

Swedish American Historical Society of Wisconsin



Swedish Behaviors that may seem strange to us

16-Jan-2021



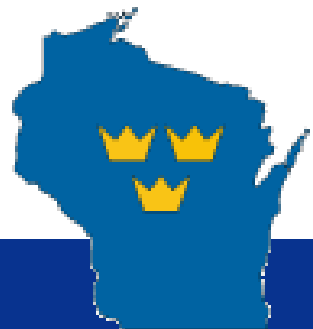
Introduction

- Today is more of a sociology lesson, not a history lesson
- For those who have travelled abroad or had foreign visitors, you may have notice atypical behaviors
- Today we explore typical Swedish behaviors... and you may learn you inherited some of them unconsciously from your parents



Nobody is better than anyone else

- **Nobody is better than anyone else.**
- **It is vulgar to brag about yourself.**
- **When you receive a compliment, you don't say thank you, you downplay the compliment**



The Law of Jante

- The Swedish subconscious is also still heavily influenced by the “jantelagen” - a popular saying coined in a 1933 book, which means nobody should show off or break the mold.
- The Law of Jante is a literary element that has been assumed by some to explain the egalitarian nature of Nordic countries.
- It characterizes not conforming, doing things out of the ordinary, or being personally ambitious as unworthy and inappropriate.

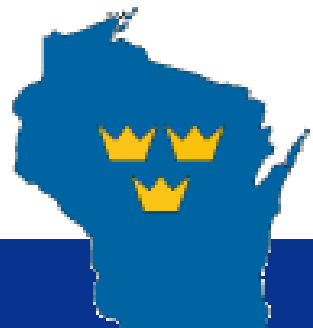


The Law of Jante

The ten rules state:

LAW OF JANTE

1. You're not to think *you* are anything special.
2. You're not to think *you* are as good as *we* are.
3. You're not to think *you* are smarter than *we* are.
4. You're not to imagine yourself better than *we* are.
5. You're not to think *you* know more than *we* do.
6. You're not to think *you* are more important than *we* are.
7. You're not to think *you* are good at anything.
8. You're not to laugh at *us*.
9. You're not to think anyone cares about *you*.
10. You're not to think *you* can teach *us* anything.



Oj

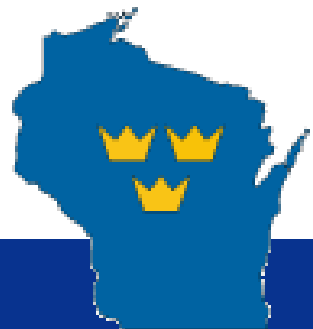


- Swede's favorite word is Oj. (oy)
-
- It means oops and wow combined
- Norwegian – Uff Da
- Yiddish – Oy veys mere
- Oj! Öl is my “go to” phrase (oops I spilled beer)



Happy Hour

- You cannot buy alcohol in the supermarket.
- Must go to Systembolaget
- Closes at 7:00 during the week, 3:00 on Saturday and closed on Sunday
- You can buy lite beer at the market, even on Sundays, but the alcohol content is so low you would have to drink gallons to become impaired
- In the US, some states like Colorado and Georgia close liquor stores on Sunday
- The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has state run liquor stores



Fear of Badgers

- When you walk in the forest, you wear wellies
- In the wellies you put crunchy crisp bread because there are badgers in Sweden.
- Belief is that badgers do not let go of a bite until they hear bones snapping.
- The snapping of the crackers is to outsmart the badgers, so they leave you alone



Boyz in the north

- **A big problem is the Boyz in the north**
- **Cold weather, low population, limited opportunity.**
- **Girls move south for the opportunities as soon as school is complete, so there are towns with very few women and mostly men living there**
- **Like deer camp in the fall in the Midwest**
- **We see similar issues in the US with a dwindling population in rural areas**



The Uniform

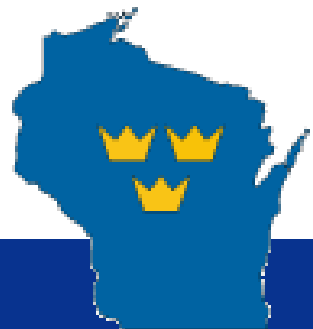


- Like to dress the same
- See similar behaviors elsewhere, I would never wear anything but black when in Paris



