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Négocier le genre ? Une ethnologue dans une société d'hommes apprentis séducteurs

Partant de l'expérience spécifique d'un terrain mené par une jeune chercheuse auprès d'une population exclusivement masculine, cet article interroge les fonctions des assignations sexuelles opposées au chercheur lors de son enquête pour les intégrer pleinement au processus de compréhension des données. L'analyse réflexive de la trajectoire du chercheur sur son terrain permet dès lors d'approcher le système d'ascension hiérarchique structurant le parcours des individus au sein du groupe étudié, reposant sur une acquisition progressive de « compétences masculines ». Dans un tel contexte où l'identité de genre est à construire, les assignations opposées au chercheur en fonction de son sexe autorisent une marge de négociation permettant la bonne conduite de l'enquête.

Mots clés : sexe/genre, assignation sexuelle, réflexivité, masculinité, négociation, terrain, séduction

Negotiating gender? An ethnologist works embedded in a society of men apprenticing seduction¹

A young woman researcher had particular experience while conducting a study on an exclusively male population. Starting from there, the article questions the functions of the gender assignments endowed upon the researcher during her study, in order to fully integrate them into the process of understanding the data. The reflexivity analysis done concerning the researcher's working path in the field hence allows approaching the upward hierarchic mobility system based on the progressive acquisition of "male skills," a system which has structured the career path of the individuals within the reference group. In such a context, where gender identity is constructed, assignments to which the researcher is confronted depending on his or her gender make room for negotiation and proper organization of the study.

Key-words : sex/gender, reflexivity, masculinity, negotiation, field, seduction

¹ Thanks to Katrina Anne Brannon for her translation work.

This article is an account of my field experience, specifically concentrated on the implications of my intrusion, as a young researcher, within the group known as the Seduction Community². The group, of North American origins, which came on to the scene near the end of the 1990s, under the name of the Seduction Community, has come to know a concomitant success with that of personal development, of pop-psychology, and Internet-based social networking sites.

Today, present throughout Europe, the Seduction Community is not organized as a unitary structure, but rather functions more as a network of autonomous internet sites, created by one or more members, on a national, or even regional, level, along with many locally-based premises. Based on this knowledge, I chose to restrict the scope of my research to the territories of the French branch of the Seduction Community, investigating, throughout a period of two years, the bars and Parisian conference halls, in which members, at times coming from all over France, got together for the occasion, as well as the internet websites, forums, and blogs of the French Community³.

Exclusively composed of males, generally ages 18-30, mobilized for the goal of reclaiming a heterosexual identity, the Seduction Community's main, and explicit function is the conquest of women. In order to attain the status of a renowned seducer, the acquisition of technical and theoretical knowledge is necessary. Said knowledge is empirically framed on what the members have themselves named the "field."⁴ This knowledge is often acquired by reproducing a scene of seduction, the place of "communal" learning *par excellence*, involving of women who are completely unaware of the kind of activity in which they are participating. The implicit functions of the community correspond to practices anchored in the day-to-day life of the group, consisting in constructing and maintaining social networks between males. This leads to a certain level of individual engagement for each

² The term "Seduction Community" is the name chosen by the members of the group, who belong to it so as to auto qualify themselves. It is possible to write Seduction Community with or without it being capitalized. So as to use the term as a proper noun, I have decided to capitalize the name. When I write Community, I designate only and specifically the Seduction Community. Moreover, in this article, I have chosen to use the vernacular term "communitarian" to designate, as the members do themselves, all the people who make up the Community of Seduction.

³ The two main internet sites of the French Community are <http://www.verselejus.com> and <http://www.frenchtouchseduction.com>. A small proportion of registered members on these sites are French speakers. Also, I had the opportunity to speak with seducers in training from Switzerland, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, or Senegal, who did not have access to a local network large enough to allow them to participate in "communitarian" social events. The relationships between members on the transnational scale are, however, encouraged. I also was aware of meetings between Moroccan and French "communitarians" in Rabat, as well as between two Tunisians, staying at a French member's house in Paris for the weekend. The discussion forums on the "communitarian" sites are exclusively devoted to this kind of exchange.

