

Thesis

Dismantling evolutionary psychology and the presumed 'natural' differences between men and women



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MA Comparative Womens 's studies in
Culture and Politics

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Foreword

Dear reader,

Hereby, I would like to present to you my thesis 'Dismantling evolutionary psychology and the 'natural' differences between men and women' for the Master Comparative Women's Studies in Culture and Politics. I would like to thank several people before delving into the content of my article. First of all my parents Corrie and Ton Derksen and my boyfriend Dave Schmeitz should be given big thanks in keeping me motivated at times when I lost faith in my writing, or when there seemed to be no end in sight. They have been there for me when I needed them and this I appreciate greatly. Of course my sisters Irene and Marlou and my friends should also be thanked in giving me good advice and motivating me.

Also, my supervisor Sanne Koevoets deserves a thanks since she gave me good feedback on how to improve my thesis. This was very helpful. She was also able to help me through the last bits of finishing my thesis in time. Further, I would like to thank Asha ten Broeke, Rosalind Barnett and Caryl Rivers in giving me multiple good insights and revelations when reading their books. They have been a huge influence for this thesis. Last but not least, I owe a thanks to the respondents of my questionnaires. Their opinions gave me a great outlook in the multiple points of view and debates that exist on the issue.

At times, it was pretty difficult writing this article. At several occasions I had so much to write that I was adding unnecessary information and was losing sight of what was important regarding my subject. At other times, I had no inspiration and was finding it very hard to find the 'courage' needed to keep on writing.

Luckily I was able to finish my thesis and am proud to be able to present it! I hope reading it will be a pleasant experience.

Kind regards,

Myrthe Derksen

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Introduction

Women are not the weak, frail little flowers that they are advertised. There has never been anything invented yet, including war, that a man would enter into, that a woman wouldn't, too. ~Will Rogers

Why is it that men can be bastards and women must wear pearls and smile? ~Lynn Hecht Schafren

Men weren't really the enemy - they were fellow victims suffering from an outmoded masculine mystique that made them feel unnecessarily inadequate when there were no bears to kill. ~Betty Friedan

The problem is not what we don't know. It's what we know for sure that just ain't so.

~Al Gore o.a.

(Ten Broeke, 2010, p.30).

About a year ago the PVDA (a Dutch Political Party) was looking for a new party leader. Five people were nominated for this position and one of these people was the Turkish-Dutch Nebahat Albayrak. The day after she announced her decision, a letter appeared in the Metro saying that she shouldn't run for party leader since she has a small child and should spend time with her infant. It was stated that it is beneficial for the child if the mother spends most of her time with him/her. A ('good') mother should have tea and cookies ready when her child comes home from school (this was literally mentioned in the letter). What was interesting in this case is that Ms Albayrak was the only one facing criticism for running for party leader. None of these sorts of letters were written about the male candidates. Diederik Samsom also has two children but he was not held responsible for them. Isn't it important that he also spends time with his children? Why isn't it taken into consideration that the husband of Ms Albayrak could take care of their child? Why is it that there are still double standards on men and women and their roles in the private and the public sphere?

The question is never asked why Ms Albayrak is seen as responsible for the children. Is she perhaps better at taking care of a child? Is she more connected to the child than her husband? Is caring more natural for her than for her husband/men? These above questions

are often mentioned as reasons why women are more suited for being (the primary) parent. This thesis will deal with these kinds of questions and will prove that they are not necessarily true. Our culture and environment has a lot to do with how men and women behave.

Since over about two thousand years, men and women have been associated and attributed with certain qualities they should possess both on a symbolic and normative level. Men are (or are supposed to be) adventurous, self-confident, independent and courageous, they are (supposed to be) good technicians, and they are (or supposed to be) interested in sports. Women are (supposed to be) sensitive, soft, emotional and social, love flowers and children and are (supposed to be) good nurses (Seron, 2005). From when a child is born, people treat her/him differently whether it is a boy or a girl. Some parents decorate their baby-rooms entirely in pink or blue and purchase typical boy- or girl toys for their child (a sword for a boy and a princess gown for a girl). Later in life, a girl is asked to help her mother in the kitchen, while the boy plays sports with his father. A girl receives compliments for her good looks while a boy receives compliments for his bravery and actions (Seron, 2005).

When equality between the sexes is discussed, these stereotypical ideas and double standards are often not talked about. A lot of qualities are seen to be natural to men and women and thus do not need to be addressed. In this thesis I want to show that typically masculine or feminine qualities have different origins than is commonly believed. 'Natural' female or male behavior is mostly seen to derive from hunter-gatherers who have influenced us in our actions. We are still fitted with a hunter-gatherer brain and therefore women can't park cars and men can't multi-task. This traditional idea has fundamental flaws and has a lack of theoretical foundation. It should be dealt with if we ever want more equality between men and women. If we continue to teach women that they should be caring, thoughtful, nice and generous, we are holding them back and are locking them in a certain stereotype. The same applies to men and the masculine qualities it is believed they should possess.

In this essay I will go deeper into the double standards and expectations that exist for men and women in our Western culture. Overall, the focus will be on evolutionary psychology and their claim that the differences between men and women are natural. This thesis will be divided into different sections: first, it will be investigated how our society

deals with gender and what kind of stereotypes exist. Secondly, the theories of evolutionary psychologists will be analyzed. Where do they base their ideas on? Subsequently, it will be shown why their theories and their methods are flawed. Evidence will be given which proves there are many exceptions to their rule. After that, I will go deeper into the influence that these ideas have on men and women in the Dutch society and will demonstrate where our differences do come from if they are not in our genes. Then, several questionnaires will be exhibited which talk about gender differences. In the end, a conclusion will be drawn from all this.

Main Text The Pressure to be Normal

Dominant gender roles are played out in several areas of our society. They can be found at the societal level, at the individual and at the symbolic level, each of these will be discussed in the following section. First, the focus will be on the societal level. How are we influenced by gender norms on a structural and institutional level? Who is 'society' that tells us what to do? Antony Giddens (1984) has tried to find an answer to these questions. He believes that structuration bridges the divide between the micro and macro level of society. According to him, individuals and the society are in a reciprocal connection with each other. Social life is more than just random individual acts, and is also not merely determined by social forces. Human agency and the social structure are in a relationship. Since individuals repeat their acts the social structure is reproduced (Giddens, 1984). The social structure exists, but it can change when people collectively decide to ignore a rule or tradition. When no one objects to it, it will keep on existing: "Society only has form, and that form only has effects on people, in so far as structure is produced and reproduced in what people do" (Giddens & Pierson, 1998, p. 77).

Everyone has a clear view in their heads what social rules to follow and what is considered 'normal behavior'. There is a certain consensus on how men and women should behave. This is not only constricting, since people also have an emotional investment in these rules. They want the world to embody their expectations, and they do not want to run into any surprises. Even though this is limiting, it also opens up a space for us (Giddens, 1984). We know how to treat and raise our child and how to make sure he becomes a 'real man' or a 'real lady'. If we all agree on the fact that women are caring and men are competitive, this unwritten rule will keep existing.



