

## Chapter One

### Theories on Gender Construction

#### Masculinity

All cultures adhere to specific ideas of what it means to be masculine, often alongside contrasting notions of what it means to be feminine. As many anthropologists would attest, the concept of masculinity is, unfortunately, often constructed in opposition to femininity (Whitehead and Barrett 2001, Beynon 2002); however, as Connell argues in his theory of hegemonic masculinity, men also perform masculinity in a way that is for, and in relation to, other men (1987). This paper focuses on the ideology of masculinity constructed as a dichotomy to femininity, and also explores what would happen in a society that does not relegate masculinity to 'men' and femininity to 'women'. These characteristics often seem immutable and at contrary ends of the spectrum, and are sometimes posited as 'natural', rather than socially constructed mores. These two issues, that of gender dualism and the notion of naturalism vs. social constructs, are inescapably linked to beliefs in gender equality.

Scholars, such as Sedgwick, challenge any natural equating of masculinity with men, instead positing, "When something is about masculinity, it isn't always about men" (1985: 12). Similarly, Halberstam speaks of female masculinity that concentrates more on individual characteristics, and less on who is displaying them (1998). MacInnes goes further to state that 'genitals and biological capacities aside, men and women are not different...Being a biological male, does not confer masculinity.' (1998: 77).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Members of the indigenous tribe of Wogeo in Papua New Guinea might agree. In their culture, both males and females are made through biology, but a male must become a man through six stages of initiation rituals commencing from the age of ten.

## **Biology vs. Social Construct**

Many theorists assert that men and women are not limited to simply performing in a masculine or feminine way, and concur with the relative unimportance of biology in determining gender characteristics. For instance, Kaplan and Rogers point out “cellular and hormonal factors, once thought to be distinctly different between the sexes are now known to be not so clearly differentiated. Our biology makes less distinction between the sexes than does our social world.” (2000: 23). Lila Leibowitz asserts that obvious anatomical differences aside, these differences need not directly relate to differences in emotional and intellectual capacities, or even in physical abilities. As she puts it, “anatomy is not destiny” (1975: 20). Other proponents of theories denouncing the juxtaposition of biology and gender include Simone de Beauvoir, the French feminist philosopher, who famously rationalised, ‘One is not born a woman; one becomes one.’ (1997: 301). Dani Cavallaro posits that the ideology of social construction has evolved in response to the rejection of people being required, under patriarchal requirements, to fit into neatly categorised norms (2003).

## **Suggested Motives for Keeping the Biology Argument Alive**

Stuart Hall, referring to the importance placed on gender dualism, posits the first thing seen when looking at males and females is gender. Inevitably, this is laced with other culturally dominant representations, such as race, ethnicity, body, and age (1997). The magnitude of gender is indubitably far-reaching. While all the previously cited theorists convincingly assert that gender is a social construct<sup>2</sup> and advocate that the mind is a “blank tablet which experiences write upon” (Mallon and Stich 2000: 134) rather than asserting that biology impacts how men and women

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<sup>2</sup> In reference to emotion, William Reddy describes ‘socially constructed’ as two things: (1) The individual is the site, but not the source, of emotional events; (2) the learned feelings that individuals express are consonant with the ambient social order, its norms, its ideals, its structures of authority (1999: 264)

intrinsically 'are', then why, one must ask, is there still a discourse on the 'naturalness' of the behaviour of men and women?

Stephen Whitehead believes it is hard to resist the easy 'seduction' of relegating all the complexities and intricacies of human behaviour to simple genetic coding. Whitehead proposes that there is comfort and security in categorising human conditions as genetic predispositions (2002: 9). He also points out the interest of some in wanting to safe-guard the concept of 'natural' gender differences because of the role it plays in "maintaining power differentials, accessing material wealth, limiting/enabling lifestyle choice, and probably most importantly, structuring language itself." (2002:10). Whitehead posits that biological determinism, taken to its greatest extreme of evolutionary psychology, "...ignores diversity amongst women and men; rests on a limited view of human history; and moreover, results in justifying men's oppression and marginalisation of women and 'Other' men." (2001: 25).

Connell asserts that socially constructed meanings can play an especially important role in gender relations because they can be attached to, and thus emphasise, biological differences in a manner that legitimise gender stratification. He elaborates by saying, "Naturalisation [of gender differences]...is not a naïve mistake...It is a highly motivated ideological practice...nature is appealed to for justification more than for explanation" (1987: 653). Its purpose, as Kane and Schippers similarly assert, is the acceptance of sexuality due to naturalisation, which infers the acceptance of the status quo, thus confirming the sexuality inequality of the genders (1996: 650). Finally, Margaret Jackson also agrees by stating that "Naturalism has always been a formidable anti-feminist weapon" (1987: 76). Jackson refers more specifically to the 'scientific model' set out by sexologists such as Havelock Ellis in the early twentieth century on 'natural' models of

heterosexuality, which place males as dominant and females as submissive. Jackson argues that these models gave scientific legitimacy to the same patriarchal structures that feminists were opposing (1987: 58).

### **Why Study Flirting?**

In order to explore the basis of the belief in biology or social construct, the human interaction of flirting was selected as the focal point of this study. Furthermore, it was proposed that sexuality forms a major component of flirting. Kane and Schippers (1996) quote Jeffrey Weeks (1984) when he argues, “far from being the most natural element in social life... [sexuality] is perhaps one of the most susceptible to organisation.” As such organisation is socially constructed, it is perhaps likely to highlight underlying beliefs of the society. This would help to explain, for example, why some cultures prefer obvious flirting and others are very careful not to flirt ‘too much’. This premise was supported by the findings of the research project; in that each culture’s ideology on religion, politics, economics, history and sociality all affected the ways in which its members flirted. Such results were in concordance with Beynon, who states that masculinity is always juxtaposed with culture, history and geographical location (2002)<sup>3</sup>.

Though largely unexplored in the social sciences, and underrated for the insight it provides into gender ideologies, flirting was considered to be useful in understanding new dynamics between men and women. While flirting may seem to be a somewhat irreverent indicator in the context of academic discourse, it remains a universal form of human interaction. It is hoped that the exploration of such seldom examined fields may provide new insight into a larger scope of human behaviour.

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<sup>3</sup> According to Mallon and Stitch, social constructionists emphasise the diversity of the social and psychological phenomena in different cultures around the world, and consider a great deal of attention has been placed on describing that diversity (2000: 134).

Furthermore, the study commenced with the assumption that flirting is formed by social constructs, just as the genealogy of emotion was found to be formed by social constructs in the work of Abu-Lughod and Lutz (1990: 7)<sup>4</sup>. In a manner similar to Abu-Lughod and Lutz's observations of the genealogy of emotion, flirting also receives much of its meaning from the way it is displayed in the public realm.

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<sup>4</sup> Ian Hacking, in *The Social Construction of What*, makes the point that the act of being socially constructed does not always have to be negative (2000).

