A primer on the ineffable, je ne sais quoi appeal of the French woman.

It is not the shoes, the scarves, or the lipstick that gives French women their allure. It is this: French women don't give a damn. They don't expect men to understand them. They don't care about being liked or being like everyone else. They generally reject notions of packaged beauty. They accept the passage of time, celebrate the immediacy of pleasure, like to break rules, embrace ambiguity and imperfection, and prefer having a life to making a living. They are, in other words, completely unlike us.

Ollivier goes beyond familiar ooh-la-la stereotypes about French women, challenging cherished notions about sex, love, dating, marriage, motherhood, raising children, body politics, seduction, and flirtation. Less a how-to and more a how-not-to, What French Women Know offers a refreshing counterpoint to the stale love dogma of our times. Peppered with anecdotes from its Franco-American author and filled with provocative ideas from French sexperts, mistresses and maidens alike, it debunks longstanding myths, presenting savvy new thinking from an old sexy culture and more realistic, life-affirming alternatives from the land that knows how to love.

I loved Debra Ollivier's earlier book, Entre Nous: A Woman's Guide to Finding Her Inner French Girl, which is more of a how-to book on acquiring the je ne sais quoi, sang froid of French girl chic that is more than effortless scarf-tying. That book was also an intelligent discussion of how some of the cultural differences that shape the average French woman
differ from those shaping the Anglo-American woman. This book takes that discussion much further.

It is not at all a how-to book. You might be able to extrapolate a few behaviors from this discussion, but unless you are relating to a Frenchman, you may find yourself misunderstood. What comes off as charmingly coy and mysterious in a Frenchwoman may be seen as stuck-up and bitchy in an American woman. Maybe not. The overall message in this book, as well as the earlier book, is that a Frenchwoman does what she likes and does not worry about others opinions. She does follow social protocols, for the most part--for example, it is understood that a beau will bring flowers on the first date--the French don't date like we do either--pay for the meals, and so forth. Fundamentally, though, according to Ms Ollivier, who is an American married to a Frenchman who lived in France for 10 years and still has a home in Paris, the French are private people who do not care what the public at large thinks. Their homes cannot be seen into from the street. They do not tell all, even to their spouses. They like mystery and secrets and discretion.

Ollivier tells us that the French have wonderful mixed gender friendships, and flirtation is expected. A husband is proud that his wife attracts admirers, not threatened. Women are close to their fathers, brothers, and have many male friends. The down side appears to be that women do not have particularly good relationships with other women. C'est la vie.

Ollivier tells us about real French people, not the handful of Left Bank stereotypes we have seen on our travels. French women do get fat and dress badly, but apparently, they have many types of vibrant relationships with men. Sign me up!

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What French Women Know: About Love, Sex, and Other Matters of the Heart and Mind by Debra Ollivier - 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price!