According to Connell (2005), our Western culture generally assumes that there is a fixed, true masculinity. We hear of 'real men' or 'real masculinity' and certain men are revered because they are masculine or others are put down since they are too girly or a

wimp. True masculinity is seen to proceed from men's bodies or is seen as being inherent in a man's body. But this 'natural masculinity' as Connell says is almost entirely fictional. It supposes that there are large differences between men and women and supposes that these differences are biological. The natural masculinity thesis believes that there is a strong determination for biological differences. Yet there has never been any proof for this strong determination (Connell, 2005, p.47).

In our times, there is one form of masculinity that is culturally exalted above other types of masculinity. This is called 'hegemonic masculinity', from Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony who devised it for his analysis of class relations. Hegemony is the cultural dynamic that a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life. In Gramsci's times the highest classes were in a position of hegemony and could decide what rules and behavior were accepted in society. Applied to masculinity, certain men can decide what is accepted as masculine behavior and how a 'real' man should act. Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and women" (Connell, 2005, p.77). This hegemonic masculinity can be seen as a successful claim to authority. This does not mean that the people who possess this hegemonic masculinity are always persons in power. They may also be film actors or fantasy figures, think of Batman or Brad Pitt. It is believed that if you possess this hegemonic masculinity you will face social approval and you will be seen as a 'real man'. This hegemonic masculinity will not remain the same. Hegemonic masculinity is a 'currently accepted strategy'. When the defense of patriarchy faces different conditions, the bases for the dominance of a particular masculinity are eroded (Connell, 2005).

On an individual level, children are at a very young age influenced by unwritten rules. They will learn (unconsciously) what is normal behavior and what is not. From the moment a child is born, parents use differentiated approach when it comes to their offspring. They will buy certain clothes for their girl or boy; they will plan certain activities for their son or daughter etc. Within 24 hours after a child is born parents act different according to whether it is a boy or a girl (Seron, 2005). Since this differentiated approach starts so early it will have a large effect on the lives of the children. Differences will seem natural to the child while these can also be explained by different psychological mechanisms (Seron, 2005).

Two kinds of pressure can be exerted on the infant: normative pressure and information pressure. Normative pressure expresses itself when you remove yourself from the standard and do not behave according to expectations. If you do not adjust you will be punished, otherwise you will be rewarded. A girl is encouraged to put on a lovely dress that she has to keep clean and is asked to help her mom in the kitchen, while the boy is encouraged to play outside, jump and throw and is dressed in appropriate attire to do so. This process is called *differentiated reinforcement* (Seron, 2005). The reward is social approval. Children want to be seen and so they want to be like us. We then act like our behavior is natural, which the children will start believing (ibid, 2005). When you act too feminine as a boy, or when you are gay, you will be bullied and you will face disapproval from several angles. You are punished for not displaying 'normal' behavior. A child will then realize that he does not comply with the norm. He will possibly change its behavior or will be so brave to continue to be himself. Unconsciously children will remember what gender-appropriate behavior is. After a certain age, girls will face more disapproval if they act too masculine or if their clothes are not feminine enough.

Information pressure works differently. When the infant is three, it will have realized that it belongs to a certain gender and that several things are attached to this gender. In kindergarten children are able to classify a lot of objects, toys and behaviors as either masculine or feminine. When the children realise at about the age of 7 that their gender remains constant, they will observe their environment to learn what to do. They then model the behaviour of their own gender and take on the same preferences. When girls see their mom do the dishes they would want to model this and the same goes for boys who see their father mowing the lawn. This is called *differentiated modelling* (ibid, 2005). Even though parents (try to) raise their child gender-neutral, the child still observes the environment where other rules apply when it comes to their gender. The child will be influenced by its environment, as soon as it sets foot outside the door. Multiple influences play a role in the socialisation of a child. If they watch television or read books they will learn about the differences between the sexes (ibid, 2005).

Currently, gender on a symbolic level will be described. Simone de Beauvoir (1972) and her very influential book '*The Second Sex*' deals with gender on this level. In the past, standards to be accepted as a 'real' man or woman were very strict, especially for women.

Women were supposed to stay within the boundaries of the private sphere and were to find their fulfillment either in children or in providing for others. Men were able to enter the public sphere since they were believed to be competitive, rational and ambitious. Women were seen as weak, caring and irrational. They were as Simone de Beauvoir (1972) calls it, 'the second sex'. Men represented the positive and the neutral, as we can see in use of the word 'mankind', while women were the negative, defined by limiting criteria. Women were seen as being defined by their ovaries and their uterus: these imprisoned women in their body so that they couldn't think rational. The man is the absolute human type, who is able to look at things objectively. The fact that he also has glands is simply ignored. His body is in a normal and direct connection with the world. Or as Aristotle put it: 'The female is a female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities; we should regard the female nature as afflicted with a natural defectiveness.' The woman is not regarded as an autonomous being but only exists as relative to him. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other.

Since de Beauvoir has written her book many things have changed. De Beauvoir has been criticized for being too centered on the West and for her hetero-normativity. She was seen as being too limited in her analysis. Yet there is a truth in her words. In the past and even nowadays, women were/are treated as the second sex while men were/are seen as the norm. Even scientists saw women as the weaker sex, who let their emotions take over their lives. Women would never be able to do the jobs men were able to do, since they could not be objective and were too emotional.

Even today differences in character and behavior are seen as natural and as originating from the body. The Netherlands Institute for Social Research has the following statistics (which will be discussed later on in the thesis): one third of Dutch women and one half of Dutch men thinks that women are more suited for taking care of children than men. Four out of ten Dutch people think that children suffer if their mom works full-time (ten Broeke, 2010).

There are many things that are seen as being typically gender related. Besides our reproductive differences there are also differences in strength, in sexual interest, physical skills (men, mechanical, women, fiddly work), recreational interests (men; sports, women, gossip), character, intellectual abilities (men, scientific genius; women, intuition), and so on

which are different for men and women (Connell in Ferree, 2000, p.450). There is an influential biological determinism discourse that deals with these great differences and portrays these differences as natural and ever present. This 'gender truth' reaches us in many forms: through the scientific and media discourse for example. In the following part I will first focus on how these discourses work together to create their 'gender truth'. Books are written about the subject which are often backed up by 'scientific' evidence. Ideas from these books are then used in theater plays, TV programs and movies that show us how different we really are and how communication issues arise between men and women. In the next part I discuss Ten Broeke (2010) and Barnett and Rivers (2004) who show that evolutionary theories and the books written about this subject are inaccurate. Together (both the books) discuss and tackle a lot of new and flawed research done on the subject, which is why they deserve a substantive part in my thesis. They both thoroughly criticize and analyze the evolutionary psychologists.