## Chapter Two

### Social Structures of Paris and Stockholm

#### Religion

The role of religion in Parisian and Stockholm culture was compared in order to help deconstruct the origins of cultural beliefs about gender roles and attitudes about equality.

According to the 2005 Eurostat 'Eurobarometer' poll, Swedish citizens largely classify themselves as non-religious, even though the majority belongs to the Church of Sweden. The Church of Sweden is a liberal church, to such extent that it has condoned same-sex unions from 2006. The same Eurostat poll reports that 56.1% of French people categorise themselves as Catholic. It has been theorised that inequality between the sexes is more prevalent in countries where Catholicism has a strong influence, in that Catholicism, as with many religions, is aligned with patriarchy.

As Cavallaro observed, "France's Catholic heritage kept women in a dominated state. According to the catholic view on marriage, the woman's primary responsibility is to her husband as both wife and mother. The ongoing influence of Catholicism is borne out by the fact that in France, divorce was not an option until the nineteenth century." (2003). France has a long history of Catholicism, a religion whose beliefs include dictating women's fertility choices by means of birth control, controlling women's choices to have abortions, not allowing women to be priests, and, as proposed by Cavallaro, segregating women to the private sphere which consequently ingrains deep suspicions of displaying femininity in the public sphere, equating it with potentially immodest behavior (2003: xi). At one stage in France's history, Catholicism was used to rationalise why women should not be allowed the right to vote: one senator proposed that women were so absorbed in their church that their legal status should be different (Cavallaro 2003).

Nici Nelson asserts that the openness with which a woman exhibits her sexuality is equated with corruptness in Catholic society. Nelson discusses this further in an article comparing prostitutes in non-catholic countries in Africa and the Catholic country of Peru:

“The sources of the Peruvian association of strong sexuality with bad women are undoubtedly complex but one of the most important influences would be 400 years of Catholicism. The Judea-Christian tradition has always distinguished between those women meant for domestic pleasure and procreative purposes and those intended for pleasure. This would appear to some observers to have its origins in the conflict between male sexuality and male patriarchy.” (1987: 232)

Similarly, in order to explore conceptions of masculinity and femininity, Nelson (1987) cites the work of Arnold (1977) who examined prostitution in a Peruvian brothel. She found that in Peru, women have been relegated to one of two limited categories; neither of which is realistic for the average woman. Both categories are based on a woman’s sexuality, namely the married woman, and the woman who sells sex; otherwise termed the ‘virgin’ and the ‘whore’. Arnold claims that women who sell sex in Peru are viewed in opposition to married women in that they take the sexual initiative, are sexually active, are economically independent, and are ‘masculine’ in the eyes of society. As Peruvian women who sell sex are not under the control of husbands or male relatives, a man’s honour is not diminished. Arnold posits that this delineation serves as a parameter to contain notions of masculinity and femininity. Conversely, in Nelson’s non-Catholic community of the Kikuyu in Kenya, the men do not so clearly separate women into ‘pure’ and ‘impure’ groups on the basis of their perceived sexuality.

In the course of this research, it was found that Parisians, much like the Peruvians observed by Arnold, adhere to the perception of the ‘virgin’ and the ‘whore’. This was illustrated by the phrase often heard in interviews: “I make love to my wife but I fuck my lover”, implying that the

way a man has sex with a woman is dependent upon his relationship to the woman and her prescribed role in society. One Parisian man stated, "There is a separation between lust and love. Either I want to have sex with her, or, if I really like her, I couldn't even think about sex for a few dates." On the other hand, because religion does not have a major impact on the culture, Stockholm women often commented on how lack of influence from the Church makes it easier for them to make sexual choices. One interviewee stated, "The church and state are separated and don't have much influence. Before, sex was associated with shame". Such cross-cultural findings are a persuasive argument that religion, or, as in the case of Sweden, lack of religion, is a factor which influences equality amongst the genders.

### **Politics**

It was only as recently as 1944 that French women were granted the right to vote, with their first bids made in 1919, then again in 1922, and yet again in 1925. In McMillan's work, she states all attempts failed due to the attitudes of politicians such as Senator Pierre Marraud, who said, "The woman of the Latin race does not feel, has not developed in the same way as the woman of the Anglo-Saxon or Germanic races...As a person, she is generally more involved in her church, whose dogmatism she does not dispute. It is perfectly reasonable, then, that her legal status should be different." (1989).

Similarly, Louis Napoleon Bonaparte dictated that legally, women must be "grouped amongst children and mental patients", he further asserted that as a "husband owes protection to his wife; a wife owes obedience to her husband". Cavallaro (2003) quotes Hause (1987) when she comments that the liberation of French women has taken place only over *la longue duree*, and it seems that 'la longue duree' still has some way to go. The situation of French women does not



seem to have changed much in politics, with parliamentary representation at a paltry 13.9%. Meanwhile, at 45.3%, Sweden has the highest percentage of women in parliament of any country in the world.

## History

The influence of religion and politics on a culture's ideology on gender equality has been explored, and it is similarly beneficial to review the history of the two cultures. History helps explain present interactions and identify origins of patterns of behaviour, thereby aiding the deconstruction of flirting in a manner similar to that adopted by Abu-Lughod and Lutz when studying emotions. Abu-Lughod and Lutz refer to the historicising of such socio-cultural phenomena as "subjecting discourses on emotion, subjectivity, and the self to scrutiny over time, looking at them in particular social locations and historical moments, and seeing whether and how they have changed." (1990: 5).

Parisian history is contradictory, as were many ambiguities found in Parisian culture in the course of interviewing for this study. As one interviewee surmised, "France is a country of paradoxes, and that's why it's so charming. We never know the rules. We like to be mysterious. It's a complicated culture and it takes time to understand." Such notions of ambiguity are ingrained in Parisian history, and it has been suggested that even the ideology of French feminism is a "... seemingly paradoxical doctrine of 'equality in difference'" (Cavallaro 2003). This contradictory aspect of French culture and its history encompasses a surplus of prestigious, female figures: Joan of Arc, Marie Curie, Anais Nin, Luce Irigaray and Simone De Beauvoir, to name a few. Cavallaro believes that the dichotic side of French culture, particularly in regards to women, produces two

contrasting views of femininity, however, the two categories are equally unattainable for a typical Parisian woman, and thus, are equally repressive. Parisian women seem to be trying to live up to an impossible ideal, illustrated perfectly by one Parisian male as he speculates about one-night stands, “They [men] don’t want one woman for a long time. She was just physically attractive and not more. For a longer term relationship, he wants someone who is perfect.” Another male interviewee says that if a woman were to approach him, she would be taking herself off the pedestal upon which he has placed her. If modern-day women are supposed to be ‘perfect’ and stay on their pedestals, it is not surprising that Parisian women struggle to find a place between the image of the sexy, feminine, French goddess, and the ideal of feminine as a woman of chasteness, virginity and modesty as illustrated in history by Catholicism and the patriarchy.