⁴ The "field" designates a space dedicated to seduction training. It could refer to bars, homes, Internet forums, telephone, etc..

member of the group, with the exchange of knowledge and support between members being the norm. Specific locations are chosen to facilitate meetings between group members, whether by the means of Internet forums and sites, accessible to all, under the pre-established condition of having created a user's account, thus marking one's entry as a "member" of the Community, or in seminars given by "coaches,"⁵ themselves former students of seduction, having acquired important knowledge that they believe should be shared, or even at weekly meet-ups, organized in the cities in which an organized network of the Seduction Community exists, such as in Lille, Paris, Nice, or Nantes, so the members can practice the "game of seduction" in a group setting. The practice of seduction, as well as the rules and techniques that it revolves around, are known by the generic term of the "Game." The members of the Community who participate in this are known as "players." *The Game* is also the title of the book considered as the "Bible" for the Community. It is a cautionary autobiographical account, recounting the irresistible ascension of an anonymous *player* turned "guru": and one of the most influential ones of the Community at that, as well as a true Hollywood celebrity⁶.

In such a context, although the seduction of females is *a priori* at the heart of the functioning of the group, they are paradoxically excluded from the benefits of a masculine peer-to-peer relationship, as L'Or, one of the members with whom I corresponded with via e-mail, remarks: "*I began to notice [...] that, in fact, women were a pretext for us to form a hierarchy. The paradox is that we only spoke about women although, in reality, they gradually became sidelined. The Game was really a craze shared between friends, between men.*" [L'Or, pseudonym⁷, 25, student, Lausanne]

The presence of women is thus only required in the specific environment of "seduction situations," in which they are considered as the "target" of young seducers who use them to practice their new techniques.

Considering the specificity of the investigation undertaken due to my feminine presence in an exclusively masculine environment, I shall now focus more particularly on the plan of action put in place so as to neutralize my incursion, taking into account an analysis of the different positions that I occupied during this survey.

The "assignments" endowed upon me in the field of my research were essentially aimed at my "sexual" identity, to use the terminology of Nicole Claude Mathieu; thus,

⁵ The term coach is used by the individuals themselves who have attained a certain reputation within the Community, and are thus solicited by seducers-in-training who desire to benefit from their teachings. However, the coaches of the Community have no diploma to guarantee their competence, which forcefully raises the question of the legitimacy of their professionalism. The training offered by the coaches are priced between 50 and 400 euros an hour, based on the level of prestige of the coach. The coaches of the Community are, thus, regularly suspected by the "communitarians" to be swindlers and impostors, resulting in numerous rivalries and alliances within the group.

⁶ Neil Strauss, *The game: penetrating the secret society of pickup artists*, NY, ReganBooks, 2005

⁷ In order to preserve the anonymity of the interviewees, the pseudonyms have been changed

the idea that between my sex and my gender there exists a “homologous correspondence” (Mathieu, 1989: 232). The questions that I asked myself were questions such as if it was possible to be something other than a woman in such a situation, and if the investigations I was undertaking provided me with a status different than that which is normally accorded to women in the Seduction Community. Stated otherwise, I wished to determine whether or not between my sex and my gender there could have been a correspondence not considered as “homologous,” (*homologique*) but rather as “analogous” (*analogique*) (Mathieu, 1989: 239), which reveals, according to Nicole-Claude Mathieu, “sexed” identity, “the past participle marking the recognition of an action, of an elaboration performed by the social on the biological” (ibid). Here, my observations should allow the interface—which plays between the perceptions of my gender by the individuals being studied—and the situations of investigation in which these perceptions are imbedded, to be understood. These observations are, in effect, analyses of the sense and the functions of gender assignments with which I was confronted, considering the variable and constructed character of these assignments as significant data, permitting not only access to comprehension of the investigation in process, but also the object of the research itself. Said otherwise, the process of the neutralization, then reconstruction, of my “sexed” identity in the field of research, once integrated into the analysis, reveals much concerning the social organization of the group being studied and as a system of representation structuring this organization.