We are all Hunter-Gatherers

Asha ten Broeke (2010) examines in her book *'the idea M/V'* (Het idee M/V) the origins of the differences between men and women. In line with Hedgwick, Haraway and other feminist criticism on science she criticizes 'objective', rational research on gender differences and shows that the employed scientific method is flawed. She sees two camps when it comes to the origins of men-women differences. On one side are the feminists who believe that our differences are cultural and that our upbringing is responsible for teaching us these differences. The other camp includes the more evolutionally inclined scientists who believe that our genes and hormones decide how we act as men and women. Our ancestors, the hunter-gatherers have been a huge influence on our hormones and genes nowadays. Challenges in the environments of our predecessors who lived hundreds thousands of years ago determined our behavior. Hunter-gatherers evolved into humans who were fully adapted to a world where the men hunt and the women collect food and take care of others (Ten Broeke, 2010). Since for a short time we do not live like this (evolutionally speaking), our genes and brains haven't been able to adapt to modern life. And because the men now have a 'hunter-brain' and the women have a 'gatherer-brain' we are all affected in our daily lives. According to evolutionary psychologists, this is why men can't take care of babies and this is why women aren't aggressive on the work floor. The female has such a 'tender and caring brain' that she can't be competitive (ten Broeke, 2010 , p.13).

Rosalind Barnett and Caryl Rivers (2004) have also written a book *'Same Difference'* (Bij Gelijke Geschiktheid) on the supposed biological differences between men and women. Their reason to write this book was a group of men and women who were not comfortable with their new, more equal roles around the house. Prior to writing the book they researched the consequences of the entry of women in the labor force. Many worries about this were unfounded: people prospered in the new family structure. Most children of working moms showed no signs of attachment problems or cognitive flaws. Numerous researches showed that there were no great differences between children of working moms or stay-at-home moms (Barnett and Rivers, 2004).

But this was not the end of the story. In their research one particular group underwent great marital problems and suffered a lot of stress at home and at work because

of their new roles. What was characteristic for this group was that their convictions and attitudes were at daggers drawn with the life they were leading. People in this group did not believe that men and women were equally capable to fulfill different roles. They saw women as more suited for a homely atmosphere since they simply enjoyed it more and men as not suited for this atmosphere since they are naturally more aggressive and less caring. Barnett and Rivers thought these ideas would fade over time, but this was not the case. They saw more and more people getting stressed and tense because their lives did not match with their traditional views on role patterns. Meanwhile, books like Steven Pinker's *The blank slate* and John Gray's *Men are from Mars, Women from Venus* were becoming huge bestsellers. Traditional ideas which they thought had died out, were making their way back. In a subtle way, these books could influence individual choices when it comes to tasks around the house (Barnett and Rivers, 2004).

The topic of the books by Pinker and Gray were the ideas of the evolutionary psychologists or as Barnett and Rivers call them 'ultradarwinists'. Evolutionary psychologists base their ideas on Darwinistic theories, saying that the basic drive of humankind is to pass on our genes to future generations. Because men and women in the past faced several procreation problems, their bodies and minds formed according to the different characteristic ways they developed to deal with these problems: their reproduction strategies. Pregnant women prefer a partner that is a good breadwinner, a strong and aggressive male and a good hunter. Men increase their procreation success if they fertilize as many women as possible (Barnett and Rivers, 2004).

Our behavior is influenced by our ancestors in multiple ways. The 6 most common types of behavior that men and women exhibit according to ultradarwinists are these:

1. Women are naturally shy, tempting, modest and monogamous. Carol Brady from the Brady Bunch is a good example of this. Madonna and Elizabeth Taylor are aberrations and are not real women.
2. Men are naturally aggressive when chasing women. Because of natural selection, they believe they have to spread their seed.
3. Women are less ambitious than men. They do not want or cannot compete with men for high-paying jobs. Because of this they cannot expect an equal division of genders in the top

of the labor market as well as equal rewards.

4. Women want successful men, and older men are generally more successful than younger men. That is why women prefer someone like Dennis Franz (Andy Sipowicz from NYPD Blue) over a young and unsuccessful Brad Pitt.

5. Men are attracted to very young, fertile women.

6. Men have no interest in investing in fatherhood. Long monogamous relationships and fatherhood are not natural for men. Their true destiny is to produce a child and go away, in search of other females (Barnett and Rivers, 2004, p.61).

These ideas have been copied by a lot of people who want to explain gender differences. In this way the question why there are no women in high-paid positions is easily answered: Our 'fore mothers' were not ambitious and thus women nowadays are also not ambitious. Evolutionary psychologists (and the people who use their ideas) portray their ideas as being facts, even though there hasn't been real proof for it. According to Barnett and Rivers, there is no certainty that all these conclusions form a legitimate science. Harvard scientist Stephen Jay Gould asks:

"How could we ever know what small groups of hunter-gathers were doing two millions years ago in Africa? How these people lived and what their culture was like cannot be told from fossils. Our forefathers have left some tools and bones, and palaeontologists can deduct several facts from this. But where can we find the key that is needed to show the validity of our assumptions: to get insight into their family structures, social structures and group size etc. We don't even know the environment of our fore fathers – did they stay in a certain region or did they travel?" (Gould in Barnett and Rivers, 2004, p.63).

With the lack of reliable facts from our predecessors, evolutionary psychologists have decided to portray them as an American family from the '50s: dominant males and passive, home-bound females. With this they have caught a lot of attention and have ignored new research that showed otherwise (Barnett and Rivers, 2004). It was no coincidence that traditional theories came up that defined men and women according to stereotypes when women became successful and were entering the labor market in large numbers (idem, 2004).

Flaws in evolutionary research

Evolutionary psychologists are not using scientific methods to validate their theories. Karl Poppers idea of falsificationism should lead scientific research. Saying that all swans are white because you have only seen white swans is not enough evidence to claim that all swans are white. Science is only of use if you can show that a certain idea is not valid, you have to search for the black swan. Yet evolutionary psychology does not use any falsificationism in their research. They research the same sex differences time after time. And when a black swan does show up, it is probably ignored. Exceptions should be enough evidence that a hypothesis is not correct, yet these exceptions are not taken into consideration (Ten Broeke, 2010).

Research regarding spatial awareness can serve as an example. In the course of decades researchers have published papers that show that there are large sex differences when it comes to spatial awareness. The test for spatial awareness is to let men and women rotate a three-dimensional cube in their head. Men were significantly better at this test than women. But consider the research of Gerianne M. Alexander and Milagros Evardone: they too wanted to know more about the spatial awareness of men and women. They asked their research subjects to rotate a 3-d object in their head, but this time the cube was replaced by a little puppet. Their results were astounding: women exhibited the same results as men. Alexander and Evardone had found a black swan: their research made clear that men are not necessarily better in spatial awareness. The type of test simply determined if differences between the sexes were found. But the black swan did not have the impact that was expected. Scientists asserted that most swans were white, and that was the end of it. New research should be carried out on the subject, but this has not happened.