The role of men and women in Swedish history is not so different from the traditional gender roles of their European neighbours, but unlike their neighbours, modern-day Stockholm seems to have shifted in a new direction. One Stockholm male interviewee attributes the change to Sweden’s relatively unscathed emergence from World War II. He said:

“If you look at history, Sweden didn’t have to totally rebuild our society because it wasn’t involved in WWII. During the 1960’s through the early 80’s Sweden was looked on as the perfect society. It’s like climbing a ladder, since Sweden was already well developed, we could focus on other issues and the ‘luxury questions’ since the fundamentals were already solved. When your focus is on where is the food and how do we eat the questions of equality between men and women don’t seem as imperative.”

Although it is not necessarily true that equality cannot be equally achieved in societies that are less prosperous, by, for example, rejecting that equality cannot be negotiated at the same time as

foraging for food, this interviewee's argument would support the idea that a strong economic position helps women claim equality.

### **Economics**

It appears that equality, or relative equality, also brings the benefit of choice. The greater economic freedom a woman possesses, the more control she gains in choosing a partner, or indeed, in choosing whether to take a partner at all. In *Evolution of Desire*, David Buss asserts that in situations where women have less opportunity economically, there is greater competition amongst women for the men with the most resources. For example, there is some evidence that the function of post-secondary education for women in the United States was once focused on women finding men whom they could marry and depend on for economic support. This pattern can be found in most cultures where there is economic disparity between the genders. Following this rationale, it was proposed that a culture with relative economic equality between the genders would not only have greater equality *between* men and women, but also *amongst* women. Additionally, the camaraderie amongst women in public settings<sup>5</sup> would be greater, with less need for competition for men and their resources.

Inhabitants of London, Paris, Stockholm and New York were researched during the course of this study. Of the four cities, Stockholm was no rival to the others in terms of population or cosmopolitan appeal, however the Swedish had the highest standard of living among those surveyed, ranking fifth in the world according to the 2006 United Nations Human Development Index Report, while France ranked sixteenth.<sup>6</sup> In gender equality rankings, Sweden was rated

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<sup>5</sup> The public domain has traditionally been reserved for the men while women have been relegated to the private domain, which is why we are specifically interested in women's attitudes in the public sphere.

<sup>6</sup> The United Nations Human Development Index was developed as part of a 1995 UN Development Programme as an aid to comparing nations in the areas of health, life expectancy, educational attainment, literacy, access to knowledge, relative income and standard of living. In 2006, Sweden ranked fifth, the United States tenth, France sixteenth, and the United Kingdom eighteenth.

number two on the 2005 United Nations Gender Empowerment Scale, while a rating for France was not reported for the overall results.<sup>7</sup> According to the 2005 UN Gender Empowerment Index, the ratio of income between Swedish men and women was 0.81, the smallest income gap between men and women of any other country in the world, while the ratio of income between French men and women was 0.64.<sup>8</sup>

While social service benefits in both France and Sweden are similarly generous for women, as one Parisian woman noted, “A [French] woman’s position in life is not recognised. 1983 was the first time women could declare their own income to the government, which meant they were not dependent on their husband’s or father’s anymore. Before 1978 we couldn’t even get a credit card in our own name.”

Following the discourse that equality achieved through economic security increases options of choice and freedom, it is posited that Parisian women’s economic dependence on men, from lack of opportunity to earn similar wages, would cause competition amongst each other as well as economic pressure to be in a relationship. This theory is explored further in Chapter Five.

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<sup>7</sup> The United Nations Gender Empowerment Scale measures the power of females in relation to males.

<sup>8</sup> This external rating contradicts a report issued by the Service de Presse de l’Ambassade de France a Londres in the 2003 Eurostat Poll, where it was stated that the gross average hourly wage for French women was only 12% lower than men’s.

## Chapter Three

### Flirting and Language

#### Definition of Flirting

Regardless of dictionary statements that do not take cultural factors into account<sup>9</sup>, it was discovered in the course of this study that there is not one cross-cultural clear-cut definition of flirting. Individual definitions varied depending on the interviewee's gender and culture, with some interviewees stating that flirting needed to be brief, while others stated that it had derogatory meaning. Study participants interviewed across all four cultures had markedly different definitions of flirting. These responses helped construct the hypothesis as to how flirting differs in societies with differently constructed and followed gender roles, including the reasons interviewees gave for choosing to flirt, with whom they flirted, in which situations they flirted, and if they believed flirting always contained sexual undertones. Research results also showed that in addition to respondents' varied opinions and attitudes towards flirting, there were different layers to this human

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<sup>9</sup> Oxford University dictionary says that flirting [verb] is to "behave towards as if you find them sexually attractive, without seriously wanting to have a relationship with

them. 1 To think about or be interested in for a short time but not very seriously. 2 noun [usually sing.] a person who flirts with a lot of people..

dynamic, ranging from 'harmless' flirting with cashiers, which some deemed as 'friendly' interaction rather than flirting, to the intricate 'game' of flirting involving sexual attraction conducted with the hope of someone becoming a potential partner.

In Stockholm, men and women's reasons for flirting were similar to each other's, and were markedly different from Parisians. Reasons commonly given for flirting by Stockholm interviewees included: fun, self-confirmation, and testing others' reactions. Parisian men and women gave different responses to each other. Parisian females commonly stated that flirting was a tool used to get what they wanted or to be desired/liked, while interviewed males generally stated they used flirting as a way to determine where they stood on a hierarchical scale. Parisians were the only cultural group surveyed that did not mention any fun or exciting aspects of flirting. These vastly different definitions supported the theory that men and women in cultures which did not strongly differentiate between masculine and feminine would have similar responses, while cultures which strongly upheld 'difference' between the sexes would have varying response. This finding inspired further study into how the relationship between belief in gender innateness or social construction affect gender equality, and also affect the willingness to 'share' characteristics with the opposite gender.

### **Discourse on language**

The subject of language is so far-reaching that its scope cannot begin to be covered in this paper, yet its influence is so momentous that it cannot be overlooked. "Language is usually seen as the medium in which ideology is manifest, and as the tool through which ideology works to obscure reality, to instil beliefs or worldviews in subjects and to impose frameworks on our apprehension in the world." (Frazer & Cameron 1989). Two known difficulties pertaining to

language were encountered in trying to illicit responses from the participants. Frazer and Cameron mentioned the first difficulty was the fieldworker's conundrum of how to construe and rationalise apparent contradictions in what informants say and do, this was apparent in both the Paris and Stockholm interviews, and is discussed further in this paper. The second difficulty pertained to language contradictions occurring most often in studies of gender and class (1989: 25). The latter point is particularly significant when referring to the theory of subjectivity first outlined by Lacan and further developed by Irigaray, whereby language acquisition is the means by which women internalise the patriarchal order of things. As Ferree and Merrill state, "Language often carries masculinist assumptions and normative judgements that pass as neutral concepts." (2000: 454). Therefore, language has been structured in such a way that women have been placed 'outside' of it, thus, if accepting this account when engaging in language, women are unavoidably trapped in a cycle of alienation<sup>10</sup> (Frazer & Cameron 1989). We must acknowledge the weight of gendered language when researching a subject such as flirting, and also its ingrained effects on participants' responses. As stated by Montgomery, "If obvious gender differences are signalled in part by surface contrasts in dress and demeanour, it is likely that even more profound differences of gender role and identity are carried by language." (1995: 148).

