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Born around the Second World War: Struggling with Gender Equality With Monica Rudberg

Men's Work and Women's Service

Well, he earned the money and she spent it [laughs]. Because she never worked, she stayed at home. Most did, back then. But she was the one who took care of everything. She paid the bills and did the shopping. I guess that was pretty common at the time. Especially that one person was at home and the other was at work from early morning till the late afternoon.

Q: Did she have the most say in how to bring up the children?

I guess so. I can't really say, because she was at home and we went to school and came home again, and she was there when we came home and he had already gone when we left; when we got up, he had already gone. And he came home after we did. So automatically it's the one staying at home who took care of that, yes.

Q: Did you have a relationship with your father or was he a little distant?

Not distant, I'd say, pretty normal. Not that we've had any sort of, what do you call it, affectionate relationship. (Arne, b. 1930)

Arne, born in 1930, grew up urban working class. He is the son of Anton, who dedicated himself fully to his work in order to provide for his wife and children. Anton himself grew up at a smallholding and moved to the city, where he started working as a carpenter shortly after the First World War. From Arne and the others of the middle generation in our sample, we learn how they as children experienced the refined gender complementarity model promoted by their fathers and ambiguously adapted to by their mothers, and what traces it left in their own conceptions and feelings of gender. The main bulk of the 33 women and men we interviewed from this generation are born between 1940 and 1953; seven are born before the Second World War. Most of them grew up in working-class or lower middle-class families in cities, while some came from the upper middle class. A few grew up at farms or smallholdings and describe much of the same rural work patterns between men and women as the eldest generation did. But even in these cases the division urban/rural holds much less significance in this generation than it did in the previous one.

In the cities, the provider/carer model led to more absent fathers and more present mothers, as in Arne's case. Most of the informants describe the division of work and care in terms of fathers who worked long hours and then fell asleep on the couch with the newspaper over their heads. Some fathers left in the morning before the children were awake, or left after dinner to tend to a second job or to help friends and family with construction work. Social class does not add much variation to this general picture. Dagny's daughter Drude (b. 1940) remembers that the whole family tiptoed around when her organist father rehearsed. They knew he needed peace and concentration to work. In this case the father worked from home a good deal, but he never took part in any kind of housework or carework and was often served his breakfast in bed. The children of this generation remember their fathers mainly from holidays and weekends when they took them camping, went on walks in the forest or took them to sporting events. This is more fondly remembered by the women than by the men. The women remember how joyful these occasions were compared to their mothers' preoccupation with her tedious housework. The men stress that these events, nice as they might have been, did not make the fathers sufficiently present in their lives.

In the implementation of the provider/carer model, the work, toil and economic contributions of women—which were stressed by the eldest generation when talking about the families they grew up in—were transformed to female *service and consumption*, whereas *work and money* belong to the male world. The distinction between men's work outside the family and women's responsibilities at home may resemble what we heard from the upper middle-class families in the previous generation (with fathers sleeping on the couch after dinner and mothers in charge of the children's upbringing). Supported by the improved conditions of living and the family politics of the welfare state in the post-war period, this family model also became the normal one in Norway from the mid-twentieth century in working-class and lower middle-class families (see Chap. 4). However, the stay-at-home mother figure who emerges in the narratives of the middle generation is rarely the educated middle-class mother of the older generation who had maids to help her with the household tasks, but rather is a busy housewife with a limited horizon. As we have already seen in the previous chapter, only a few of the mothers *were* actually exclusively housewives all their lives, yet most of them are described by their children mainly in this capacity. The provider/carer model seems to have led to such a strongly male-connnotated concept of 'work' that women's work became invisible, even when it was done outside the home and paid. Most of the informants say that their fathers did not do anything in the household, some laugh at the very thought that he should, and others remember with some resentment that he never lifted a finger at home and even had to do less than the children. Some of the informants from working-class families with full-time working mothers briefly mention that their fathers helped out a bit, but what they did in the household is not described further. Kirsten (b. 1953), a working-class woman and the daughter of Karen who took the 'mommy-shifts' (evening/night work), does not mention in her interview that her father cooked dinner as her mother did, but rather recalls how her working mother prioritised and spent too much time on the housework. Gunnar, the only man in the eldest generation who said he took part in the childcare, is described by his son Geir as a father who worked around the clock, but Geir also admits that due to his father's special personality, he was always like '*a magnet on children*'. Thus, to

some extent it may have been the case that the father's care was also made invisible within this strict frame of male work and female care.

In the provider/carer family the work of children disappears too, not only symbolically as with women's work and with men's care, but also in reality. Children helping out is irrelevant to a father who works outside home and is to a large extent unnecessary for a mother who has all day to do her housework in a small dwelling in the city. Also in rural areas child labour lost legitimacy during the period of the middle generation. Those who grew up on a farm still see the parents' work as an expression of skill, but we hear much less enthusiastic reports about helping out and learning from parents than was the case in the previous generation (see also Slettan 1984; Thorsen 1993a). The work of children disappears both for material, political and educational reasons (cf. Chap. 4), and as an effect of the provider/carer organisation of the family that became dominant.