Evolutionary psychologists are not critical enough of their research and science in general and could employ some insights from feminist criticism on science. Feminists try to acknowledge their standpoint and their background when doing research. According to Sandra Harding (1991), not just opinions, but also a culture's best beliefs – what it calls knowledge – are socially situated. Feminist standpoint epistemology deals with the idea of not starting research from a researchers('neutral') point of view but from women's point of

view. Sandra Harding is one of the leading women of feminist standpoint epistemology and has made important claims on the nature of science and its conceptual frameworks. Standpoint epistemology emerged in the 1970s and 1980s and dealt with the relation between the production of knowledge and practices of power. Where formerly it was believed that politics could ruin science since research had to be objective and not be meddled with by politics, standpoint theory challenged this assumption (Harding, 2004). In standard research, science is not supposed to speak from a particular location but its adequacy should reach above historical accounts that were useful at a certain time. Yet feminists observed that the conceptual frameworks were not as value-free and neutral as it was liked to believe. It was the conceptual frameworks themselves that were flawed. Knowledge is always socially situated and therefore the groups who are in power can produce different kinds of knowledge from the subordinated groups (Harding, 2004). Standpoint epistemology was seen to be no different from the standard philosophies of science, epistemologies and methodologies, which obscured their normative features behind a veil of claimed neutrality (Harding, 2004).

Among the standpoint theorists there are differing views of what it exactly entails. What Sandra Harding first correctly states is that women's movements needed knowledge that was for women. They had been the objects of researches for decades, yet there were no conceptual frameworks in which women could become the subjects – the authors – of knowledge (Harding, 2004). For a long time now in science, the implied 'speaker' of scientific words was never woman. It was supposed to speak for the general mankind, or the researcher claims to play a 'god trick' (which it was called by Donna Haraway) where he or she speaks from above everyone else and has no particular location or human perspective (Harding, 2004).

Londa Schiebinger (2000) shows how feminism has changed science. Especially medicine and primatology have been influenced and transformed by feminism. Research in the past would investigate 15.000 men on heart-medicine but no women would be included in the sample. When it comes to research on the body, men normally represented the human norm. Feminism has shown that men are not the norm, but that women and men both have their own standpoint and bodies. The people that were in power (mostly white men) can decide what is knowledge and what is accepted as such. Therefore it has been possible in the past for women to not be seen as important for research, since their minds

and bodies were 'Other' and therefore not important. When excluding certain research (that proves evolutionary psychologists otherwise f.e.) from accepted science groups in power are still excluding women and behavior that does not fit in with the stereotypes.

Emily Martin (1991) researches the possibility of culture shaping the way biological scientists see and discover the world. She has found that pictures of the egg and sperm are heavily influenced by stereotypes central to our cultural definitions of male and female (Martin, 1991). In all biological books, sperm is given more importance than the egg. The male is presented as continuously produces fresh germ cells, while the female has stockpiled germ cells by birth and is faced with their degeneration (p.487). Egg production is because of this presented as inferior since it is finished at birth while sperm production is celebrated since it is continuous from puberty to senescence. It is remarkable how masculine the sperm behaves and how feminine the egg behaves. The egg is seen as large and passive. It does not move or journey, but passively 'is transported' or is 'swept'. Sperm is small and streamlined and invariably active. Even though new images of the sperm and the egg emerge, textbooks just stick to the old imagery, although slightly changed.

The above-mentioned information is an example of what Ludwig Fleck calls the 'self-contained nature' of scientific thought. As he sees it:

"the interaction between what is already known, what remains to be learned, and those who are to apprehend it, go to ensure harmony within the system. But at the same time they also preserve the harmony of illusions, which is quite secure within the confines of a given thought style" (Martin, 1991, p.492).

This is another example of how differences between men and women are portrayed as natural. The differences are already noticeable at the level of the cell (and thus start very early). This imagery keeps alive some very old stereotypes about the damsel in distress and her rescuers. We are projecting cultural imagery on what we study and it is important to study this. In order to present things as the truth, it should be more thoroughly scrutinized and analysed.

Where to find the Hunter-Gatherers

Several things are known about how our ancestors lived and recent research has presented new information about them. This chapter will deal with the information that is known about those living in the prehistory and how this information does not add up to the theories of the evolutionary psychologists. Evidence proves that the first human societies did not live of hunting but of looting and eating bait. In the Pleistocene women were just as actively involved in collecting food as the men. Eagly and Wood from the North-Western University have studied anthropological and biological material that suggests that simple looting communities were more egalitarian than is taken into consideration. No one could afford to wait for food to be brought to them, everyone helped in finding meals for the day since their primary care was to survive. Patriarchal social structures developed later as by-products of social and technological developments. Women in the prehistory held higher status and were more equal to men than in later centuries, when a life of searching for food led to property rights and growing male greed (Barnett and Rivers, 2004).

New findings show that there has been a person largely ignored by scientists: the hunting woman. Her favorite weapon seemed to be the net, which is hard to find compared to the hard weapons that men used. Olga Soffer (from the University of Illinois) revealed on a Paleolithic site in the Czech Republic a set of crossways stripes in a layer of clay, which were presumed to be the remains of fibrous textures of 25.000 years ago. After examining more clay samples, rests of what seemed to be a net were discovered, which is an obvious weapon for hunting with a group. When Soffer's colleagues Hyland and Adovasio researched the imprints in the clay with a microscope, they found sheet bends, a technique that was used to make strong nets for fishery or hunting. According to Soffer, hunting with nets was a group activity in which women and children participated. The net was used to hunt small animals, particularly the ice-age hare, of which many remainders were found. (Barnett and River, 2004). When observing tribes in our times, many of them hunt together in groups and use nets more often than weapons such as a bow and arrow. The Mbuti in Congo rapport for example that they catch fifty percent of the animals for which they set traps, a higher percentage than when hunters aim for large prey with bow and arrow (idem, 2004).

There is also evidence for the fact that prehistory was not the period when patriarchy arose. Farmer communities were supposedly the first example of societies where the man worked and the woman looked after the children.

A couple of things were different in this society compared to the hunter-gatherer society.

Two things changed:

1. The quantity of man- or womanpower that is needed to provide the whole tribe with food diminishes. The farmers can easily provide enough food for five, six or more people.

2. The birth rate starts to rise. A hunter-gatherer women gets a child every four or five years.

The women give their child milk for about four or five years, since they do not have any animals to get milk from. Country woman have children on average every two years. When you have children every two years, you do not have the time to learn a profession. The result was that women stayed inside their house more while men had the time to learn a craft, while on the same time they gained power (Ten Broeke, 2010).

The evidence that evolutionary psychologists use for their theories comes from modern hunter-gatherer societies. They observe tribes for example in Africa or South America and presume that their social structure or behaviour will be about the same as our ancestors. Another option they have is to look at the behaviour of apes since they share the same genes with us for 98 percent. The danger of this method is that the interpretation of the scientist plays an important role. The standpoint of the researcher will influence what he sees/wants to see (just as feminist standpoint epistemology claims). Observing monkeys is another example where 'neutral' researchers are influenced by their culture, background upbringing etc. in what kind of results they find during their research.