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<sup>10</sup> In their research comparing young women of upper-class and working class backgrounds, Frazer and Cameron found the upper-class young women had sole access to the register of formal debate while the working class young women had sole access to the register of feminism (1989).

## **Chapter Four**

### **Methodology: Handling Discrepancies**

#### **Structure of Study**

The basic structure of this study was comprised of interviews with approximately twenty-five single men and twenty-five single women<sup>11</sup> in four capital cities in Western Europe and North America, though only results from Paris and Stockholm are analysed in detail for the purposes of this paper (refer to Appendix A for the interview participant criteria). In the study, methodologies of structured interviews and participant observation were used, as well as several key informants (refer to Appendix B for additional detail on research methods).

#### **Interviews**

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<sup>11</sup> Single people were interviewed almost exclusively, as it was considered that the motivating factors for flirting differed between those who were single and those who weren't.



In commencing the interview process, it was assumed, incorrectly, that the definition of 'flirting' in Western society was congruent across all cultures. However, in French, the word 'flirting' translates into something different to that of the English definition; the French meaning of the word is more similar to 'seduction' in English. Flirting seems to be a more serious venture in Parisian culture. In Parisian culture, 'flirting' as defined in English is undertaken with strangers, and this mostly through non-verbal communication, body language. Whereas in French, flirting is more the equivalent to 'sortir avec quel qu'un', and is usually undertaken with someone the flirter is already acquainted with, with more serious intent. Parisian interviewees stated they would only flirt with someone they really liked. Additionally, Parisian women generally commented that they would not flirt with a man they were not interested in, because they would not want to give him the wrong impression. Parisian female interviewees seemed to believe that they were responsible if men misunderstand their intentions. Over five interviews with Parisians were conducted before it was realised that their definitions were at odds with the standard English understanding of the term.

During the course of interviewing, another point for potential error was also discovered when an interviewee's desire to give socially desirable answers was noted. Many Stockholm participants wished to say things they felt were expected of them and were especially aware of giving 'socially desirable' answers. Stockholm interviewees would often say, "I bet everyone says that", or query, "Is this what others are saying as well?" Stockholm respondents seemed to think they should be providing an 'expected' answer, but in reality, their responses were far from unitary and conventional.<sup>12</sup> In marked contrast, no interviewee from London, New York or Paris asked what

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<sup>12</sup> This need for consensus is echoed in the common Swedish expression 'yantalogen', meaning 'don't think you are better than everyone else'. Many Swedish interviewees pointed out that in schools, rather than fostering exceptionally bright students, more effort was made to ensure slower students did not fall behind. Stockholm interviewees were also those most concerned about privacy. Once reassured of response confidentiality, they were more than happy to answer questions and often mentioned they found the interview a cathartic experience.

other respondents were saying. Parisians were concerned about giving socially acceptable answers. When answering the question, "Do you flirt at work?", most Parisian respondents answered no. Not quite convinced that this was the case, a few key Parisian informants were consulted, and agreed with the suspicion that this particular response was not true, and when questioned about the discrepancy, stated that all flirt at work, but it is not socially acceptable to admit it outright. In another case of discrepancy with the Parisian interviews, quite a few men said that if they were really interested in a woman, they would wait a long time before asking for a phone number and would want to wait at least three dates before they would expect a kiss. Comparing the answers of Parisian men with those of Parisian women, led to a re-assessment of their answers, as responses and actions seemed contradictory. Parisian women were questioned on this specific point, and confirmed that answers given by Parisian men were incorrect on this point, the women scoffed at the idea of waiting three dates before kissing. In other instances, interviewees responded the way they believed the interviewer would prefer, and though this did not pertain to a specific culture, it was most often noted in interviews with male respondents.

Unfortunately, not much could be done about such contradictions except to be aware they existed. Fraser and Cameron posit, "For the ethnomethodologist it is clear that all we have are people's individual and negotiated accounts of how things are, and of nothing more. We do not have access to any 'reality' against which to check these accounts; rather they are constitutive of the constructed reality which is the life-world." (1989: 29). However, this need not be the case, if the same informants could have been interviewed, and then observed, triangulation of the methodology could have used to make sure their answers were consistent with their actions.

### **Participant Observation**

The other methodology adopted in this study was that of participant observer. It was a great way for to observe, reinforce, and sometimes question the responses given in the interviews. For example, when asked, “Do you flirt in everyday locations?” almost every New Yorker answered ‘yes’. This was congruent with what was observed while walking on the streets of NYC, shopping for groceries and using public transport. In the case of New Yorkers, this was not only what was said in the interviews, but it was also easily observable. This did not seem to be the case in Stockholm. When subjects were asked, “Do you flirt in everyday locations?” most answered ‘yes’. However, when trying to experience the Stockholm ‘everyday’ flirting experience, these answers did not appear to be true. After questioning a key informant, it seemed that the flirting was happening the way it was described, it was just that personal expectations were influencing what it was supposed to look like. With the help of the key informant, who demonstrated that Stockholmer’s references to ‘everyday flirting’ meant quick glances, all was made clear. Evidently, Swedish flirting was more subtle than expected, and their idea of ‘everyday’ flirting was non-verbal. Though natives are inevitably far savvier to signals of attraction from their compatriots than an outsider, perhaps the Swedish flirting style is too subtle for the average Stockholmer to comprehend. This conclusion is not only from that of a participant observer, but from many Stockholm respondents mentioning that Swedes are generally bad at flirting.<sup>13</sup>

From a holistic viewpoint, such examples not only demonstrated situations where words were incongruent with actions, but also revealed that this study of flirting was subject to the North American cultural biases of the researcher. Observations of flirting in New York were far simpler as they were closest to the North American anthropologist’s understanding of flirting. Such subjectivity provides support for the argument that Anthropologists studying their own cultures can never be

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<sup>13</sup> ‘Bad’ meaning they are not good at making their intentions clear when they are interested in someone.

truly objective. However, despite such initial misunderstandings, once the researcher is aware of such pitfalls, 'Anthropology at home' can be insightful, especially if one triangulates research methods to serve as a testing point.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Gender Construction Beliefs Shown in Flirting Research**

In comparing each culture's economics, history, politics, and religion, it is perhaps unsurprising that there seems to be greater gender equality in Stockholm than in Paris. However, such observations do not necessarily prove that a culture's belief or disbelief in gender construction is one cause of that equality; flirting research results will be used to analyse this further in this paper.

In the modern-day setting, Stockholm was a culture where constructed gender roles of what it means to be masculine and feminine were the least stringent. Indeed, the malleability of these roles seems to be an effect of gender equity. In regards to flirting, a common viewpoint expressed in interviews with both genders when questioned about flirting preferences of the opposite sex, was that a man or woman would like 'the same thing as me'. Stockholm respondents seemed to be very aware of the role traditionally *expected* of men and women, although they did not necessarily adhere to them. As one woman remarked, "When you start to go out with men, all of a sudden you are forced to 'be the woman'. It's only okay if I choose to be the woman, being single is a lot easier. We [Swedish women] show more of our masculine sides."