This disappearance creates a *generational paradox* in the transmittance of the gender order: even though the gendered division of work in the family was much stronger in the childhood of this generation compared to the previous one, they are not themselves as children brought into it as their own parents were when they grew up. As children, most of the girls, but to some degree also the boys, often did some simple chores like setting the table, peeling the potatoes, washing up or taking out the rubbish. Most of the women remember this with resentment, while a few of the men are in retrospect more appreciative because it gave them better qualifications in housework than their fathers had. Children of full-time working mothers or single mothers had to do more, but it did not represent or resemble the transference of skills that the previous generation experienced and talked about with pride for them either. Thus, there is a rift in the social bond between fathers and sons, and mothers and daughters. Children are not part of their same-sex parent's world as they were in the previous generation. This means less gendering and more individualisation. The obligation in the previous generation, especially for daughters, to put the needs of their families first also disappears with the generation born after 1940. Seen from a generational perspective, the gendered division of work and care in the family by itself contributed to processes of individualisation that undermined the very same gender order. Most of the urban girls and boys attended gender-segregated

classes in primary school, but this practice was discontinued in around 1960. So, in spite of still-existing gender-discriminatory practices (more housework for girls, for instance), the housewife-mothers, as well as the teachers of this time, increasingly did not see boys and girls, but children. The focus was redirected to child development and away from conveying norms for behaviour (Rudberg 1983; Myhre 1994; Nielsen 1998).

Education in this generation went from being a privilege of the few to becoming more of a matter of course, as shown by the fact that half of both the men and women in our sample continued to middle school. But there are also visible class and gender differences with regard to prosperity in school and the choice of further education. In general, the women in our sample did better in school and were less dependent on their social background for educational success than the men. Few of the women, however, had any clear goals and direction when they finished school, but since the educational system was there at hand, extended and free, and their parents urged them to get more education, they drifted into further education in a highly gender-conventional way. Ellen from the eldest generation, who had to give up her intense wish of an education, has a daughter, Elsa, a middle-class girl born in 1948, who drifted into library school by using '*the elimination method in the occupational handbook*'. She had hardly been to a library, but thought the subject looked OK and then it only took three years. Martha's daughter¹ dropped out of high school and never got an education; however, as an adult she worked her way up to a very good career. Johanna, who loved doing maths so strongly but never considered it possible to pursue an education, had a daughter, Jorun, born in 1943 at the farm, whose main motivation to finish high school was that it meant that she could move away from the village: '*it was all about going to school, then you could get away*'. When she later chose to become a teacher, it was '*completely unconscious and without consciousness*'. Most of the women in the middle generation describe their choice of education as more or less accidental, and for many of them the most important consideration was to find a school in the same town as where their fiancé

¹Martha's daughter was not interviewed, but Martha's granddaughter Mari was. Information about Martha's daughter is thus gleaned from the interviews with her mother and her daughter respectively.

went to school. The vast majority of the women in our sample became teachers, nurses, librarians or secretaries, mostly because these jobs were easy to combine with family obligations: *'I don't think I dreamt of anything but getting married and having children, and to be a teacher'*, Helga's daughter Hanne (b. 1947) says. Turid, a working-class girl, also born in 1947, recalls: *'It was important to get through your education first, and then you thought, you really wanted a family.'* A few of the women experienced serious life crises connected to illness when they were young, and these women talk about a more serious and reflected choice of education.

The men did less well in school, but in contrast to their fathers, they do not deem school irrelevant. They give interpersonal and psychological explanations for their failures in forms of insensitive teachers and bullying, or blame themselves for being too lazy. Nevertheless, since the possibilities in the job market were many in the 1960s, most of the men made satisfying careers through climbing the ladder in the companies they worked for. Their choices of trade were no less gender-conventional than the women's educational choices, as all of them, except two, went into technical jobs or sales/business. This kind of career, made possible in a context where theoretical qualifications were seen as increasingly important but still attainable through practice due to an expanding job market and new industries (for instance, the developing IT industry), seems to have encouraged the emergence of a new narrative about masculinity and schooling, 'the myth of effortless achievement' (Epstein 1998). They made their way anyway and often better than those swots who had better grades in school (female as well as male nerds). They redefine the detours they had to take because of bad grades as strengths and a more creative and non-conformist way to success. Thus, in the educational trajectories of this generation we see a mixture of new individualism and old gender scripts, which also characterised their childhoods.