The analysis of my “gendered” trajectory in the field will also allow the reader to understand the inner workings of the sex/gender system (Mathieu: 1989) upon which the hierarchical organization of the Seduction Community is founded. To be of the male sex, here, is not a prerequisite sufficient enough to integrate into the Community; this masculine sex must also coincide with an exclusively heterosexual sexual identity. But, beyond these injunctions, there is one that proves to be even stronger: the order to make the “biological” male sex into the “social” masculine gender. This necessary accomplishment of masculinity by way of individual apprenticeship is seen as a process of social ascension.

Additionally, I will begin by questioning the link that exists between my own development within the group and the ideal of ascension within the group, founded on the accomplishment of a necessarily unachieved masculinity, to further interrogate the workings of opposing sexual assignments given to a researcher in his/her field of research in social sciences.

Feminine knowledge versus masculine knowledge

The analysis of my trajectory within the group must begin with the prerequisite understanding of two archetypal figures of the Seduction Community, situated at the extremes of the social hierarchy: the AFC (*Average Frustrated Chum*), and the *Alpha Male*.

The AFC designates the individual who is not yet familiar with the Community or who has just entered it. Considered as an “average guy,” he represents the majority of men and cannot manage to “distinguish” himself, which, in the game of seduction, is seen as a great disadvantage. Frustrated because he does not know how to express his masculinity, he is oblivious to the rules of seduction and the rapports between men and women. The AFC, in fact, has an erroneous perception of masculinity. He believes that to please women, it is sufficient to be kind and gallant. Opposed to this perception of the “nice guy,” the “communitarians” consider chivalrous gestures as markers of the domination of men by women, thus providing women with the upper hand in situations of seduction. To progress in terms of seduction, the AFC must thus learn how to behave “like a man,” which includes his capacity to make choices, to approach women, to set limits, and generally, to position himself as socially dominant. The members of the Community thus consider these qualities as social competences that every individual can acquire with the help of the group. The masculine gender is not a “given,” but must be the goal of an acquisition of a certain kind of knowledge. Without any “communal” knowledge, the AFC is considered as an emasculated man. However, for the members of the Community, the apprenticeship of masculinity is now threatened by what they call “global feminization of society.” Already a threat at the turn of the century, according to Otto Weininger (1989: 73), the “global feminization of society” reveals a “weakening” of the masculine (De Singly, 1993: 60). The rehabilitation of “virile” values, supposedly having disappeared, would allow for a reestablishment of the social order based on an essentialist conception of sexual identities, which are assumed to be complementary. Today, the hypothesis of a malaise or of a “crisis” of the masculine identity, following feminist revolutions, is endorsed by certain scientific discourses and widely presented in the media. In *Le premier sexe. Mutation et crise de l'identité masculine*, André Rauch (2000 : 9) recalls the “crisis of masculine identity” during the French Revolution, during which numerous reforms, such as the law concerning divorces passed in 1792 established a symmetry between the sexes, leading to an “irreversible alteration” of masculine dominance. Here, the “crisis of masculine identity” appears as the corollary of a “crisis of masculine dominance.” In their respective works consecrated to the masculine identity “in crisis,” Elisabeth Badinter (2004) and Annelise Maugue (1987) support the hypothesis of a “confusion” in which men are forced to “resituate themselves relative to a woman in movement,” (Maugue, 1987: 8) obliterating the necessarily contingent dimension of masculine identity, set in an undetermined temporality.

According to the members of the Seduction Community, the qualities said to be “feminine” are also the object of valorization and of an overinvestment, detrimental to the expression of virile values, now seen as stigmatized and sanctioned. Docility, passivity, incertitude, and emotionalism prevail over strength, control, power, and rationalism. Also, to become a “real man,” the AFC must, first of all, let go of his feminine qualities, embedded in him since childhood, so as to reconstruct his identity on the basis of masculine knowledge. The constitution of a strictly “masculine” *savoir-faire*, along with its diffusion to a large group of men, becoming more and more numerous, is the main goal of the Seduction Community, which thus

desires to counteract feminine knowledge, perceived as socially dominant, and thus, detrimental to masculinity.