Speak Smartly to Strangers

- **To be cool, you speak super smartly to strangers.**
- **Hi sweetie, hi missy**
- **I unconsciously call my dog, Missy as an expression of affection**
- **My grandfather always referred to his daughter and grand daughters as Sweetie or Sweetie Pie**
- **This behavior could cause you to lose your job in the US for sexual harassment**



Avoid Confrontation

- **Do not like talking to strangers or acquaintances.**
- **Avoid eye contact when in public places.**
- **Hate meeting people we know on the streets because then we must talk to them.**
- **We look in the door peephole before leaving so we can avoid our neighbors**
- **Prefer texting over calling. It's easier for one to say no over text than over a phone call.**



Avoid Confrontation

- **Very reserved people.**
- **In business, I would use this to my advantage because I knew the Swedes would bend in order to avoid a confrontation**
- **I still find it quite hard to be confrontational at work. Others like the Germans seem to thrive on confrontation**



Let me tell you about my gall stones....

- **Don't ask people how they are unless you want to get depressed.**
- **They will tell you the gory details of all their problems**
- **Again, it is all about not bragging about your life**



All people are good

- **Trust in society**
- **Believe strangers are good people and do not believe we will be hassled or tricked**



Cute speech

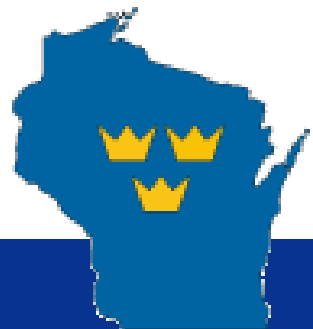
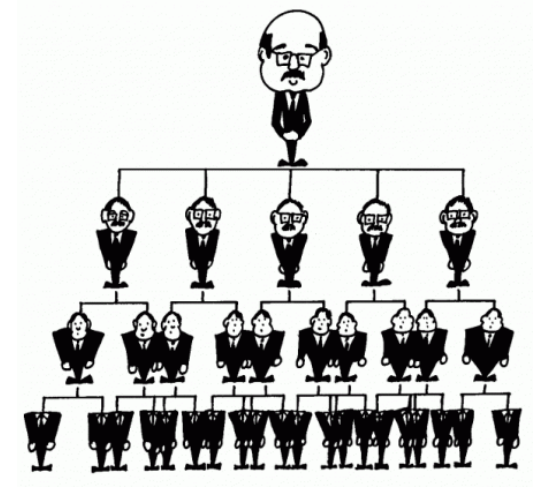
- We like to double up words to be cute
- hej hej
- puss puss
- tack tack

hej—hej



No hierarchy

- We hate hierarchy
- Nobody is any better than anyone else
- Never use Mr or Miss, doctor, professor – everyone is on a first name basis
- You never talk about wealth
- There is a long history of Social Democratic governments and strong unions, which have put an emphasis on spreading wealth across society



Take off your shoes



- **Take off your shoes – it is not hygienic and is barbaric to wear shoes in the house**
- **Travel hint – don't travel with tie shoes, slip on shoes are far easier to get on and off**



Kaffe

- **The most coffee drinking people in the world**
- **Do not have different kinds of coffee. It is just coffee**
- **Very rare to see a Starbucks**
- **No Triple, Venti, Soy, No Foam, Half Sweet, Non-Fat, Caramel Macchiato**



Dress Code

- **Unisex – women like to dress masculinity .**
- **Men like to dress cute**



Kebabizza



- **Combination of a kabab and a pizza and covered with French fries**
- **Heart attack on a platter**



Cash Free Society

- **Cash free society**
- **Coins and bills are a thing of the past, everything is done electronically**
- **Debit Cards**
- **Note: Debit cards processed by Metavante (BMO Harris) do not work in Sweden due to previous fraud issues – take a credit card just in case**
- **Seeing this in the US when working festivals – anyone under 30 does not carry cash**