In the sixties, the prevailing thought was that male chimpanzees had a kind of harem where one dominant man owned a number of females that were waiting for him to have sex with them. The women also took care of his children. But after extensive research this turned out not to be the case. After comparing the DNA of adult chimpanzees with that of children-chimpanzees, half of the children were not from the Alfa male. When chimpanzee women are fertile, they want to have as much sex as they can with as many males as possible. This does not add up to the image of submissive females who wait for the man to have sex with them. Jane Goodall also witnessed in Tanzania that a male chimpanzee took

care of a little baby chimpanzee when his mother died (Ten Broeke, 2010). Thus chimpanzee males can also be caring and chimpanzee women are not as submissive as is believed.

Then there is also the bonobo community, where the women take initiative if they encounter an unknown tribe of bonobo's. They deal with the food negotiations, the taxes and the peace negotiations. The males also take care of their infant children without ever expecting something back. They can be both tender and macho (Ten Broeke, 2010).

Evolutionary researchers also looked at tribes to find the sources of our human behaviour. They found the African tribe !Kung who live very traditional lives: the men hunt and the women gather. From this they concluded that this was the way our ancestors also must have lived. For decades, this tribe represented all tribes and all our ancestors. In the seventies and eighties, however, researchers looked at other tribes in South-America, Africa and Asia, and found other results. The Hadza tribe in Tanzania was investigated. The men go out and hunt in groups, and the big animals are brought home where they are equally divided. But the women do not stay at home waiting for the men. The hunting of the men is very unpredictable (there is no guarantee that they will bring back meat), and the women have to go out and find food for themselves so that everyone has a proper meal. They find the basic food for the dinner while the men's meat is just extra. They are the breadwinners while the men provide the supplement. Then there is also the Agta tribe from the Philippines, where the women tie their child to their back when they go hunting with a group of women (Ten Broeke, 2010).

What should be the conclusion from this is that female and male monkeys/apes and traditional tribes exhibit all kinds of behaviour and thus our ancestors could also have exhibited all sorts of behaviour. Men can care and hunt and women can care and hunt. There is no proof that the social structure in the prehistory was the way 'we' want it to be. Our culture is more influential in how we see the past than what the proof really tells us. Their standpoint has influenced a lot of researchers in the past who saw exactly what they wanted to see: submissive, gathering females and active, hunting males.

Traditional ideas are still alive

Even though there is enough proof that the hunter-gatherer ideas cannot be legitimated, many people are unfortunately still affected by the underlying ideas. These ideas find an audience because we are already accustomed to the notion that there are deep differences between men and women. Traditional ideas are still influencing people. The Netherlands Institute for Social Research has the following statistics (from 2008): one third of the women and one half of the men thinks that women are more suited to take care of children than men. Four out of ten Dutch people think that children suffer if their mom works full-time. It is accepted that women work, as long as their career does not affect their caring duties and the children. This makes it very difficult for women to have a thriving career and a child. We can see the effect of this in women with a successful career. Almost half of them does not have any children, and for women in the directorate this number rises to almost 80 per cent. Three quarters of these women would have liked to have children. This shows that for mothers with careers there can be a glass ceiling (as Asha ten Broeke mentions). As a mother you are still supposed to be ever-present and are not supposed to have a full-time career. The mother is treated as the primary one responsible for the children. Contrary to the women, most men in the directorate have children. And when it comes to men having a career: almost two-thirds of the men admit to wanting to work less, yet only 1 in 7 works part-time (Ten Broeke, 2010, p.24).

Barnett and Rivers researched families where both the parents were working and found out that the people in those families were happy and content with their situation, not less so than families where the mother was a stay-at-home mom. Yet as I mentioned before, Barnett and Rivers found in their research a large portion of people who were not comfortable with the new division of roles. They are among other things influenced by the traditional ideas that exist about men and women and the fact that this is portrayed as natural. Many books are written about our ancestors the hunter-gatherers. Several books by these 'ultradarwinists' will be investigated in the next section.

Ultradarwinists and their books

David Buss is an evolutionary theorist who wrote a very influential book called *'The Evolution of Desire'*. After having done research he has found that there are certain constants in the way men and women choose mates. He believes that men have a preference for young women and women on the other hand have a preference for older men with ambition. Women want a man who stays faithful, so that they have a breadwinner when they are raising the children. Men want a faithful wife, but can't stay faithful themselves. The mating interests of our early fore fathers (from the Pleistocene) have influenced us in our behavior. His ideas were immediately taken over by the Washington Post, Newsweek and the U.S. News & World Report who all wrote large articles on his conclusions (Barnett and Rivers, 2004). Buss tested five hypotheses among 10.047 people from 37 cultures. Yet, his samples were not always reliable since people were assembled in very different ways, either via the university, via the newspaper or by other assembling methods. Also, the number of respondents varied greatly per country. Yet Buss is letting all his results weigh equally as heavy.

But when taking a closer look at his research other conclusions can be derived. His research showed that both men and women value understanding, intelligence and kindness the most in a partner, more than attractiveness or the ability to garner an income. This outcome was ignored by Buss and other researchers (Barnett and Rivers, 2010). Stephen T. Emlen found out that when choosing a partner the desire for like-minded people was five or six times as strong as the desire for rich and beautiful partners. It was also discovered that when gender equality is increased in a society, women had less preference for older men with more income, and men had less preference for younger women with domestic qualities (idem, p.101). And furthermore, can we claim that how we select our partners nowadays (by free choice f.e.) was also used by our predecessors? Why would we assume what applies to us also applied to them? Our culture and social norms have a lot to do with the desire for young and beautiful women (Barnett and Rivers, 2010).

Gray and his book *'Men are from Mars, Women from Venus'* has also been very influential in the whole gender debate. According to him, women are not goal-oriented but relationship-oriented. They worry about expressing their kindness, love and care. Men are

goal-oriented and merely interested in the result. They see their whole life as a battle where you either win or lose. In Gray's mind there is only one solution for women when it comes to communication problems. They have to be caring and sacrificing while totally being aimed at the wishes of others. If she remains calm and uncritical, everything will work out (Barnett and Rivers, 2004). Basically, we have to go back to the times when men were still the patriarchs and women were supposed to follow her man according. Now women, with the help of John Gray, can tell themselves that they are supposed to be caring, and sacrifice themselves. This will just bring women 60 years back in time.

Contrary to the belief of Gray and Buss, men can be caring. Barbara Risman found out that men who were responsible for their children, raised their children just like a mother would do. In her research from 1986 among 141 single fathers, she stated that 'most men felt perfectly comfortable being a single father'. Not gender but circumstances are the key to behavior (Barnett and Rivers). Social norms seem to be the primary thing that Buss and Gray talk about instead of science. Not our ancestors but our social norms and the environment influence us in our behavior. The next part will show just how big of an influence our surroundings are on our behavior and gender.

Not genes but the environment

According to Ten Broeke (2010), epigenetics are the key to understand how our genes work. After research with mice and rats it was found that our environment is a huge influence on our brains. Researchers found the same results with people: hormones, eating habits, upbringing and lifestyle, all these epigenetic influences are capable of switching genes on and off in the brain. Ten Broeke saw in this the mechanism that is able to change our society.