This last point explains that, on the other end of the scale, diametrically opposed to the figure of the *AFC*, there exists the figure of the *Alpha Male*, the dominant male, “he who knows.” In the measure in which he has completely interiorized the masculine ethos, he imposes himself upon others by way of his presence alone. The *Alpha Male* is situated beyond the hierarchical system. He demands estrangement from the Community and withdraws himself from it, as a few members with whom I was in contact with explained, with phrases such as: “I took a step backwards”; “I went into retirement”; “I continue to pass on what I know, but I no longer regularly frequent the Community.” This last declaration, coming from a coach, clearly illustrates the contradictory character of “communitarian” ascension: the higher one climbs in the hierarchy, the more one explicitly flaunts his detachment from the group, finally claiming total autonomy. Seen, in effect, as a man free of all influence, the figure of the *Alpha Male* corresponds to that of a sage. For example, during an interview, one of the members confided in me that he identified the status of the *Alpha Male* to that of a “great sensei.” In Japanese, *sensei* designates an individual highly knowledgeable in his area of expertise, which he assumes the responsibility to pass on. This explains to what extent the figure of the *Alpha Male* is particularly nested in that of the coach. Teaching and transmission of knowledge are the functions of excellence associated with success and power. Thus, there is nothing surprising about the fact that many members are motivated by the idea of the career as a coach, something that they consider as the logical culmination of their apprenticeship, sidelining success with women, which is, at times, completely eliminated from their discourse. As I was questioning a member concerning the definition of the Alpha Male, he responded with this laconic response: “*an Alpha Male is a man who dominates other men.*” [Sphinx (pseudonym), seduction coach, Paris)

Furthermore, the exclusion of women in the Community occurs on multiple levels:

-Firstly, this exclusion consists in the avoidance, pure and simple, of all feminine presence, which is assured by the creation of “controlled” spaces, which remain strictly masculine, such as certain Internet forums regulated by moderators who verify the identities of everyone, seduction classes or meetings between “communitarians.”

-Next, when their presence is required, women remain, nevertheless, excluded, only recognized as partners in a “game.” In the cases in which they are perceived as the

“target” of seduction experiments, their participation is never seen as equivalent to that of the engagement of “members” in the scene being played out⁸.

-Lastly, and this is the most important point: women are excluded due to their recognition as carriers of feminine knowledge, harmful to the expression of masculinity. Based on this, my position as a female researcher could have been seen as the pure incarnation of this threat.

However, in light of the conditions of this investigation, from which I benefitted, it would seem that my identity had been the object of strategies of neutralization, materialized by the conformation of my identity to the norms of the group. My trajectory, as well as my progressive integration, could be analyzed as the archetype of a “communitarian career.”⁹

At the beginning of this investigation, my ignorance of the specific language used between members, along with my nescience of the technical and theoretical knowledge of seduction, rather than marginalizing me, drove the members to try to incorporate my presence into the organization, already constituted in my identification as an *AFC*: he who knows nothing, in short: the beginner. My feminine sex especially reinforced this apprehension of my position within the group, in the measure in which the *AFC*, still under the emprise of feminine knowledge, is a man without masculinity who acts “like a woman,” which is the cause of his unsuccessfulness in seduction. To integrate myself within the group, I chose, first of all, to conform to this sexual appointment by way of adopting a “gendered” behavior, corresponding to the norms seen as “feminine,” which are, naivety, docility, candor regarding certain subjects, all the while being particularly diligent and rigorous in my learning, demonstrating my will to renounce, in a certain way, my feminine knowledge. My naivety, which was genuine at the beginning, provided me with true success with my interlocutors, in the measure in which my attitude provided them with the occasion to show me the full range of their knowledge whilst correcting me, and even more so, in front of their peers. Like any novice, I needed to be taught; and I was expected to improve day by day. I was their student; and I had to respect my masters, becoming a real source of satisfaction for their teachings. At the “communitarian” meetings, I always sat at the back of the room, whereas the more experienced members sat in the first row. The members sitting around me whispered explanations in my ear throughout the meetings. At times, the speaker even stopped to make sure that I was following the discussion. The other novice seducers often took my notebook to write down terminology that I didn’t understand. Regularly, before leaving, I was offered a full curriculum of lectures,

⁸ In response to the question: “What is the place of women in the Game?” I often received the following answer: “They are only spectators.” The “communitarians” thus identified themselves, going along with the theatrical metaphor, as “actors,” who must “put on a good show.”

