "Web Extras," Ben Rapaport's "The Write Stuff" called for pipe smokers everywhere to put pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard) and write something to further enrich our pipe and tobacco knowledge.[xix] So here's an idea and an opportunity. Is there a *P&T* reader with a scientific background or with data collection and analysis skills and experience who would like to tackle this research project? That person is not limited to the proposed schema outlined herein; he or she can develop a different template and a different set of metrics to assess any changes over time. If someone would like to take the lead, we are willing and enthusiastic assistants. And perhaps that person could convince *P&T* to be the clearinghouse for these data or assist with the survey on its Web site? The results could be published in a future "Web Extras" article. Of course, with *P&T* overseeing/collecting data behind the scenes, there is a possible attendant risk, as with the Criswell effort, of unintentionally biasing the data.

What makes pipe smokers tick? Was your pipe-smoking father or grandfather a typical "pipe smoker," as defined by these commentators? Or, as we surmise, was each so individual that he defied being typecast or pigeonholed? Better, what do others think makes us tick? Is it worth a try? Have attitudes about and perception and characterization of the pipe smoker changed in the last 25 to 50 years? Has there been a paradigm shift? Could the results shed new light on an old dialogue? Well, we won't know unless or until someone ventures to undertake this investigative endeavor. Is there anyone out there who considers himself (or herself) industrious, intelligent, meditative, curious and devoted enough to our cause to accept this intellectual challenge? Time, interest and at least one enthusiastic and devoted pipe aficionado to take the lead and run this sporty course are all that's required to find out.