In Paris, on the other hand, gender roles were firmly adhered to, and one example of this was their response to the question "What do you think men/women like when it comes to flirting?" Both Parisian men and women stipulated that women like men who, "act like a man" and men like women who "act like a woman". Respondents were, on the whole, definite about their expectations as to what this meant, with women making such comments as, "Flatter his power" and "Make him feel manly". There did not seem to be any malleability of the characteristics between masculine and feminine. Judging from their responses, and in line with what Whitehead posits about masculinity, often constructed in opposition to femininity (2002), Parisians also viewed these two images to be at opposing ends of the continuum. Most interviewees were very clear that men and women had different duties, roles, and desires. As one Parisian man living in London said, "I think they [women] like a man to look like a man. This means he should carry her bags and open the door. I get so embarrassed in the UK when women say 'thank you' when I open the door, like it's

some big thing. This is a man's job. It's a man's job to open the door and a woman's job to walk through it."

Given the different degrees of gender equity in Paris and Stockholm, it does not seem coincidental that the culture with less equity is also the one that adheres most strongly to separate roles for men and women, and also maintains roles for men and women that are completely *different* from each other.

### **Socialisation: Couples vs. Singles**

Revisiting the earlier positioning, that a woman's economic freedom makes her less competitive with other women, proves to be the case in Stockholm. Additionally, it seems that women in Stockholm spend a lot of time socialising with one another. A frequent sentiment from Swedish men was, "It's very common for women to go out with their friends and only want to talk to them. They are very picky about men; if you don't fit their criteria...forget it!"

Parisian participants said it was very rare for women to go out in social settings such as a bar or nightclub without the accompaniment of men. If they did, it might seem like they were sexually available, especially if they went out solo. As one English woman who was living in Paris said, "Unlike England, where I go out on my own all the time with no trouble, if I do the same here [in Paris], all the Parisian men think that I am 'up for it'."

The positive side of such mixed sociality such as that common to Paris, includes being comfortable socialising with the opposite gender, but it also leads to the possibility of jealousy and competition amongst women, not to mention lack of opportunities for women to form social bonds with one other in public settings. This observation correlates with Simone De Beauvoir's assertion of women's helpless scattering among men: "They live dispersed among the males, attached...to

certain men...more firmly than they are to other women. If they belong to the bourgeoisie, they feel solidarity with the men of that class, not with the proletarian women; if they are white, their allegiance is to white men, not to Negro women" (1997: 42).

In addition to mostly socialising in mixed company, another trend in Paris was for single people to go out with people already in a couple. Parisian culture was the only one to display this dynamic, and shows the prominent place of pair bonding. Also, the amount of 'truly' single people in Paris was very low, especially compared to the Stockholm demographic. The word truly is highlighted, because although many Parisian men said they were in a relationship, they often still thought of themselves as single. This was another characteristic unique to Parisian flirting culture and this viewpoint came from men, almost exclusively.

Offen terms the importance of heterosexual relationships as 'relational feminism'. Although this term was used in reference to nineteenth-century France, its relevance is still apparent today, evidenced by the need of an overwhelming number of Parisians wanting to be in relationships. Cavallaro (2003) cites Offen (1988) who explains relational feminism as, "The primacy of a companionate, hierarchical, male-female couple as the basic unit of society, whereas individualistic arguments posited the individual, irrespective of sex or gender, as the basic unit." The presence of coupling in a Parisian context can be attributed to a number of variables, such as enforced models of heterosexuality, influences of patriarchy, Catholicism, Offen's 'relational feminism' and even women's economic dependence on men. Consequently, it is suggested that Stockholm women often socialising in the public realm together without the company of men, and choosing to be single rather than in a pair bond, is an effect of gender equality.

### **The Equality of Economics**

In Stockholm, there is a discrepancy between the awareness of the traditional roles and lack of adherence to these roles. This, in addition to the importance placed on economics as an opportunity for equality, was why one of the questions in the 'culture' section of the interviews made in this study pertained to attitudes about the effect of economics on women's position in society.<sup>14</sup> The general attitude for both men and women was that Swedish women's economic independence *does* have an affect on flirting interactions, and even more significantly, the overall relations between the genders. As one woman said, "Some girls don't like it when guys pay, they want to be equal. A woman would be as likely to carry a heavy bag as the man. In Sweden, it's all about the economics. The women don't need the men to pay because they have their own money." Congruent with Stockholm women's rejection of men and women adhering to specific roles, the interviewee went on to say, "If the woman made more money than the man, then she would go to work and he would stay with the kids." Stockholm men also agree with the equality of Swedish women, "You respect women more; they are equals in the flirting arena". Some men even admitted to learning things from observing women. As one man said, "If you meet an aggressive woman they show you what you should do [pertaining to flirting] and you think 'Oh, that's how I do it.'

### **Theories on Sexual Power**

Interestingly, Swedish women may have surpassed 'equal' and moved on to greater advantaged, a situation not often seen in modern societies, if at all. Responses given by men and women were often 'reversed' from the traditional understanding. For example, in regards to initiating the flirting, one man responded, "Guys are most likely to start looking at a girl and girls are most likely to follow it up". Such an observation goes against the traditional model of women giving

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<sup>14</sup> The question asked was, "How do you think Swedish women's being financially independent affects the flirting culture?"



approachability signals and men approaching, a model of women as passive signallers and men as active pursuers, which was the case in Paris and most other cultures researched.

In Parisian flirting culture, this model could be influenced by a period of French literature, which still seems to permeate the culture. In interviews, Parisian men said they would wait great lengths of time before asking for a woman's phone number or attempting a kiss. A Parisian woman explained this was because "They miss l'amour courtois of the middle ages, where a man would court a woman over a period of years. The girl never initiated a response; she just nodded yes or no". This literature not only reinforced the model of male as active pursuer and female as passive receiver, but my informant implied that it derived from an era where the man was in control of the pace. As Cavallaro mentions, "Indeed, one of the main axioms of courtly love consists of the idea that the idealised lady is precious because she is unattainable and that the male lover should be inspired precisely by her unavailability." (2003: 2). As will be addressed in more detail further in this paper, this concept of unattainability is still prized in Parisian society. One Parisian man said, "We have a proverb which says, 'Follow me and I will escape from you. Escape from me and I will follow you.' When noted in conjunction with Cavallaro's discourse on courtly love (2003), it seems that some men in modern-day Paris still feel they need to be rejected in order to be attracted to someone. The Parisian man elaborates by saying, "The pursuit can't be too easy. It's best to show you are interested and then stop. You just provoke interest and then stop."