⁹ I chose to use the term “communitarian career” to refer to the trajectory of novice seducers/members, in the measure in when this trajectory was the object of short, medium, and long-term strategies, resulting in the dilution between the “communitarian,” professional, social, and romantic life of the individual, confusing the objective of ascension within the Community and social ascension in general.

other members lent me books; I was sent articles by e-mail, etc. Thus, I was, above all, assimilated as a debutant, to whom the Community worked together to provide teaching.

However, after a certain amount of time in the field, my knowledge grew and it became obvious that I was no longer a novice. I was able to perfectly master the technical language; I could keep up with the discussion concerning articles published by the Community. My knowledge was equal to that of other members; however, I noticed that there was certain information to which I was not privy. There were certain meetings to which I was not invited, even though I knew about them, and no “communitarian” would accept that I accompany him in the “field” during the seduction training sessions. No longer protected by the status of the *AFC*, I became, once again, “dangerous” to the “communitarian,” who invoked my feminine sex as justification for the proscriptions towards me. I thus decided to re-negotiate my presence, knowing precisely that, to advance in my study and in my involvement, I had to move up in the hierarchy. At that particular moment, I was too involved in the situation; and I didn’t take enough distance to provide myself with the status that I aspired to have; but, wishing to become closer to influential individuals, I knew that I should adopt a similar attitude, by way of expressing authority, by taking my distance from the group, along with the mastery of “communitarian” knowledge... all of these being defining qualities of the *Alpha Male*.

This re-definition of my “sexed” identity in the field came at the moment in which I began a series of interviews with four coaches from the Community, establishing a brand new relation with them. The intimate setting of these interviews, performed one-to-one, allowed me to break with the social interactions that I kept up with until this point. Contrary to their ways, the coaches no longer addressed me as a young novice, but as a researcher interested in, as they were, in the rapports between men and women. During the interviews, they asked me for my point of view or asked me for reading suggestions. One discussion, held with one of the most famous coaches in the French community, is particularly revealing of the undergoing process of “reassignment” during my investigation. We met at a very chic, fashionable café, near the Champs Elysées in Paris. My interlocutor arrived, dressed very elegantly, and remarked that my appearance, on the other hand, was not up to par: “*What are you wearing? Was there no electricity at your place today? I prefer you more feminine...*” This remark, notably intended to destabilize me, is simply a well-known seduction technique of the community, called the *neg*, an abbreviation for *negative*. The exact opposite of a seductive compliment, the *neg* aims to shake up what the members call “feminine assurance,” so as to (re)gain control over the situation. This *neg*, addressed at me, although I had just sat down, was used so as to reinforce the asymmetry of the situation between me, a woman asking for a meeting, and him, a male coach, holder of information that I wished to gather. However, in responding to a question that he asked me a bit later in the evening, I had the joyous opportunity to modify this rapport. Below, I have reproduced his reaction to one of my statements:

“Ok, you’re surprising me now, how do you know that? That’s not stupid at all! Yeah, it’s been a long time since I’ve heard a girl say something so intelligent! You know, you’re lucky, it’s rare that girls are capable of thinking like that, to be able to stand back and look at the situation. For the majority, seduction should be something natural. For me, it’s the total opposite: I teach men how to become men.” [Mike (pseudonym), 32, seduction coach, Paris]

One week later, he introduced me to the participants of a seminar that he organized, using these terms: *“I would like to introduce you to Mélanie: she is doing university research on us, on the Community. Be careful what you say, she is redoubtable, she understands everything.”* [ibid] Although said in a joking manner, this introduction illustrated to what extent my status on the terrain had been the object of a readjustment. Leaving behind the status of the *AFC*, I had now attained that of an *Alpha Male*, the qualities of which I had adopted little by little. The time I had spent in the field had allowed me to acquire a solid understanding of the Community and its rules. Presently, I shared the same know-how as they did. I was initiated into masculine *savoir-faire*, and that was sufficient for me to be viewed as a “woman unlike the others,” resulting in an unclear gender, but nonetheless being incorporated into the “communitarian” social network. Regularly, the inquiries I made explained my presence amongst them due to the fact that I was not “a woman like the rest.”