Anger, Distance and Closeness

The rift in the social bond between fathers and sons, and mothers and daughters that came to characterise the childhood of the middle generation is also processed on an emotional level. The harsh critique conveyed

in the interviews of their parents' gendered division of work is infused with these feelings. The ambivalences we found in the eldest generation's identification with the same-sex parent, to whose world they saw themselves as belonging, have in the middle generation become more of a disidentification or a negative identification. What emerges is a new generational pattern of feeling closer to or being more like the opposite-sex parent, but the character of these feelings and their consequences is different for women and men and reflects the asymmetries in the gender order they grew up in. The shift of identification with the same-sex to the opposite-sex parent is stronger and involves much more emotional conflict and temperature for the women than the men.

Sons: Distant Fathers, Close Mothers

What the majority of men emphasise in the depiction of their parents is the available mother and the distant father. There is a remarkable shift in the perspective from 'who father is for the world', which we found in the previous generation of men's admiration for their fathers, to 'who father is for me', which we find in this generation's more low-key and somewhat disengaged descriptions of their fathers. This may express both an increasing individualisation and an actual lack of knowledge of the father's merits since he is working outside the home. His absence may in itself lead either to doubts about how successful he really is in the world or to more abstract fantasies of what it entails to be a man (see also Chodorow 1978).

Evidently, the fathers' masculinity is seen as quite outdated in the eyes of their sons, whether it is the fathers' public positions, work ethics or class identities. Knut, who held his own father in high esteem, has a son, Kjell, a working-class boy born in 1946, who says sarcastically: '*Father was and still is the last worker in the country, I think.*' Kjell finds his father's proficiency as a handyman convenient, but it does not make his father an object of admiration, as in the previous generation. This may also reflect the social mobility in the middle generation: just to be an honest worker is nothing to strive for. The relationship with the father is described as more bland than explicitly conflictual. Einar—the man who was injured

in the war and made huge sacrifices in order to provide for his family so well that his wife could stay at home with the children—is described by his son Egil in this way:

I guess he has never been the type to be very ... He has done his job differently when it comes to kids and childrearing. He made sure we had a place to live and money for food and clothes. It hasn't been very ... He hasn't been the type to have a lot of bodily contact or to express much emotion. Very firm, you could say ... There haven't been any particularly serious conflicts between us. But not a very close relationship either, at least not in many, many years. But I have a lot of respect for him. He is a very sort of strait-laced person and honest and sincere and dutiful. And he has done quite a few things that command respect, I think. (Egil, b. 1949)

What is wrong with fathers is not their authoritarian style, but their lack of communicative skills, emotional presence and openness. Kjell compares his father's emotional closure with his much warmer and kinder maternal grandfather, who represented 'everything father wasn't ... attentive and caring'. John's son Jan, a working-class boy born in 1947, characterises his father as a 'fairly bad psychologist ... there was nothing directly bad in him, but he is an egoist ... selfish and takes himself pretty seriously'. Among the middle-class sons there is more identification with fathers based on admiration for their knowledge and activities, but also they agree that their fathers' strong side was not psychological insight. Helge, born in 1938 at the farm his father Harald bought, talks with pride about his father's political activities and vast consumption of books, but adds that 'I don't think he has read any psychological novels'.² It is remarkable that the only men in this generation—Geir, Magne and Helge—who say that they admire and resemble their fathers are the sons of the three men who for different reasons spent more time with their children: Gunnar,

² Holter and Aarseth (1993), who interviewed 23 Norwegian men between the age of 25 and 45 at the same time as we did our interviews (1991–1992), find much of the same: two-thirds of the men had negative or bland descriptions of their fathers—and their critique is not directed towards the father's authority but towards his absence and distance to the children. A Swedish study (Bengtsson 2001) of men born in the mid-1960s indicates an increasing identification with mothers, compared to men born in the mid-1930s who only identify with their fathers.

Martin and Harald.³ Geir stresses his father's way with children and also sees himself as a sociable person, just like his father and grandfather (the tailor). 'A lot of silliness in our bodies', he says about the playfulness of all the men in the family. At the same time, the sons also report a positive relationship with their mothers and say that they resemble them too.

The majority of the men say that they are unlike their fathers and that they had a closer relationship with their mothers.⁴ She was the one they went to and confided in when they had problems or felt miserable. The description of the mother is often characterised by a tone of tenderness. They acknowledge with gratitude the comfort and service she provided. What mothers actually *do* becomes much more visible here than in the previous generation of men's often muted depiction of their mothers' work. The men in this middle generation are also more aware of the potential fate of invisibility of their mothers' services, like in Egil's account of his mother:

Yes, she was very caring at home, afraid that we wouldn't have everything we needed and was there for us in all possible ways, but perhaps too kind, she didn't demand enough from us. She fixed everything. It was like that, she cooked for us, made our packed lunches. Organised our clothes, tidied our rooms too. And kept an eye out and ... She didn't maybe get a lot in return. What can I say, she might have, since we have had such a good relationship all these years and we never had any big conflicts, so I think she was happy with how we turned out. But in everyday life she got very little attention and praise for the work she did.
(Egil, b. 1949)

There are still traces of the mother as the kind victim, but Egil knows much more about what his mother actually does and he emphasises the reward in terms of relationships his mother gained. In the wake left after the absent fathers, the mother and the kind of things she does have become more visible. The close relationships between mothers and sons appear to have contributed to an identification with care and the emo-

³Holter and Aarseth (1993: 66) find the same: fathers whose work permitted closer contact with their sons are perceived as 'good fathers'.