Contradictory to the belief that courtly love holds women in power, Cavallaro suggests it was used in the Lacanian sense of men using women as mirrors to help express their masculinity. However, as Bordo notes, such a perspective is not unique to Parisian culture; it is a concept that has been present since classical Greece. Bordo posits that the image of woman as ministering

angel, sweet, frail, gentle, domestic, without intensity, is necessary to maintain an image of men as cool, strong, effortlessly confident and under a calm control (1993). In fact, the 'traditional' model, one which is imbued in the history of patriarchy, is also linked to the biologically essentialist view of men and women. As illustration, the early twentieth century sexologist Havelock Ellis stated that sexual intercourse between men and women was based on animal courtship, defining males as pursuing and conquering the females. Because this was prevalent in the animal kingdom, Ellis concluded that it was somehow natural and instinctive in all of us (Cited in Jackson 1987).

With regards to attitudes about sexual drives and sexual power, a North American study by Kane and Schippers found that men and women have similar beliefs about sexual drive, but have differing opinions on sexual power. Both groups of men and women surveyed in the course of their study believed that men had a higher sexual drive than women, although their opinions varied as to whether this was due to naturalness or social construction.<sup>15</sup> Findings from this flirting research, which includes information on sexual behavior and shows a culture's level of acceptance of female sexuality, reveal that Stockholm interviewees would reject the idea of men having innately higher sex drives. Kane and Schippers concur, and caution against accrediting a higher sexual drive in men as something which is natural, believing this leads to a greater acceptance in men's 'innate' sexual aggression and women's 'innate' passivity (1996: 662). Kane and Schippers found that in terms of sexual power, both groups not only accredited the other as having more sexual power, but they also thought the others' power to be too great and their own group to be disadvantaged. As women having the final say as to whether there will be sexual activity in consensual sex, a significant number of men believe women have more power in the sexual arena, a belief which

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<sup>15</sup> Sixty percent of men felt a high sex drive was something 'natural' in men whereas women's views were split between being natural and a social construction.

Kane and Schippers believe could stand as a significant obstacle in recognising 'sexual coercion and gender inequalities' in general (1996: 662).

### **Who Has the Power?**

It seems that Stockholm women have gained sexual power in more ways than one. Firstly, they have gained power in the passive sense as illustrated by Kane and Schippers and so have the final say in whether sexual relations will take place, but secondly in the less traditional manner of actively choosing their partners. As another Swedish man said, "Men do the work and the women choose. They are always in control." The overall situation in Paris is different, as one male interviewee put it, "The men are the bosses and the women work under them."

In another reversal of the norm, similar to locker room scenarios where men brag about their conquests to other men in order to prove their manhood, in Stockholm culture, it seems to be *women* who are pressured to show their ability for sexual conquest. As one man said, "Women are worried about their reputation among their friends if they can talk to a guy or not." It appears that although women are still competing, they are not competing for *resources*, but rather to show their ability to attract men in a hierarchical-type model, one that previously applied to men only.

In a flirting situation, one Stockholm interviewee remarked he did not like it when Stockholm females "Move straight to the sexual invite. It's like skipping the game." Another Swedish man said, "It's more common for women to go out and say 'let's meet a guy tonight' than it is for men." Again, this goes against the traditional model of man as sexual predator and women as prey. Stockholm women generally concurred, and one woman explained her reason for not wanting to see a man again by saying, "One guy didn't want to have sex on the first date. He wanted to get to know me better, but I didn't want to see him again." When asked if she had an end goal when flirting, another woman said, "It depends on what you

want. Sometimes you only want him for one night.” Stockholm women’s sexual choices seem to be un-stigmatised. As one Swedish man said, “We are equal here so women don’t get the label they are easy.” Another agrees by saying, “Swedish men aren’t so stupid to judge women for having one-night stands. Then we know it won’t happen anymore.” This highlights the question of how the sexual freedom was acquired, was it due to men allowing it, or women taking it and men having to accept it due to women’s strong positioning in society?

Parisian women have not yet encountered sexual freedom. As one Parisian woman said, “In France, a woman has sex on the first night to please the man in hopes she would get a relationship out of it. I think it’s rarer [to have a one night stand] in France than in other countries.” In regards to sexual freedom, another woman said, “We are not very liberated. A girl is a ‘bitch’ and a guy a ‘don Juan’. We had big revolutionaries and then we stopped.”

Comparison of these two contrasting cultural attitudes towards women’s sexuality reveals that in a culture where gender equality is greater, so is a woman’s choice in whether or not to engage in sexual relations. This is significant because, according to McClintock, women have always been unfairly used as symbols of nationalism, made to uphold and protect cultural borders and customs, often through food, language and sexuality (1997). Furthermore, the examples of ‘reverse’ behaviour of Stockholm men and women could surely disrupt assumptions about the innate actions of men and women, and could serve as a prelude as to what happens when traditional gender roles have shifted.

### **Parisian Sliding Scales**

Parisian flirting culture seems to be regarded as a game, with the continuous process of testing and checking referred to by Parisians as ‘cat and mouse’. It was apparent that if a Parisian

woman were interested in a man, the only way she could be successful and win his interest, was to ignore him. As one Parisian woman said, “Women ignore men; to show interest, you show disinterest. You would look a tiny bit, but only just a little. If a girl looks at a guy a lot, especially with a smile, she might appear easy”. Unfortunately for the women, while they are trying their best not to appear “easy”, the men do not understand their constraints. “When you ask a French woman to dance she will say no, even though she really does want to dance with you. They like to be desired and chased after. They are a lot of hard work for nothing!” It appears once again that Parisian women are not only trying to live up to impossible standards, but this miscommunication could be an effect of living in a society which stresses gender differences rather than similarities.

The ‘game’ the Parisians play in their flirting courtship<sup>16</sup> has a direct link to underpinning views on patriarchy. It can be compared to the ideals of ‘naturalness’ in the ‘inherent’ roles of men and women outlined in the ‘scientific model’ of courtship; a model which was based on animal courtship. Jackson (1987) cites the work of the sexologist Havelock Ellis (1940) who defined the feminine role as one of a hunted animal who lures her pursuer while the man captured the woman. Much like the French ‘cat and mouse’ description, Ellis stated that a woman’s resistance was all part of the ‘game’ and the purpose was to increase sexual desire in men. Parisian women admitting to only look ‘just a little’ and Parisian men confessing to losing interest once they knew they had won the game, is comparable to the advice given by Estelle Cole in the 1930’s in her sex education classes for young women (1938). Jackson quotes Cole when she says, “Man is a hunter by nature. He likes to chase his game. His pleasure lies in the pursuit. With the capture and possession there often comes loss of interest; so that the wise woman restrains herself at such passionate moments, in order that he may be kept eager in his pursuit.” (1987). Indeed, because

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<sup>16</sup> Paris was the only culture where flirting was repeatedly referred to as a game.

Parisian women have to abide by their society's rules of modesty in addition to having to balance the scale of the over-eager draggeurs<sup>17</sup>, by pulling back and not being available or approachable, they are therefore deemed hard-work. One man's explanation was, "In Paris, the relationship between men and women is more complicated than in other parts of France. Women in Paris aren't as easily seduced. Parisian women are always approached. In parties she can wear her sexy tops and clothes but not in the streets. It's like a person showing their jewels on the street- he will attract thieves." The French emancipator of the 1870's, Louise Michele, whom Cavallaro quotes, echoed this sentiment by saying, "In the street she [woman] was merchandise" (2003).