Genes are not part of a pre-defined construction plan of human beings. We are not born with certain genes that define how our further life will look and how we will act and think. Human beings are an uninterrupted process where change and flexibility are the defining terms. This insight has only reached the scientific world a couple of years ago. New discoveries were made immediately. Scientists found, for example, differences in the activities of genes in genetically identical twins. The more their lifestyle differed, the more differences were found in the genes which were switched off or on (Ten Broeke, 2010). This incredible insight is called epigenetics. DNA is a strip with information, but it is useless without the proper knowledge on how to read this strip. Epigenetics knows how to read the strip and use the information (p.67). The presence of a gene (for example a gene which makes you very aggressive) does not mean that you will become aggressive. Until you grow up in a certain aggressive environment or are influenced by those around you, will the gene influence your brain and your behaviour (the gene will then be switched on) (Ten Broeke, 2010).

X- and Y genes are very small and only contain a few chromosomes. Most of those are for example for the production of sperm or eggs when we grow up. What we do not find, are genes for maths, technique or taking care of others. Your genes are your ingredients and you have to make it work and cook with them. They can influence the end-product, but eventually the chef, or the environment, decides on which ones are used and how (Ten Broeke, 2010).

A couple of years ago, Baron-Cohen claimed to have found evidence for the fact that testosterone influences the solidarity/community feeling of boys and girls. For his study, he

researched how often boys and girls looked at their mothers. Since the girls looked more often, there was enough proof that boys were influenced by the testosterone in their genes. Girls therefore had a better sense of community than the boys. However when looking at the research results this does not prove anything, since the variation in one sex was far greater than between the sexes. The differences that were found were too small to be significant: on average boys looked at their mothers 16 times and girls 22 times, yet the differences were far greater between the girls or between the boys (Ten Broeke, 2010).

The brain of a baby is made for flexibility and adapts to different situations. This is the way in which we are truly evolved, as Andrew Feinberd and Rafael Irizarry claim. Flexibility (or in their words variability) is the way in which we cope with ever changing environments of our ancestors. Our genes have not changed, but we learned how to adapt to new surroundings without having to wait for our DNA to become accommodated to a new situation. Our DNA never changed, we just became more flexible. Our environment is the main determining factor in our behaviour (Ten Broeke, 2010). Our surroundings will stimulate certain genes, while others will fade out unused. Looking at sex from just a binary perspective is not enough. Men and women can have the same amount of testosterone but we and our environment are responsible for the fact how aggressive we will become.

Questionnaires

But what do women and men in the Netherlands think about our differences? Do they believe that men are from Mars and women from Venus? It is important to find out to what degree men and women are influenced by evolutionary psychologists or whether they believe otherwise. This will bring some practical insights next to the theory of the preceding parts. How do the 'truths' about gender influence men and women in their daily lives? (or maybe not at all?) For my internship last year I have asked about 50 persons to fill in a questionnaire regarding the differences between men and women. The internship-institute used these questionnaires to see how men and women 'face their gender' nowadays and how big an influence their gender is in their lives. For this thesis, I believe the answers are very valuable, to see first-hand how people feel about their gender.

The questionnaire consisted of two questions:

- What are your associations, pictures, memories of feminism?
- How do you experience your own gender at this moment?

Stratified sampling was used: the people that answered the questionnaire were divided in three different age categories: 15-35, 35-50 and 50+ years old. After this, accidental sampling was used where people in my environment and 'friends of friends' and 'friends of colleagues' were asked for their opinion. People were e-mailed and asked on the phone for their opinions.

I would like to show some (parts) of the answers, to give an idea of the diverse opinions that were uttered:

Linda, 21

My association with the word feminism is first of all the Dolle Mina's that I know from history books. I also think of slogans like 'Boss in my own belly!'. Nowadays I believe feminism is not as outspoken as in those early days. You do not really notice it, perhaps because woman are quite emancipated. Abortion is not a taboo anymore, women are able to work (fulltime) and men help out around the house if needed.

Nowadays I believe women are close to equal to men, at least the younger generations. Of course there are still clichés ('the woman belongs in the kitchen') and typical male and female jobs, but it seems more balanced than in the past. You are able to study and build a career as a woman. With older generations I can clearly see the difference. The woman takes care of the house and the man provides the income. Older men are often helpless without their wife at home.

Rutger, 36

'The term feminism has unfortunately become quite contaminated. I think of the ardent supporters of women's emancipation and women's rights, but the media often only shows women with purple hair, pants-suits and men-haters. At the same time, I would like to call myself feminist, since women's emancipation is nowhere near finished. When you look at the unequal rewards of men and women, some things really need to change. Where in first instance I had all sorts of negative associations, I would call myself a feminist now. With feminist I mean a supporter of women's rights.'

Linda, 36

'[...]My husband comes from a different family, my in-laws expect that I check his underwear and his socks and provide for him in his needs. Family karma is very hard to break but I am happy that we worked it out.

In my daily life I do notice some inequalities. Women have to work, keep the house clean and take care of the children. If you put them in day-care you are a bad mom. Besides that, you have to be a volunteer at the school of your children, you need to have a social life with a lot of friends, be a good lover, always look your best and keep some time for yourself. I think that women are better at multi-tasking than men, but even a superwoman cannot meet these standards.

You need to put aside the expectations of others. Just as you should not have expectations when it comes to others, you cannot change other people's opinions. When you neglect yourself you will never be happy. You can fight against the system, but you can also use your energy to do something constructive. If you cannot find happiness within yourself, you will not find it anywhere.

I think that men and women have a different nature. Since my husband and myself are back in the traditional role pattern, we are both more satisfied. I can hear it when my child cries, my husband doesn't. He also doesn't notice what needs to happen around the house. If my child is sick, I keep thinking about it, my husband puts it aside and has the confidence that it will be better. When I was working and my husband was caring it felt like we were fighting our instincts.'

Paula, 50+

'[...] It used to be quite normal for women to stay at home and take care of the children and keep the house tidy. It is possible that feminism is responsible for the fact that women could also have jobs and that men help out around the house.

In the Netherlands I do not experience any (dis)advantages in being a woman. In my profession everyone has the same opportunities whether you are a man or a woman. Also in other areas I do not notice a lot of differences. I believe that in the Netherlands everything is taken care of pretty good. The fact that men have a higher position than women at work does not mean that women do not have that possibility. It is also a matter of wanting.'

Wiel, 50 +

'Feminism has been very important until the half of the last century for the equal rights of men and women. After that I think that feminism has lost the way.

In a properly functioning society there is no necessity for this (feminism), since equality in the court and the law between men and women is so apparent, that it is not an issue anymore.

[..]

I think that feminism nowadays is too occupied with a useless battle. Where do you fight for if 99% of the women and men have the conviction that men and women are equal and need equal opportunities?

The fact that some feminists are still frustrated with the fact that more women stay at home to raise children, has more to do with the fact that there is a lack of understanding when it comes to the fact that you cannot construct a society. Feminists who think that they can control the buttons of society and create it any way they want, are just as faulty as the men

hundred years ago who fought feminism and who thought they should have more rights than women.