⁴Two men, both upper middle class, describe psychologically labile mothers and a relation of distance. These two men connect this to specific circumstances in their families and as something uncommon for the time.

tional aspects of life. Willy, a working-class boy (b. 1925), says: *'I could almost read my mother's feelings.'* It may also lead to an incipient understanding that not only cooking but also care in general may represent a piece of decent work and a job to be done (see also Holter and Aarseth 1993). This does not, however, entail an identification with the housework she does or her position as a housewife. Whereas the men in the eldest generation felt empathy with their mothers who had to work too much, the men in the middle generation feel sorry for the potential lost in their mothers who were restricted as housewives with too little to do. Kjell puts it this way:

It's a shame ... I would describe my mother as, well, how should I put it, I nearly said that she hasn't been able to use her abilities. I actually think she has far superior abilities to my father when it comes to ... well, maybe not the practical things, but more intelligence-wise. My mother is more intelligent than my father. But she has never, until recently she has never had the chance to exert herself outside of the house. She was always at home. And I think she maybe should have had the chance to work outside the house earlier than she did. I think she would have enjoyed it, I don't doubt that for a second. (Kjell, b. 1946)

The sons in this generation do not show the same contempt for the mother's weak position and the emptiness of her life that will become so prevalent among the daughters. There seems to be a new possibility for sons to identify with the mother's emotional care work in this generation, without necessarily giving up the strength or autonomy usually associated with masculinity. Even when the mother is described as an energetic housewife with 'dust on her brain', she is seen as a powerful figure. The tone is humorous and the descriptions respectful, like in this account from the otherwise quite father-identified Geir:

Very thorough and dust on the brain, cleaning herself to death. Vacuuming and cleaning and when she does something, it's not bloody half-arsed. Then she does it 100 per cent. I don't think you can find people like that today, when it comes to cleaning and tidying and order ... But maybe she likes to be in charge. What can I say, the boss, but I don't mean the boss in the strict sense of the word. But if she has said something, it's smart to do what she has said.

Q: Did she have most of the power at home?

Yes, she has been the chief [laughs]. Absolutely, she has been the chief. (Geir, b. 1948)

Daughters: Weak Mothers, Rational Fathers

The warm emotional tone in this working-class boy's description of his chief-housewife-mother stands in striking contrast to the chilly tone of the following account from Inger, a working-class girl born in 1950. She is the daughter of Ingrid, who had to help out in her mother's shop until she was 25 and then married and became a housewife. Inger says about her mother:

A very skilled housewife, perfect, you know ... newly polished silver and ... all that, and homemade bread on Saturdays ... and that type of thing ... She is kind of living a lie, she hasn't done anything sensible with her life other than being a stay-at-home wife. (Inger, b. 1950)

The mothers that emerge in the accounts from sons and daughters in this generation are very different indeed. Also among the female informants, the critique of the outdated mentality of work is directed mainly towards their same-sex parent, but as girls they were much more exposed to their mothers than the boys were to their fathers. Jorun grew up on a farm, just like her mother Johanna, but we find nothing of Johanna's enthralled description of how much she learnt from her mother when Jorun speaks about her mother:

The only thing that counted was working, working all the time. And she didn't work at a normal pace, she had to work furiously. I don't think I remember how old I was when I decided that I would never become like that ... and that I was waiting to get out of there ... I'm not sure she needed to do that, to do everything 110 per cent, 100 would have been enough ... She even monogrammed my father's handkerchiefs. (Jorun, b. 1944)

This is a pattern of which we saw traces among rural working-class/lower middle-class women in the previous generation, but in the middle gen-

eration the contempt really explodes. The mother's skill sets are hardly seen as important at all and she is rejected as a model for the daughter's life. Even the mothers' advice to their daughters about getting an education, not marrying too early and becoming economically independent is remembered by many of the women as yet another example of the mothers' occupation with control and facade: '*She always went on about getting an education ... we were better than others, et cetera, and that was complete horseshit*', says Jorun. They rarely connect the advice from their mothers to their own successful educational trajectories, and thus tend to make this intergenerational link invisible. The tone of the daughters is often angry or contemptuous and it has a considerably higher temperature than the men's bland critique and disappointment in their fathers. More than half of the women report negative or clearly ambivalent relationships with their mothers and very few mention her as the parent they felt closest to. Few think they resemble her—and if they do, they do not see it as something to their advantage. Some of them admit that the mother had a potential for doing something else, getting an education or a career, but, in contrast to the men, they often blame the mother herself for not having done anything with her life. The open negative identification with the mother is also supported by a more liberal tone in ideas of child rearing and a more psychological orientation. The daughters talk through the modern psychological discourse when they criticise the mother's emotional closure, mixed signals and endless occupation with keeping up a neat and proper facade. In this we can see a parallel to the men's critique of their fathers' emotional indolence, but with more emphasis on the mothers' emotional messiness.