Attempts to uncover the origins of these differences in culture led to the discovery that displays of femininity were equated with corruptness in France's history (Nelson 1987, Cavallaro 2003). This would help explain why, in 2006, in the springtime in Paris when these interviews were conducted, women were dressed very modestly in dark and grey colors. Unfortunately, this same modest behavior expected of French women could also explain why they are labeled 'hard work' or 'stuck-up' or 'a lot of work for nothing' by many of the Parisian male interviewees.

Besides Parisians referring generally to flirting as a game, flirting behaviour seems to function on two different systems, both operating on scales: one scale operating to find equilibrium between men and women; and the other scale between 'regular' men and dragguers. In regards to the former scale, one side is 'heavier', by acting in an aggressive manner (the men) and has to be balanced out by the other side (the women). For example, one reason given by a Parisian woman for sharing only a 'hint' of eye contact with someone in whom they were interested, was that if she

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<sup>17</sup> 'Draggeurs des femmes' are over-aggressive men found in French society. They can be found staring lewdly at women on the metro and making provocative comments as they pass by on the streets.

gave too much, she ran the risk of immediately being pounced upon by the man, or being deemed 'easy'.

The act of women purposely dressing modestly so as not to illicit undo attention from men, can be compared to women covering themselves in Islam. Also being a target of the draggeurs, receiving a lot of unwanted attention, and made to feel very uncomfortable, makes it easy to understand why many French women dress modestly. When asked how they dealt with this unwanted attention, most said they just tried to ignore it. One even suggested to "try and make a bad situation good by taking it as a compliment that you are an attractive woman".

In reference to the latter scale, women were not the only ones affected by the draggeurs' behaviour. Parisian men were also affected and were extremely conscious of not being grouped into the same category as 'les draggeurs'. This cautiousness affected many of their actions in the flirting arena, preventing them from flirting with women they did not know and making it the norm that they needed to be introduced by a friend before first talking to a woman. These social norms are most probably more stringently adhered to in Paris than in smaller towns in France. Additionally, the uncomfortable acceptance of the draggeurs by Parisian women perhaps stems from history and women's relegation to the private sphere. Perhaps this is yet another French ambiguity, as although Parisian women do frequently appear in public, a domain historically considered for men, they still feel as though they do not quite belong, and consequently, routinely tolerate the behavior of the draggeurs.





## Chapter Six

### Using Flirting Data to Illustrate Gender Equality

In an attempt to gain insight into power relations between the genders, questions were asked about who does the approaching in flirting situations. It was assumed that respondents indicating the frequency of women approaching men would provide insight into the acceptability of women in the culture to choose and take an 'active' role. It was also assumed that by questioning men about how they would feel if a woman approached them, it would be revealed how comfortable a man was with assuming the 'passive' role, a role traditionally relegated to women. Further, by relating positions of choice with positions of power, it might be inferred which gender had the luxury of choice, and whether men would feel comfortable assuming the less 'active' role of being chosen. Both genders were asked if they thought it was better to choose or be chosen.

#### **Do you approach?**

One hundred percent of Stockholm male interviewees responded that they would like it if a woman approached them, with the stipulation that it not be done aggressively<sup>18</sup>. As a woman's willingness or comfortableness in approaching a man was equated with being an indicator of choice, and, effectively, equality in a culture, it was assumed the answer given by Stockholm women would be an unequivocal 'yes'. It was puzzling to find that a large number of women responded that they did not approach men. In other cultures such as Parisian culture, when women answered 'no' to this question, it was usually because to do so was socially unacceptable due to patriarchal cultural norms. The possibility was considered that as with other discrepancies in responses, the women of Stockholm were giving answers that were inconsistent with their actions.

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<sup>18</sup> Both Stockholm men and women pointed out their dislike of aggressive flirting behavior. This behavior seems to coincide with the large amounts of alcohol consumed by both genders to encourage socialisation.

However, it was eventually discovered that the reason they responded that they did not approach men was not because they were not 'allowed' to due to social mores, but rather because they did not *have to*. As one man explained, women are in a situation where they can "...sit back and take it easy. Women aren't that desperate. They don't need to take the first move." Not only was there a large amount of power from the women in flirting exchanges, but also it seems an interesting effect of what happens in flirting interactions in countries where women have a high standard of living, and gender roles are malleable, appears to be that the women choose to be single. One single woman said, "Swedish women want a relationship, but on their own terms. Sometimes I think our expectations are a bit too high. People have lots of friends and often that's fulfilling enough."

As evidence, Stockholm has one of the highest numbers of people living alone.<sup>19</sup> This is significant, because it insinuates underlying issues about choice and power—power enables choices. When women have power, which is inevitably supported by a strong economic situation and linked to a strong presence in political representation, it seems they choose to be single and, given Sweden's low birth-rate<sup>20</sup>, do not necessarily choose to be mothers. Beauvoir asserts in her questioning of the naturalness of motherhood that, "Children are indubitably obligations, but there can be nothing natural in such obligations: nature can never dictate a moral choice" (1997: 23). Beauvoir's views appear to be more similar to those of Stockholm females than to her Parisian counterparts.

When it came to approaching men, Parisian women were slightly less likely to approach men than Stockholm women<sup>21</sup>. However, Parisian men were more likely than Stockholm men to

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<sup>19</sup> According to the Swedish Institute, single dwellings in Sweden comprise the largest group, over one-third of the total.

<sup>20</sup> According to the World Press Organisation, the birth rate in Sweden is 9.91 births per 1,000 people, while France's Birth rate is 12.1 births per 1,000 people.

<sup>21</sup> 58% of Parisian women said they would approach a man compared to 64% of Stockholm females.

approach women, most likely due to adherence of traditional gender roles.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, although most Parisian men said that they would like it if a woman approached them, there were also comments such as “I don’t like her to rush into things and make it too obvious she is into me. I like to make the first move. If a woman makes the first move then she takes herself off the pedestal where I have put her.” Another man said if a woman approached him, he would think it is a ‘trap’. “There are traps everywhere. In France, girls think too much. They don’t think the guy could be serious.”

This wary suspicion of the other gender in Parisian culture came up enough to take note. Such suspicion might be caused by two reasons. Firstly, as previously mentioned, when a society stresses difference, it cannot also expect its members to act and think alike, as well. By contrast, in a society where people are less confined by gender roles, men demonstrate more understanding of the opposite gender. This was demonstrated by the response to the question, “What do you think women like when it comes to flirting?” Unlike Parisian men, Stockholm men were astute as to the needs of Stockholm women.<sup>23</sup> The second reason for this suspicion could be attributed to the *amount* of flirting taking place.<sup>24</sup> In Paris, flirting was reported as a common occurrence, and so less likely to be taken seriously, and, although many people reported that they enjoyed flirting, this frequency also caused wariness. Flirting in Stockholm occurred with less frequency, so when it did happen, it was considered significant. In one Stockholm woman’s opinion, “It’s more serious to flirt

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<sup>22</sup> 74% of Parisian men said they would approach women compared to 66% of Stockholm men.