Even politicians are guilty of this. In the '80s of the last century some politicians thought that more women should be part of the labour process. They thought of all sorts of measures to include women in this process. One of these was that the employer was forced to choose the female candidate when there was a vacancy and two candidates were just as capable. That was called positive discrimination.

I consider this one of the most ridiculous measures that I have witnessed in the 55 years that I live. To pursue equality by discrimination. [...] Positive discrimination is a term that is wrong to the core. Discrimination is always negative.

This is an example of what should be avoided, and the reason why feminism has a negative image with so many people. What the government should do is offer men and women equal opportunities. How each individual deals with this is their own responsibility. How men and women raise their family and how they divide their chores around the house and raising responsibilities is a matter where the government has no say in, and no group should even intervene in.

I believe feminism is no longer necessary. It is long over its due date. What I would advise Dutch women is: Take a look at Neelie Kroes, take your chances and do not waste your energy complaining.

[..]There are many differences between men and women. Except for biological differences, men and women have developed for ten thousands of years in a different way. Let the differences exist. These have their charm. There needs to be a difference between the concepts of equality and equivalence. (gelijkheid en gelijkwaardigheid).'

(More answers to the questionnaires can be found in the appendix.)

What is important after reading these questionnaires is that several people believe that there are inherent differences between men and women. Linda (36) and Wiel see natural differences between the sexes. Linda mentions for example that men and women

'have a different nature' and that she is more suited to 'care' than her husband. They are happy now that they are back in the traditional role patterns, her husband isn't as good around the house and with the children as she is. This is exactly what John Gray and David Buss would also see as natural behaviour for men and women. According to John Gray, women are not goal-oriented but relationship oriented, men on the other hand are goal-oriented and merely interested in the result. So in communication problems, women have to remain caring and sacrificing while being aimed at the wishes of others. If she remains like this, everything will work out (Barnett and Rivers, 2004). This relationship or goal oriented idea can be found in Linda's answer. Her husband is the one who is goal-oriented, she is more concerned with the needs of her children. She thinks about what needs to happen around the house while he doesn't. He does not feel the same responsibility towards the house and children as she does. He is (supposed to be) more egoistic and busy with this own career. She is not (supposed to be) ambitious but is supposed to think of the needs of others.

According to the ultradarwinists Linda (and other women) are not capable of having a high-paid job, but are only in search of a successful man to marry. The man is supposed to have the career, since his genes make him competitive. The woman takes care of the child (since she is naturally more suited for this), while he goes out and finds other women to impregnate. He keeps on supporting her financially, because he is the breadwinner. This is the natural state of affairs according to the ultradarwinists (Barnett and Rivers, 2004, p.61). Social norms of our culture do not play a role in this, this occurs because our fore fathers influenced our brains. Even though Linda does not believe she has to provide for her husband's every need, she does believe she is 'naturally' more suited to care and he is more suited to work. This shows that she is to some extent influenced by traditional ideas that are still alive about men and women.

Perhaps Linda also believes (from the research mentioned earlier) that children suffer if their mother works full-time. In Linda's life it is directly noticeable how traditional ideas influenced her family's life. When she and her husband ignored the traditional role patterns, things were not working out and they felt out of place. If people in our society will keep on believing that children suffer, women will keep on feeling guilty when they work full-time or

when their house is dirty. This means that things will remain the same. People will keep on feeling out of place.

Wiel is confident we live in an equal society and that men and women have the same possibilities. Fighting for a useless cause is 'ridiculous' according to him. Men and women have natural differences and this should be accepted. It is the feminists who have a problem and not society. Since Neelie Kroes made it to the top, everyone can make it to the top, in his opinion. Neelie Kroes is perhaps only accepted in her high-paid position because she doesn't have any children. If she had children, she would face a lot more punishment, since she would not be influenced by the normative pressure that is used to keep everyone in check. Because she does not behave according to expectations, she will be punished (with social disapproval f.e.) (Seron, 2005). People want things to stay the way they are, since we have an emotional investment in these rules. This opens up a certain space for us and we know what to expect. When no one objects to these rules, the social structure will keep on existing and women with a full-time job and with children will face a hard time (Giddens, 2005).

All in all, it is not as simple as Wiel believes; maybe women do not make it to the top because they believe they are not suited for the top, as the evolutionary psychologists and thousands of books on the subject mention. If women are not (supposed to be) ambitious, competitive and always rational, why would they assume they can reach a high-paid job? (Barnett and Rivers, 2004). Paula also sees no reason to question equality in the Netherlands. If you do not have a high-paid job, perhaps you didn't want it enough. She doesn't look into the reasons that men and women have for not wanting a high-paid job. When you are seen as being responsible for the house and the children, this will play a larger part in your life than when this isn't the case.

Linda (21) sees that it is still not totally equal in our society, but she seems to be pretty content with the way things are. She feels she has the possibilities that she needs to study and have a career. She might believe that there are no inequalities since the inequalities that do exist are just natural differences. Rutger acknowledges that there are still inequalities in our society and even calls himself a feminist. He also realizes how the media influences us in how we look at things and how we define feminists. Linda's answers

were common among the younger generation. Most of the young people were happy with the way things are, but could mention a few things that are not totally equal. It was also interesting to notice that if you ask women for a specific inequality in their lives (f.e. do you have to clean more than your husband, are you seen as more responsible for the children etc.) they would see an inequality in that instance, yet if you asked them a more general question such as 'Are there any inequalities in your life when it comes to your gender?', they would generally answer 'No, not really'. They do not relate inequalities in their life with being left to do all the chores around the house. This is just because their husband/boyfriend is lazy (for example), but it is not an inequality. While the fact that men are still in charge can be seen as an inequality, Kitty (her answer can be found in the appendix) merely sees it as a difference. Maybe men are not lazy, but are they just influenced by the stereotypes that are thrown into the world as truths? If you see around you that the women clean the house and you hear that women are naturally better at this, why would you bother helping out a lot around the house?

Most people only look at a personal level to the question whether there are still inequalities. Questions are rarely answered from a societal perspective, while our society is a huge influence in how we look at gender and sex. Not a lot of people acknowledge or know that we are influenced by our culture and environment in how we act as men and women. As Asha ten Broeke has shown, our environment is a huge influence on our behaviour. Hormones, eating habits, upbringing and other epigenetic influences are capable of switching genes on and off in the brain. We are not born with genes that define how our further life will look like. We will only become aggressive if we grow up in an aggressive environment and if we come into contact with a lot of aggressive people. With being competitive the same applies (Ten Broeke, 2010).

Peter (50 + in the appendix) acknowledges the influence of our thought-patterns and our culture on our behaviour; he mentions how if he wants to change his ways, he feels like 'he is being pulled back' and is pushed into the traditional role patterns. It is difficult for him to deal with the 'uncertainty of not knowing your own role'. People prefer to have certainty and have things clear to them. It is very hard to struggle (argue with husband on chores) and work in new roles when you are not used to this, as Peter shows. You can work part-time as a man, but you will face criticism for not being a 'real man' or a softie. It all depends on how

our environment believes we should behave as men and women and what is deemed important for us as men and women. If people consider you successful if you have an important job, you will put a lot of effort into this.