Some of the farmer girls in this generation still acknowledge their mothers' strength and proficiency, and some of the middle-class girls see their mothers as kind and cultured, and may also remember with gratitude their mothers' interest in their education. For a few of them, identification rises from compassion with the weak mother. The upper middle-class girl Olaug says that she became a feminist when she was seven years old by seeing her mother struggle with the laundry in the basement: '*she was standing in a black hole, doing laundry*'. Olaug is one of the few daughters in this generation who helped out at home:

I felt that she had a lot to do, and I felt that I ought to help her from I was very little, because I felt sorry for her ... Yes, I was there for her, I was, all the time. My sister wasn't and my brother wasn't. They didn't understand. They didn't see what it was like for her—and I'm still the one who understands. (Olaug, b. 1946)

But not even these good daughters take their mothers as role models anymore. The farmer girls do not want to stay in the rural areas and the middle-class girls tend to identify more strongly with their fathers, whether emotionally or as models for their own lives. This is also the case in families where the mothers worked full-time. The mothers have lost authority both culturally and psychologically. Those who had mothers who stayed at home felt surveilled; those who had working mothers complain about having been overloaded with responsibilities. In the eyes of the girls in this generation, mothers just couldn't get it right.

The father is the admired parent for almost all the girls in this generation.⁵ Only in cases where the father was violent or very moody did the daughter resort to the mother, who was then seen as a victim in need of the daughter's protection. The overwhelming pattern is that fathers are idealised as either very rational and modern (compared to the mothers' intolerance and manipulative ways), or calm and generous (compared to the mothers' stinginess and perfectionism), or sensitive and creative (compared to the mothers' superficial sociability or boring rationality), or as knowledgeable and oriented towards a bigger world (compared to the mothers who are only occupied with their own house). The daughters share the fathers' interest in the bigger world and want to become like them: *'I'd say I was a Daddy's girl, yes, I was ... Mother was a homebody, she mainly stayed at home [speaks quietly]*', says Solveig (b. 1945), who grew up at a smallholding. There is something at stake here between mothers and daughters that is different from the relationship between fathers and sons, and between mothers and sons. The combination of increasing individualisation and the strong gendered provider/carer model in their

⁵ Bengtsson also finds a change from women born in the 1930s who identified with their mothers to a more diverse pattern among those born in the 1950s and 1960s. Like us, she finds that the women who identified with their fathers were daughters of stay-at-home mothers (Bengtsson 2001: 88).

families seems to present the daughters of this generation with a very difficult psychological dynamic with their mothers, and the relationships with the fathers must be understood as part of this. There are several aspects to this.

One is that the provider/carer model positions the mother with less status and power in the family than, for instance, women in the farmer or fishing culture, or in the old middle-class family, where she represented and transmitted the educational and cultured values in the family. As a housewife, the mother becomes more like a servant in the family. This is not only the case in relation to the husband, but also represents a displacement of power between mother and children, especially for the daughters: from being one who assisted her mother, the daughter now may see herself as her mother's only task in life: *'I am the most important thing that happened in her life, that she gave birth to me is kind of her main feat'*, says Gerd's daughter Grete, a rural working-class girl born in 1946. This places the daughter in an ambiguous gender position: she is of the same gender as the weak mother, but is at the same time her superior.

Another aspect is that this weak mother's everyday presence in the family also gives her another kind of power—an emotional and psychological power over the children. This is an issue that is much more elaborated upon by daughters than by sons. The women's recollection of their mothers' greater indulgence with their brothers may indicate that the mothers were less controlling and more service-minded towards their sons than towards their daughters. Sons may also to a greater degree have been able to receive the mothers' care without feeling caught in it because their gender safeguarded the psychological separation from her. The two men who described psychologically labile mothers seem to distance themselves more from the relational problems than the daughters do. Compared to this, the daughters' high level of conflict and strong ambivalences between anger and feeling guilty, between the craving of freedom and the longing for endless care and love, indicate that they have struggled more with upholding the boundaries and their own identity as a separate being. This double-sided face of weakness and power is what comes through in the daughters' description of their mothers' manipulative and psychologically labile behaviour and the way in which

the mother drew the children into the psychological tensions and conflicts in the family:

One couldn't speak of anything, and we mustn't ... nothing could ... see the light of day, and I guess I understood later that this was a big mistake. We should've talked about all those things, gotten things aired out and ... been done with it all. (Jorun, b. 1943)

My mother has rather ... in a way disciplined, or has had to stoop much in her life, so that it has become a bit more ... she has found other ways to maybe get back at people, or to survive, right. (Grete, b. 1946)

The daughters' idealisation of their fathers can be seen in relation to this: they were needed as psychological liberators from the emotionally chaotic relation to mothers and to grow out of the dependency on the mother (Chodorow 1978). The different variations we see in the general pattern of negative/ambivalent relation to mothers and idealisation of fathers, then, will rely, among other things, on the father's ability to fill this role as the liberator from the mother.

A third aspect is that the daughters of this generation are expected, by parents, teachers and politicians, to get higher education and head in a different direction from their mothers (cf. Chap. 4), and their fathers are the only available models for a life outside of the family. We find no mention of weak and ill fathers in this generation: fathers are, almost by definition, strong and secure.

In spite of the strong gendering of work and care in the environment in which the middle generation grew up, the psychological consequences of the very same arrangement seems to have gone in the opposite direction. The disidentification with their same-sex parent triggered complicated processes of cross-gendering and potential degendering. The values of the opposite-sex parent's world became more visible and attractive. For the men, this does not entail a full identification with the mother's work and status, and they do not demarcate themselves from their fathers in the same intense, emotional way that the women do from their mothers. In this sense the men are the ones with double identifications in this generation. For the women, the identification with the father is more unambiguous, but there are emotionally unsettled issues at stake in their relationships with their mothers and in handling the fact that they are of

the same gender as her. Considering the life project of their fathers—to refine gender complementarity in order to save their wives the struggles their mothers had endured, and to secure their children a safe and good childhood—and the sacrifices both men and women of this generation made to accomplish this dream—it is painful to see how little acknowledgement and understanding their children had for this project. But this generational drama also created the emotional energy that made it possible to enter the difficult process of transforming the complementary gender order.

Sexualising the Body

Compared with the cross-gender identifications with parents and with the elements of degendering that characterise the childhood of the middle generation, their period of youth is described in surprisingly gendered terms. If the eldest generation could be described as having become gendered within their families, the middle generation instead became gendered among their peers during adolescence. The strengthening of the youthful gender script in this period is closely connected with the new flourishing youth cultures, and young people becoming a new and important consumer group (see Chap. 4). This does not in itself, however, explain what feelings of gender these new practices could possibly connect to. Is there a link between the marked sexualisation of the body in this generation and the ambivalences towards one's own gender in a time when gender was still a strong symbolic and structural reality? For the men, it appears that the same-sex peers became a more important model for masculinity than fathers, who were not only more absent than before, but also too 'old-fashioned' to emulate in these new, dynamic times. For the women, both female friends and heterosexual relations appear to have become important sources of closeness as well as liberation from their mothers. These gendered peer relations were to a large degree mediated through bodily practices.

The men in this generation perceived, as their fathers did, their bodies as unproblematic: *'No, I can't remember that being a problem. It has been fine'* is Helge's immediate response when asked about how he experienced

his body when he came of age. The self-evident body is no longer connected with the mentality of work, but rather with sports and physical competitions, which seem to have replaced work as the arena for masculine physical achievements. But the insistence on body strength coming 'naturally' is the same as in the previous generation, implying, for instance, that bodybuilding is scorned as effeminate 'self-indulgence'.

In one respect the body has become a more explicitly male issue in this generation, which is evident in the worry about what their bodies reveal about their masculine sexual identity, and especially whether their genitals were masculine enough. When Knut in the oldest generation was asked about puberty, he started talking about the war instead. When his son Kjell is asked the same question, he relates in detail to his own bodily insecurity:

Yes, I remember quite a bit of that ... To go into the shower and see ... I remember well that it was difficult to have a smaller willy than some of the others. Than many, maybe. I didn't have hair down there either, as one should. So I was probably abnormal. I don't know if I was scared, but I was definitely very insecure and unsure whether I was like everybody else. And then we read that this willy was supposed to be hard around the clock. And if it didn't do that then it was definitely no good. You were supposed to be very tough. I wasn't tough and didn't have a hard-on around the clock either. And then one after another started going to bed with girls. If it was true or not, in retrospect ... there were probably lots of lies. I found this hard and I guess I experienced an insecure puberty. I probably did. (Kjell, b. 1946)

This bodily uncertainty also involves competition among the boys: comparing penis size in the school shower is a dark memory for many. There are also stories of hurtful ignorance and embarrassment, for instance, when it came to buying condoms. Thus, we are able to discern a new vulnerability—and therefore objectification—in contrast to the 'self-evident' body of the men in the eldest generation, but it is also an objectification that puts more emphasis on sexuality.