<sup>23</sup> Apart from the most common response from Stockholm men, “The same thing as me”, they also made such comments as: recognising them as individuals and that we had a connection that couldn’t have happened with others, making her feel special, listening and giving interesting comments to what she has to say instead of just talking about yourself, genuine compliments, women are intelligent they can spot what is fake or real.

<sup>24</sup> Such suspicions were most often revealed in interviews with Parisian women about Parisian men.

in Sweden because Swedes take life very seriously. If you flirt, you have to stay and suffer the consequences”.

### **Choose or be chosen?**

When asked the question if they would prefer to choose or be chosen in a flirting situation, almost two-thirds of Parisian men preferred to choose<sup>25</sup>, and over half of Parisian women preferred to be chosen.<sup>26</sup> This correlates with previous attitudes towards masculinity being active and femininity, passive. Not adhering to the traditional roles, Stockholm respondents showed men split almost fifty-fifty as to their preference, with the women preferring to choose eighty-seven percent of the time. This illustrates the greater choice Stockholm women have in their culture, and reveals the acceptance the culture has for women taking on roles that were traditionally designated for men. Using the indicator that half of Stockholm men prefer to be chosen also reveals their acceptance of such non-traditional roles.

### **This way forward**

While it is clear that there is a drastic difference between the two cultures, and Sweden, in common with other Scandinavian countries, is helping cast aside previous, rigid conceptions of what it means to be a ‘man’ and a ‘woman’, this new ideology has brought about some interesting cultural changes. The first, as we have seen in regards to the demographic situation in Stockholm, is that women are choosing to either remain single or in a partnership that does not necessarily involve the institution of marriage. As one Swedish woman with two children and a long-term partner remarked when asked why she did not choose to be married, “Why should I? I get the

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<sup>25</sup> 62% of Parisian men surveyed wanted to choose and 38% preferred to be chosen.

<sup>26</sup> 33% of Parisian females surveyed wanted to choose and 56% preferred to be chosen

exact same benefits without being married.” This sort of ambivalence about marriage correlates with Jackson’s ideology about what marriage represents. Jackson says that participating in marriage, a key institution of heterosexuality, is to accept the underpinnings of male dominance and submit to the system of social relations where men are dominant and women submissive (1987: 77). While this might not be the case in all marriages, by rejecting the need to participate in the institution of marriage, Stockholm women show that there might be some correlation between declining marriage rates in their country, and gender equality.

Secondly, in addressing gender equality, the perspective is usually taken from the side of Stockholm women. However, it is not possible to address the subject without considering the men’s perspective as well. Judging from responses, men in Stockholm had favorable views about gender equality, however they repeatedly asserted that they were confused about their identities. “Women want careers, maybe a kid in the mid 30’s, what’s left for us men? Men are having plastic surgery, etc to keep up. There is a big confusion of identity amongst men”. Another Stockholm interviewee commented:

“The last decade has changed with women becoming more independent. It puts more pressure on men. We have to be interesting in other areas besides just providing food and money. We have to be interesting and work harder on beauty. This is more obvious from the adverts, probably because women demand it. In an economic way, a woman’s beauty was traded for economic security, now they are more independent and don’t have to find a man. They have other values besides trying to have a family. Because it’s not as urgent as before, it means they can be pickier about it. This puts more pressure on the man. In my father’s generation, being a ‘good man’ was enough, now we have to know about wine and art, be good dressers, etc. It’s recognised how much it’s changed for women in the last decade, but often not how much it’s changed for men. There’s no previous experience which dictates as to how men should be concerning these new issues.”

The process of trying to carve out a new 'identity' yet not knowing what was expected of them in the current decade, was a common reaction expressed by the men interviewed.

Stockholm men and women seemed to realise that creating a new identity also inspires questions about what is considered 'appropriate' behavior in a gender equity society. One Stockholm man said, "It makes it difficult for men to flirt with women. I sometimes pay too much attention to this equality thing. I think perhaps girls *do* like to be treated as girls, and like compliments and small romantic gestures in a flirting situation". A woman from Stockholm agreed that men are still trying to find their way when she said, "We have a lot of strong women, and boys haven't figured out how to approach in the right way, which is to be a man and at the same time be a gentleman." Both Stockholm men and women agree that the culture is still trying to find equilibrium: Swedish men and women are trying to find the balance between equality and appreciation.

Generally speaking, when examining differences in outlook between women in Stockholm and Paris, it seems that Parisian women base their perspective on what best-suited the men,<sup>27</sup> whereas Stockholm women followed what best served their interest. As one Parisian woman said, "A friend of mine was dating a Scandinavian girl and she was a nightmare! He wasn't even allowed to look at another girl. If I have a boyfriend, I don't get jealous if he is looking at other girls because I am secure." In contrast, judging from the research, a Stockholm woman would have different expectations from her partner.<sup>28</sup> It would most likely be the case of a Stockholm man abiding by his partner's expectations, if not sharing the same expectations. Indeed, if there are differences in cultural perspectives, what was their origin? Did previously examined cultural influences such as

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<sup>27</sup> As addressed earlier in relation to casual sex, being careful not to lead him on, in public-realm socialising, not fostering strong bonds with other women.

<sup>28</sup> As might other French women.

economics, politics, history, religion and sociality, help provide Stockholm women with the power of choice? Furthermore, were Stockholm men open to change, or forced into it due to lack of choice?

### **Flirting for the future**

Upon examination of the ways people flirt in different cultures and linking this with gender equality, the question inevitably arises if equality takes the fun out of flirting. Does having gender equality mean that flirting will become 'boring', as one Stockholm woman pointed out? With regard to men's behaviour towards women, can chivalry *and* equality exist simultaneously? If one woman expects the door to be held open for her and the other deems it an offence, it is no surprise that men are confused. Are women's split attitudes holding back such change?

In studying the two flirting cultures of Stockholm and Paris, initial theories on equality have served to inspire further questions. While all questions are not yet answered, in reviewing research findings, a few points cannot be overlooked. Firstly, a woman's strong economic positioning seems to make her less likely to choose a partner. Secondly, in egalitarian cultures, not only do women and men share similar viewpoints, but also such a society is not based around what best suits men; a point that may seem obvious, but perhaps not to Parisian women who do not seem to realise that their attitudes/perspectives are so male-oriented. Finally, it is quite possible that other cultures may gradually attain greater gender equity, and could do so by following Stockholm inhabitants by not confining to stringent gender roles.

In conclusion, a culture's ideology towards gender equality was revealed in their attitudes towards flirting. Furthermore, as previously posited, results from the research indicate that those cultures which place a greater awareness on social construction over biology and believe both men

and women are equally able to possess masculine and feminine characteristics have achieved greater equality between women and men.