No pushing

- **Never try to push into a queue**
- **Follow the process**
- **Respect others**
- **Swedes do not line up in a queue but everyone knows the order.**
- **While at the bank, post office, bus station, train station and entertainment facilities make sure to look for a ticket number for the queue and it will be considered extremely rude if you cut or jump the line.**



Döstädning

- **Döstädning' (do standing) means 'death cleaning' or 'death purge'**
- **Swedish people do to save their relatives from sorting out their personal belongings after they die**
- **Death cleaning is not about dusting or mopping up; it is about a permanent form of organization that makes your everyday life run more smoothly.**
- **This is why Myrorna is such a good place to shop for antiques**



Don't eat that

- It's common in Sweden for people not to be the first to start something or the last to finish, be it tipping, eating or doing any other thing. It's mostly considered a sign of bad luck
- Everyone is the same, you do not think yourself better than other and deserve the first or last cookie
- This was an unspoken rule for me growing up and I never knew why



WAIT.....

**Enough Swede bashing,
Americans have some weird
customs as well**



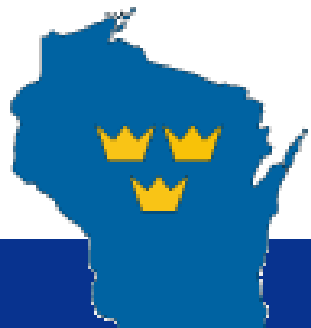
American Idiosyncrasies

- We call our dishes by the wrong name: Entrée is French for ‘entrance’ — literally the starting point of a meal. It’s usually an appetizer.
- We order water incorrectly: The mistake: saying “I’ll just have water” at a restaurant and expecting not to be charged for it. “What kind?” And the answer will be: “Still, sparkling or tap.”
- We eat sweets at the wrong time of day: Foreigners can’t understand why we start the day like we do
- We tip: Most foreigners don’t understand our tipping culture



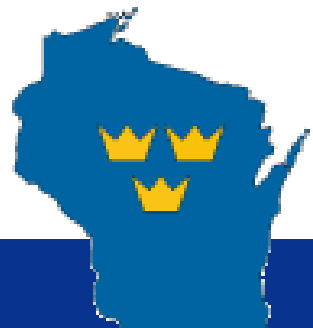
American Idiosyncrasies

- We're loud: “People outside of the USA don't hang out in public or let other people into their business on public transport.”
- We talk to strangers: “Talking about and sharing your life with complete strangers,” In Denmark you'd be a freak if you did that.”
- We complain too much: entitlement is everywhere,” “People complaining that their food isn't ready in 30 seconds, complaining that they pay late fees on their bills, complain the stores aren't laid out how they want it to, etc.”



American Idiosyncrasies

- We drive too much: Foreigners are shocked by US car culture, including how much Americans drive and the long distances we will travel without blinking an eye. “To Europeans 100 years is a short time but 100 miles is a long distance; to Americans, 100 years is a long time and 100 miles is a short distance.”
- We’re a little too patriotic: Turns out that other countries don’t flaunt their flag like we do
- We wear shoes inside: Wearing shoes inside is a no no in many countries—and many foreigners find it odd that not all Americans do the same



American Idiosyncrasies

- We love baseball: Guess what? Apart from a few other countries (Japan, Dominican Republic), foreigners don't get it
- We are nosy: Some foreigners find it strange that Americans are so career focused. Asking everyone 'What do you do?' is atypical
- We have a funny way of greeting people: Being asked a million times: 'How are you?' No, they aren't asking how you are, they are just greeting you. The only acceptable answer is 'fine.'"



American Idiosyncrasies

- We get our dates wrong: Foreigners use a very different format for writing out the date
- We use paper money: Foreigners find our money strange—especially the one-dollar bill



American Idiosyncrasies

Americans don't let go of our past:

- **Identifying as your heritage instead of your nationality. Americans will say that they're Italian, German, Polish, etc., when they don't speak the language and have no real connection to those countries anymore**
- **In other parts of the world, people just identify with the country they were born in or have lived in for a significant amount of time, regardless of their ancestry.**

