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## **THE PROCESS OF COMMUNICATION BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN**

An essay carried out from  
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According to Simone de Beauvoir in Le deuxième Sexe, "Pour être un individu complet, l'égal de l'homme, il faut que la femme ait accès au monde masculin comme le mâle au monde féminin, qu'elle ait accès à l'autre" (1). To become a complete individual, women need to have access to the masculine world, but men also need to have access to the feminine one. And to understand themselves, or to discover the sphere of the other, men and women need to communicate, to let them enter their respective universes, to share what they need, what they want, what they think, and how they perceive the world. If communication does not exist, this verbal and non-verbal exchange would not allow people to get to know each other, and men and women would be even more deeply locked up in their own gender.

As a result, communication might be the clue of the relationship between men and women, and could be the main point that allows them to move towards a better gender equality. That is why this study will tend towards determining the importance of communication between men and women and the differences in the way they use and consider communication, mainly in France and between women and men of middle-class from thirty-five to fifty-five years old. Does communication contributes to a better harmony between the genders, or, on the contrary, does it make their differences deeper?

## **The importance of communication between men and women**

In France, the problem of communication between men and women has been studied by many sociologists. They try to find the clues to explain the basis of their relationship.

Indeed, the sociologist Daniel Welzer-Lang considers that there is a double language that is asymmetrical. And that is the result of the different socialization of men and women, so that we can distinguish a "double perception du social, sur l'asymétrie que crée la sexuation des genres" (2): society can be seen from two different points of view, because men and women are different in their behaviour.

Other authors highlight the misunderstandings that can appear between a woman and a man, because of their different way to communicate. The woman talks more than the man, she expresses her feelings and he exposes facts, she needs to be listened and he needs advices (3). Men and women do not have the same needs, because they were not educated in the same way. And their different communication is a consequence of their different socialization. The two genres do not react the same, and they even do not understand the same thing when they are talking together: it is as if they were hearing different sentences. For a man, a silence will be a refusal, and for a woman a silence would be a sign that she has not been heard. (4) Communication is one clue that could explain the differences between men and women.

## **The differences between men and women in the way they use and understand communication**

**Men and women communicate in a different way because their socialization process is different, and because society has different expectations on men and on women.**

The socialization process is the way by which children and adults learn from others. We begin learning from others during the early days of life; and most people continue their social learning through their whole life. There are many different factors of socialization, such as school, family, friends, work and every organization that gathers people.

As children, men and women are influenced by many thoughts, human creations and behaviors. And that is during their childhood that they construct themselves, and all what they receive become very important for their future behavior and ways of thinking: "Children actively attempt to define gender by using the occurrences they witness everyday" (5). Each child is raised in a different way, because they do not have the same family and the same social backgrounds.

At school and through the media for instance, they have a different socialization. It appears that boys and girls receive different messages from society. In fact, girls are meant to play with dolls, little kitchens and are dressed with pink clothes, and boys play with cars, video games, and are dressed in blue. Parents prefer certain activities for their daughters, such as dance or drawing lessons, and other ones for their sons, such as football or tennis. As soon as parents know the gender of their child, they have a different way of addressing him/her. Therefore, parents do not raise their children in a certain way because of their gender, but they "are motivated to raise

children who are well liked and socially acceptable, and socializing their children to conform to display rules" (6); it is not the gender of the child that is the most important, but the expectations of the society of its gender.

Moreover, even if at school the socialization seems to be quite equal since they are mainly coeducational, there are still differences remaining between the process of socialization of boys and girls, because the ideas conveyed by the education are established by the society, and are full of prejudices. In the books the children use to learn to read, the women will have a traditional woman role. And the school will convey to boys values such as power relations, division of labour or feeling rules (7) that they won't convey to girls in the same way.

Finally, the media also convey different expectations on men and women; for instance, a current commercial show a little girl and a little boy, in front of a brand new car. They are both fascinated by it, and the girl turns toward the little boy, telling him that later, he will be able to afford this beautiful car ; this advert explicitly depicts the fact that the man is the one to earn money and to buy things, the girl would not dare to imagine herself buying the car.