Conclusion

My main aim in writing this thesis was to prove that evolutionary psychologists have no basis for their claims and that we are not influenced by the behaviour of our ancestors. Their ideas are basically used because they correspond with what we want to believe. This proves how much our predetermined notions influence us in what we believe. Or to use a famous quote from Karl Popper:

“If we are uncritical we shall always find what we want: we shall look for, and find, confirmations, and we shall look away from, and not see, whatever might be dangerous to our pet theories. In this way it is only too easy to obtain what appears to be overwhelming evidence in favour of a theory which, if approached critically, would have been refuted” (Popper, 1957, p. 133-4).

This is exactly what happens to the theories of the evolutionary psychologists. Their theories work for us because they confirm what we want to see. No matter how much evidence exists against their theories, they are not being refuted. People should stay in their place. Foucault’s (1980) power/knowledge paradigm is important here since the people in power can still decide what is seen as knowledge. Sadly, white, middle-aged, upper-class men are still the ones in power in our society, and can decide which information gets published or not. ‘They’, the people in power, benefit from everything remaining as it is, so it is very difficult to bring a change to this. The books by Barnett and Rivers are not generally accepted as refuting evolutionary theories, while they have more (if not better) evidence for their theories than the evolutionary psychologists have for their own theories. They offer plenty black swans to the white swans of evolutionary psychology, yet their ideas are not granted the same importance as those of the ‘ultradarwinists’.

Barnett and Rivers also see that it is very hard to effectively change accepted belief systems in our society. According to them, the discussion about gender differences is so tempting because it ‘rationalizes the sex segregation and discrimination that is still pervasive in our society’ (Barnett and Rivers, 2004). It is easier to believe that men and women have different capacities, because of their genes, hormones and motivation than to take the

precautions to make sure there are enough chances for both sexes. Every discussion about our gender can be swiped under the carpet and does not need to be on the agenda.



In a time when women and men are becoming more and more equal, apparently some people need books like this to prove that we are destined to be different. As we can also see in the questionnaires, a portion of people believe that women are naturally better at doing certain things than men (and the other way around). As Wiel seemed to say; feminists are the ones with the problems, not society. Peter feels he is being pulled back when he wants to do things differently, which is quite sad to hear how difficult it is.

Until reading the books by Barnett and Rivers and by Ten Broeke, I always found a great truth in the saying 'men are from Mars and women are from Venus', but now I have finally seen how much we are actually influenced by these books. Luckily, I know that this is all unfounded information. A lot of the man-female differences can be explained from looking at who can find power in what way. A man has earned respect when he has a successful career, when he has found a job where he has the power to make decisions. But there are different standards for women. They are usually branded as successful when they take good care of their children and have a nice husband. If she has a good job, she has to show how she combines it with parenting. Unfortunately, now women in the future will keep being responsible for the children, since they are 'more caring and have more empathy for children'. We are holding them (and also other groups in our society) back, because 'they' are simply better at other things. There are obviously differences between the sexes, but these differences play a far smaller role in our life than is commonly believed.

Contemporary human behavior is determined by circumstances rather than by gender. It is important to teach people our true nature and origins. Even if we would risk our safeties and securities, it is worth it in giving everyone a more honest look at their gender. If there are so many black swans (falsificationism) this should be taken into consideration.

As ten Broeke has shown, epigenetics is the mechanism which should receive all the attention in our society. You are not born aggressive, your environment decides whether that gene is switched on in your body or not. This could explain why we as men and women act either feminine or masculine. If our 'caring' gene is switched on this will mean we will be more caring than if we were in a different environment where caring is not important.

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Appendix

More questionnaires:

Irene, 25

'For me, Femke Halsema comes across as a typical feminist of this time. In a feminist I see a strong, independent, business-minded, intelligent woman that fights against double standards. Men and women are for example differently rewarded when it comes to their salary in certain positions.

[..]What strikes me is the difference between men and women in the work-sphere but also in the communication area. In the work-sphere, women are over-represented in certain sectors, while men are over-represented in other sectors. I myself will work in a sector with mainly women (education sector). What I see as a drawback of being a woman is that we are often judged more critically than a man. Women are more critical of themselves and also of other women. Men are not bothered by this.'

Lieke, 35-50

'I enjoy being a woman. I am very satisfied with my life. I am grateful that I got to experience what it is like to have children, but am also grateful that I had the liberty to choose and decide in this myself.

I do not experience any 'glass ceiling' in my job, I feel that I am getting all the career opportunities that I deserve.

When I look at the position of women in the world, I can get sad, since women are too often the victim of violence, war and abuse.'

Marc, 42

'Men act from their feelings, women are more rational. I believe this firmly. Men get into wars, jump of cliffs or go train-surfing. Women would never do this kind of stuff.

Women can rationalise everything because they attach words to their feelings. Men can't do that, that is a bridge too far for them.'

Peter, 50+

'I do experience social pressure as a man. I am supposed to be responsible for the family and have authority, but I am trying to sustain from that. These ideas are outdated, I know that myself. But if I try to move away from these ideas, then it feels like I am being pulled back, in the first place by myself. As a man you may have a natural urge to profile yourself. A part is determined by my upbringing. I was born in a traditional family, who are not used to dividing the tasks/roles in a different way. Your own role gets unclear when you decide to do things differently. I find that hard to deal with.

What I have noticed is that in the last years female qualities have been hugely emphasized, I have found trouble with this. In commercials men are often portrayed as nitwits, while women are seen as hip and modern. Men need to be everything at once nowadays; masculine, but also sensitive, show your emotions, have a good job and be a good dad who can take care of the house. If a man whistles at a girl he is a bastard, but women who are sexist to men, (which is just as annoying) are 'modern'. Men get taken less serious. Eventually, women are just as one-sided as men, but women are less willing to admit this.

This feminization also plays a role in education, where most teachers are women. Feminism has gone too far and is making new victims out of men. A personal philosophy of mine is that with violence in football this frustration still plays a large role.

The solution is that it shouldn't be about being male or female, but about the individual. Unfortunately, we also need to classify people. But within the family you can search for a solution and a balance in this.

When raising children, feminine qualities are of course very welcome, but sometimes some decisions need to be taken resolutely. During kids upbringing, slamming your fist on the table if need be is better than talking about everything, giving love and postponing everything, something that women do. Men let children discover as long as there is no blood. Women try to be ahead of all the risks and dangers.'

Kitty, 50 +

'I don't see an advantage in being a man or a woman. I do see differences, that it is still a man's world, especially here in the Netherlands. I think that we are behind in this regard

compared to other countries, where it is much more common to look at the number and representation of women. I don't find any trouble with this, but we need to keep putting it on the agenda.

[..] Also in my job, I do not feel that I am being discriminated or that I do not get any chances because I am a woman. But I do see that it is still a man's world and that white men are mostly in control.'