However, the sexualising of the body is much stronger when the men talk about the female body and in the importance they give to the physical attractiveness of women. For instance, this is seen in the way they

formulate their ideals for the woman of their dreams. Whereas their fathers, when asked about such ideals, either went silent or vaguely gestured towards their own wives, the men in this generation readily offered details concerning breasts, figure, hairstyles, hair colour and so on—often with reference to film icons. Sometimes this focus on female bodies is depicted in the interviews as a sort of youthful sin, which later in life becomes disturbing in relation to ideas of gender equality. Kjell tells us that he was body-obsessed as a young man, dreaming about girls with long hair and big breasts. His ideal of a woman has evolved since then, he says, but evidently some of the old dreams are still alive:

If I have to pick an ideal, it has to be a woman who ... who has courage and audacity ... who is highly intelligent ... who is engaged, and who is attractive. Not necessarily as beautiful as a film star, but she must have large breasts.

For the women in the middle generation too, the body is much more in focus than for the women in the eldest generation, and much more problematic than for the men in their own generation. The relation to the generative body is now the least of the problem. Half of the women were informed by their mothers in advance and the rest knew about it from their friends. Puberty is discursively installed as a life phase and questions about ‘when did you feel that you were grown-up?’ are most often answered with ‘my first period’, in contrast with the eldest generation, who mentioned their confirmation and end of school when asked the same question. In this generation it is also less problematic to tell the mother about what had happened and get her to help with sanitary belts and pads. The experience of menstruation is more varied than it was among their mothers, who all felt that it was a ‘curse’. Most of the daughters are clearly ambivalent—menstruation is a nuisance but also a fact of life.

The sexualisation and gendering of the body become most evident in the women’s intense beauty routines. Compared with their mothers’ innocent joy of getting new dresses and shoes, the practices of the women in this generation are much more elaborate and detailed. There is quite a lot of pleasure in this kind of beauty work, which was often done together with female friends. Fashion, consumption and a more sexualised youth

culture are all involved in this process—and both the lack of same-sex generational bonds and the heightened levels of conflict between daughters and mothers may promote the insistent wish to be different and to preside over their own bodies and looks. However, in the overwhelming number of cases, the project is described as a hopeless affair. Almost all the women remember having very negative feelings about their own bodies as young girls, and their stories circle around the new concept of ‘flaws’, a word only used by the women in our interviews in this generation. The contrast to the men is striking: the image of the relatively unproblematic bodies, where only penis size and embarrassment when purchasing condoms were issues to worry about, is countered by the women’s long list of flaws, complaining about being too big, too fat, too tall, too thin, too flat-chested, having too big a nose or too large a space between the front teeth. ‘*I got nowhere with my looks*’, Dagny’s daughter Drude says, even if her mother—like most of the upper middle-class mothers—told her that she was pretty. Even women who show us pictures of themselves as lovely young girls remember how unhappy they were with their appearances. This is also the first generation that mentions dieting and exercising to keep their weight down. Olaug kept a record of her weight and always compared it to ‘Miss Norway’s’, of whom she had a picture on her wall in her bedroom. Some of the women remember weight loss that would have been understood as eating disorders today, but at that time their parents just wondered if they might have some caught some infection that caused them to lose weight.

Youth in this generation coincided with the period of the ‘sexual revolution’, which obviously had an impact with regard to both discourse and behaviour, but again in quite gender-specific ways. No one in this generation waits to have sex until they are engaged or married, but for the women, their first time is most often with the partner they later marry, whereas for the men it is not. The fear of pregnancy is present for both genders and it appears to have been well founded, since the use of contraceptives is quite haphazard. The dread of pregnancy is in this generation not due to social shame, as it was for the women in the previous generation, but threatened freedom. Pregnancy meant that one ‘had to marry’, and quite a few of both the men and the women in our sample experienced exactly this.

The looser norms seem to have left this generation in a void concerning what one should and should not do. The sharp line between nice and cheap girls that guided the informants in the eldest generation has become blurred. A new division between 'fun' girls and 'dull' girls arises. The 'fun' girls are the popular ones, the ones attractive to boys and the ones who are always invited to parties. The middle-class girls in our sample mainly chose the safety of 'being smart', resigning themselves to the fact that this also made them bores. Drude kissed a boy she did not know from before on her high school graduation trip to Copenhagen in 1958 and had severe moral qualms afterwards. When she later, at 23 years old, was pondering having sex with her steady boyfriend, she had pangs of doubt. She consulted her mother Dagny, who, as a liberal and educated woman, thought it was quite OK as long as Drude felt it was a serious relationship. But this only added to Drude's ruminations because then she had to think about whether the relation was serious *enough*. The absence of moral standards seems to have promoted reflections on personal morality, which again led to more variation in behaviour. Vigdis, a working-class girl born in 1951, recalls: *'I pondered a lot: what can one do? What can't one do? What do the others do? What can I do?'* Some girls, like Drude, became extremely careful; others took advantage of the liberal norms and went around searching for exciting boys. But that the sexual pressure on girls became much stronger than in the previous generation is beyond doubt. Many of the working-class girls whose sexual respectability was more vulnerable than that of the middle-class girls solved the problem by entering into steady relationships at an early age (see also Skeggs 1997).