As a result, the process of socialization is a factor that shows the expectations of the society towards men and women, and the ideas that it conveys during the childhood of each individual determine its own future expectations of him, and of the others.

**Women's communication is more based on expression, and men's communication relies more on their actions.**

Three French films have been analyzed to demonstrate this other factor of difference between the masculine and the feminine communication.

### **Un homme et une femme, by Claude Lelouch, 1966.**

**Plot** - This film depicts the love story of a man (Jean-Louis) and a woman (Anne) from its very beginning, so that every step of their relationship is being filmed and developed.

**Scene 1** - Jean-Louis is in the South of France in a car race in which he is participating, and Anne is in Deauville (Normandy). At that moment, they are only friends, but they are quite close. Anne takes the decision to call him; but he's not answering, and she lets a vocal message for him, saying "Congratulations. I love you. Anne". As soon as he get the message, Jean-Louis leaves the race, takes his car and drive fast to Deauville, to rejoin Anne.

**Analysis** - This scene clearly shows that the woman expresses her feelings by saying them; in this film she simply says that she loves him, but she is the first to say it. As a response, Jean-Louis takes his car and drive fast: he does not send a message to answer her back, neither does he call back. He uses action to demonstrate that he also loves her.

**Scene 2** - Anne and Jean-Louis has just spent the night together; but Anne realizes that she cannot get involved in a new relationship, as she is still in love with her dead husband. She tells Jean-Louis, and announces that she has to go back to Paris. Jean-Louis does not say anything, although sadness can be read on both faces.

Anne takes the train to Paris. But Jean-Louis decides to meet her at the arrival of the train in Paris, and he takes his car and drive as fast as possible to arrive before the train. At the end, they meet at the station, and they seem happy.

Analysis – Once again, that's Anne who expresses her feelings, and who takes verbally the decisions; but Jean-Louis does not try to keep her when she is still with him. He demonstrates his love by getting her at the train stop.

### **"8 femmes" by François Ozon, 2001.**

**Plot** - This film relates the story of a family, composed by the father, the mother, the two daughters, the grand-mother, the sister of the father, the sister of the mother, and two servants. It takes place only in the big parent's house. The plot relies on the murder of the father, and the fact that the eight women are locked up in the house: the murderer is one of them. The father only appears in one scene, the last one, and never speaks. All along the film, every woman reveals dark secrets, and each woman is being suspected: they all finally express their true feelings about the others and their life, and at the end it seems that we know everything about them. But in the final scene, it appears that the father was not murdered: it was a trick planned by his younger daughter, who believed that if everyone thought that the father was dead, they would all reveal their true personality. And it worked. Therefore, the father cannot stand all those dark secrets, and kills himself.

Analysis – It is clear that every woman expresses all what she thinks, and all what they have experienced. But the father does not say a word, even at the end when he could have expressed all his anger and his disgust for what the women have done: his

way to express that is to kill himself, without a word. He communicates through action.

**"Contre toi", by Lola Doillon, 2011.**

**Plot** – A young man has lost his wife: she died during her delivery and their child too. He is so devastated that he needs to blame someone, and he decides to kidnap the obstetrician who was operating her wife during the delivery. The doctor, a woman, ends up in a cellar, and the young man often comes to visit her, to give her some food and sometimes to beat her. She tries to understand why she has been kidnapped, because she does not remember him, and that makes him even more violent. Every time he comes to see her, she tries to talk to him softly, to make him know that she did not kill his wife.

**Analysis** – The first part of the film is centered on this special relationship they have, the woman trying to convince by what she says, the man trying to threaten thanks to violence. And that illustrates once again the hypothesis: the man communicates through action, and the woman through expression.

As a result, each film perfectly support the variables "Women communicate through expression" and "Men communicate through action".



**It is important for women to know what men think of them; it is important for men to know what other men think of them, but not what women think of them.**

Each people interviewed were being asked what they thought about the impact and the importance of the opinion of both men and women have towards them.

#### **· Women's concerns**

In a first part, it appears first that the first variable of the hypothesis could be understood in that way: "women care about what both men and women think about them". But we have to distinguish two environments: the home environment and the professional environment. In fact, regarding those two kind of environment, women do not care about other people's opinion in the same way.