“I never talk to my female friends about the Community; there’s no way they would understand... for them, seduction isn’t something that should be learned, it should be something natural. With you it’s not the same, you’re not like other women; you know how we work, why we do the things we do.” [Numa (pseudonym), 27, computer engineer, Montreuil-sous-Bois]

Indeed, if my initial naivety let me pass as completely inoffensive, the knowledge that I had now acquired became suspect. To what extent I now had to justify myself based on the academic character of my work, reassuring the members that I would never commercialize my knowledge by working on my own as a coach! However, as evoked earlier in this article, the figure of coach and that of the *Alpha Male* merge together at the top of the “communitarian” hierarchy. This is why, if I had never ceased to be considered as a woman in my field, I could, nevertheless, have acquired strictly masculine knowledge, leading my subjects of investigation to grant me the liminal position of *honorary male*.

This concept, used for the first time by Carolyn Fleurh-Lobban in 1986, adopted two years later by Carole Warren, (Warren: 1988) to describe specific situations in the field in which female researchers worked in a “masculine setting,” bypassed the assignment based to their “sexual” identity so as to temporarily put on a new gender, possessing both masculine and feminine qualities. In my field, the acquisition of the status of Honorary Male was facilitated by the “communitarian” system of ascension, based on the progressive procurement of masculine competences.

Gender Assignment of the Researcher In the Field: As Represented in Discourse of the Social Sciences

The conditions of the study from which I benefitted lead towards a rethinking of the understanding of gender assignment of researchers in the field, although this assignment remains either unknown to research in social sciences, or approached as a problem and an obstacle to knowledge. In effect, contrary to his or her social identity of which the researcher has the possibility to misrepresent based on the environment being studied, as Michel and Monique Pinçon-Charlot envisaged, during an investigation on the *grande bourgeoisie* (Pinçon and Pinçon-Charlot: 1991), the sex of the researcher is defined based on a fixed categorization, invariable, regardless of the contingences of the terrain. A primordial condition concerning the access to data, there would be no question of gender assignment except to evoke the reasons for the difficulties encountered during the study¹⁰. Also, inversely to methodological prescription, which calls for the rapports of sex to be considered as dynamic constructions, and not as categories, as soon as the question is raised of the sex of the researcher, there is no longer the question of seeing it as something ineluctable. Considered up until now as an inescapable obstacle, will the sex of researchers continue to be resistant to negotiation?¹¹

The reflexive analysis of my terrain of study leads me to review this question in the measure in which, despite my sexual identification as a woman and the specific context of an investigation in an exclusively male environment, I was able to rapidly integrate myself within the group and have access, with ease, to information. What's more, I would even say that it was only on very rare occasions that I felt myself to be limited by my sexual identity, and at no point did access to different areas of the field seemed non-negotiable to me. It is thus, beyond gender assignment—I am a woman—there are other defining elements of my identity that I can, and must, negotiate so as to properly conduct my research. The sexual assignment of a researcher in the field could thus be the object of various strategies of “circumventing,” through one’s capacity to “perform”¹² his or her identity, and more particularly, his or her gender, based on the situations specific to the investigation at hand and the interlocutors present.

Indeed, if my gendered identity was seen as an identity in “training,” it was as such first of all because, within the group, the properties seen as masculine are thought of as capital to be acquired, rather than “given” qualities. In the light of the three modes of conceptualization of sex/gender systems, identified by Nicole Claude Mathieu (1989), the Seduction Community would fall under the mode II, in which the “gender takes precedence over sex” (Handman, 2008: 78). Seen as a sort of “collective lifestyle” (Mathieu, 1989: 239), the mode II is a mode of learning in which

¹⁰ See Blondet for more on this question (2008: 59-80)

¹¹ See Hunt for more on this issue (1984: 286)

¹²The term “to perform” here is employed in reference to the way in which Judith Butler uses it, (1990: 263)

gender is something to be perfected and actualized, as Nicole-Claude Mathieu illustrates in using as an example the collective masculine rituals of initiation in Melanesia, whose goal the perfection of masculinity: this is often actualized by separating them from women (Mathieu, 1989: 253).

Thus reproducing a model of “virile” camaraderie, it was possible for me to play with masculine “competences” by embracing certain specific qualities, already described in this article, which allowed me to go beyond the initial proscription, forbidding women to have access to the activities organized by the Seduction Community.