#### *In the professional environment*

In general, in the professional environment, women do not care about the sex of the person they are exchanging with. The sex is not the determinant factor for them: women use other factors to determine if the opinion of the other is important to them or not. They will look at the personality of the other, at his/her hierarchical position or at his/her skills. Every woman interviewed found other factors, different from the sex factor, to justify the importance an opinion has for them. However, women do not completely forget the sex of the person, because if a person is a man, they will tend to use their charms on them to get on well with them and to obtain more easily what

they want. On the contrary, at work, women feel on the same level as other women, and they will fight and work with those other women using their own skills; they feel more like being equal.

### *In the home environment*

If in the professional environment women do not seem to attach a different importance to men and women's opinion, the result is more ambivalent in the home environment. In fact, within the family, the opinion of the father has a huge importance. To grow, women feel like they need the look of men. During their childhood, there was a model to follow that was presented to them: the model of the man. So that even if those women grew up as women (and they know that they have a feminine personality), they felt that they should get closer to this ideal model: the masculine family circle was very influential. Thus, women also care about women's opinion in their home environment, as they feel embarrassed by the look of some women who are judging them. Finally, within their relationships with their sisters and brothers, women do not take in account their sex, but more the degree of intimacy and the strength of the relationship they have with each other.

As a result, women are concerned by both opinions, men and women's one, but with some slight differences : the professional environment is more a field of equity, differentiating people from their skills, while the home environment is more a space overwhelmed by the patriarchal figure.

### • **Men's concerns**

In a second part, the second variable of the hypothesis is related to the kind of care men have. The two environments separated for the study of women's concerns will not be separated for men, because they did not clearly separate those two fields during their interviews. First of all, the interesting thing about men concerns is that in the first moments of the interviews, they all straight said that there were no differences between men and women to them. But when they justified their sayings, many factors showed that their relationships are different according to the gender of the other person. In general, men look at other men with suspicion. If the man is in a higher position than himself in the hierarchy, the man will fear the judgment of the other man, more than the one of a woman. In fact, the women has more a role of confident, and in the professional and familiar environment, men will trust more women. Therefore, distinctions are depicted between the men themselves: an important white man's opinion will be more efficient than the opinion of another man. A man interviewed even said that he would "trust more an Arabic woman than an Arabic man". Because the Arabic man appears as aggressive, and imposing: people fear him. And the Arabic woman is still Arabic, but she is a woman, so that she will be weaker and attentive.

Meanwhile, men do not only refer to the gender of the person to take in account or not his/her opinion. They also care about the age and the living experience of the person. The form (in its general sense - professional coherence, physical health...) is another factor that affects the way a man receives the opinion of the other. As an example, a man said that a little fat woman will have less power and authority, but at the same time a little fat man will not lose his authority, he will just be a funny

character. The gender of the person connected to other factors produce a different impact on men.

To conclude, we can say that men are especially aware of the judgment of the other men, but it depends on the characteristics and position of each man; every man's opinion does not have the same influence. Yet, it is less easy to find a general principle to explain what men think of women. It might depend on the social background of the men and their professional activity; a wider study should be made to raise more conclusions about this aspect of the hypothesis.

## Conclusions

The many differences that are being seen in men and women are deeply rooted in the society, which perpetuates them through the strictness of the process of socialization. And as they are raised in a different way, men and women cannot comprehend the world in the same way.

Moreover, men and women do not act in the same way: they communicate differently. Men communicate through actions, and women through expression. Hence, they both should make an effort to understand the other, and this fact does their communication quite hard.

And, as M. Benda said, in *Le Rapport d'Uriel*, "le corps de l'homme a un sens par lui-même, abstraction faite de celui de la femme, alors que ce dernier alors que ce dernier en semble dénué si l'on évoque pas le mâle... L'homme se pense sans la femme. Elle ne se pense pas sans l'homme" (8); that is to say that the man can think

about himself and his gender without thinking about women, but on the contrary, woman cannot think about their own gender without referring themselves to the masculine gender. This idea depicts the conclusions brought by the study of the last hypothesis: men do not need the look of women, but women need the look of men.

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