However, if this possibility of “performing ones’ gender” is partly the result of comfort, or even of the cunningness of the ethnologist, it could not be attributed to his personality or competences alone. The point of my demonstration is rather the contrary: my research allowed me to take the necessary measures to exhibit the fact that the identity of a researcher in his field is not acquired information, determined once and for all at the moment of negotiating access to the necessary places, but necessarily pertains to a dynamic process which is the function of the situation of inquiry and the persons involved. I would thus consider that the construction of the identity of the researcher is based on his or her research, and more particularly, the perception (or not) that others have concerning his or her gender as a framework based upon which interaction is engaged, but even more so as the product of said interaction. This theoretical position is inscribed in the perspectives of North American feminist research, beginning in the 1980s, performed by female researchers working particularly in masculine environments. Thus opposed to the consensus surrounding the gender assignment of researchers as a category resistant to negotiation (Warren, Rasmussen, 1977), Jennifer Hunt (1984) undertook an experiment within an urban police patrol to show how she was able to don, interchangeably, masculinity (by the handling of weapons, the usage of certain vocabulary, her composure in dangerous situations) or femininity (by demonstrating her capacities of empathy or by the expression of a certain vulnerability). Thus producing a flexible identity that she considered as “liminal,” she was thus able to collect data that would have been otherwise off-limits for her, if no other reason than for the dangerousness of the patrol’s work restricting her to the protected environment of the office.

Thus, my first hypothesis: the gender of a researcher, if pertaining to gender assignment, is not necessarily an ineluctable constraint or fatal to the investigation; in the measure in which it is produced and by and in the situation of the research, his or her gendered identity, contrarily, the object of constant readjustments. This hypothesis recalls the arguments made by Joan W. Scott on the utility of gender as a category of analysis (Scott: 2009). The analysis of the gender assignments which were accorded to me in the field leads to my responding with her that, to remain “useful,” gender should liberate itself from a “programmatically and methodological [approach]. [...] in which the meanings given to “men” and “women” are immutable

[...] to rather focus on the construction of the difference of the sexes,” (Scott: 2009, 9), in which gender is dynamic.

This leads to my second hypothesis, upon which I wish to construct my analysis: if the perception of a researcher’s gender varies based on the situations of investigation and the interlocutors present, this means that the situation being studied is (notably) a device used to implement the norms aimed at neutralizing the “abnormal” identity of the researcher by incorporating him or her into the system of representations and classifications of the social world of inquiries. Currently, to maintain a relation with the group, the research must conform, by way of an adjustment of his/her identity, to the categories—sexual, social, or generational—of the group into which he/she wishes to integrate. Indeed, the analysis of this operation, which one could call the “identity adjustment,” of the researcher in the field, aims to stress the importance of the norms presiding over the classificatory systems of the social world of inquiries. This hypothesis was, notably, formulated by Gérard Mauger in his article entitled “Enquêter au milieu populaire,” (Mauger: 1991), which broaches the subject of the “neutralization” of the situation being analyzed by those being analyzed. According to Mauger, the diversity of the attitudes adopted by those being analyzed, confronted with what he calls the “*offre de parole*,” (Mauger: 1991, 26) of the researcher, is intrinsically linked to the perception that they have of the survey, of the surveyor, and of their own social position.

Conclusion

The analysis of the different positions that I occupied in the field leads to a rethinking of the question of the gender assignment of the researcher, no longer as an obstacle to the gathering of information, and thus, to knowledge in general, but as information in and of itself, participating in the “free right” of the analysis. I thus propose a displacement of the methodological apprehension, or even anguish, concerning the gender assignment of researchers so as to reclaim the expression of Georges Devereux (1980), that the intrinsic limitation of gender assignments that a researcher encounters constitutes them as research materials of the highest order.

Lastly, the negotiable character, the negotiable sexed identity, of the researcher in the field, appears here as the pure expression of the scope of possibilities immanent to the social structure of the group being studied. However, this scope of possibilities is precisely what must be grasped, or even experienced, by the researcher in the field, because it reveals the way in which the malleable and arbitrary character of individual trajectories imbedded in a coherent system into which the researcher is necessarily integrated, including the marginality which his/her position, at times, incarnates.