Also among the men in this generation, we sense some confusion about what rules the girls followed and how to interpret the signals from them. Quite a few of the men experienced as young boys falling in love with a girl and being rejected for reasons they did not understand. The working-class boy Jan (b. 1947), says that *'infatuations are actually really painful. You become a volcano, violent forces really. Emotions that you think you don't have, right. That enter [laughs]*. For some of them, this meant giving up intimacy and instead going for all the sex they could get. But the sexual debut could be embarrassing, and the rules of conduct when it comes to sex were not experienced as clear-cut either. The working-class boy Geir describes his sexual debut quite defensively:

It wasn't rape, it wasn't. She wanted to, but it wasn't quite 100 per cent OK, I remember that. Struggled a little, but I don't know if that was to, what do you say, play hard to get or something. It never quite dawned on me ... We were making out ... and you can feel her body underneath the clothes and all that, and you begin to undress her, and, it's fine that there's a limit sooner or later, you knew that because you'd been there before. But when the whole thing, there was no raised finger or verbal protest, nothing like that. It was more like giggling and laughing, and as I said, if it had been rape, I'd have known. But for me ... I was sure she was holding back to tease me. That was my experience. But when the clothes were off and stuff, it had to be OK. (Geir, b.1948)

Confused or not, what clearly has changed in this generation of men is that the feelings of guilt or shame that were so obvious among the eldest generation of men have disappeared, and the fear of hurting the girl also seems to have diminished. Almost all of the men had their first heterosexual intercourse outside a steady relationship. It is often talked about as a fun story about youthful clumsiness, '*finished on the way in*', but also involving excitement and '*violently*' good feelings. Some of the men are rather brutal—they seem to have grabbed whatever was offered them, but afterwards they describe these sexually active women as almost nymphomaniac, and not girlfriend material. Sexuality is clearly anchored in the body—almost what the male body is all about—and yet is also seen as a separate thing, not really a part of the man himself. Helge comments on his own youthful sexuality in this way: '*sex is something the body came up with*'. Their choice of marriage seems to have come as a rather pragmatic decision, not involving a lot of romantic feelings. Some of the men dreaded the idea of losing their freedom, some 'had to marry', while others realised that the time had come. Seen in retrospect the men do not recommend the split between intimacy and sexuality that guided their youth. More than half of them divorced later and stress that it was only in their second marriage that they learned about the value of closeness and intimate relations. This process should probably be seen in the light of the changing discourses of both sexuality and gender relations in the period, but perhaps the psychological roots of the dilemma could also be found in the cross-identifications with their mothers?

Whereas the men occupy the new youth cultural arena with gusto, sexuality is not discussed in terms of female desire and satisfaction at all. Just like the men, the women reject the possibility of female initiative when they were young girls: *'not even thinking about it'*, as one of them puts it. Some of the women use the euphemism of being *'swept off their feet'* to describe their infatuations, but we are a far cry from the more or less uncontrollable lust that the men in this generation describe. On the contrary, the heterosexual debut of the women is often depicted as rather indifferent or even hurtful. The most important and almost only legitimate reason for sex among the young women is to be in love, and romance is a much more elaborated theme among the women in this generation than in the previous one, where only some of the middle-class women talked about it. Yet this focus on romantic love often had a somewhat instrumental touch to it: across social class, the young women's relationships with boyfriends often became part of the liberation from parents. That this relatively unprotected journey out into the world is quite risky is not so surprising given the stories we heard from the men. In some of our interviewees' cases the risks involved rape and abortions, with all the humiliation, anxiety and bodily pains that these involved. The route to autonomy could also lead to a *new* asymmetrical relationship where the young woman found herself controlled by her boyfriend instead of her parents. Kirsten describes a psychologically invading mother as well as a controlling father, depicting her own *'restless'* and *'wild'* youth as a way out. At 16 she became involved in a gang where the older boys were attractive, not least because of their access to cars. As a grown-up, her description of this exciting life is still enthusiastic:

We drove around, Opel ... huge car, it was very exciting, but I was only about seventeen years old myself ... down to the centre, of course, people-watching and going to the Main Square, and ... in winter we drove to this other place outside the city centre and drifted around there, it was very exciting, it was quite cool because not that many of us were allowed to have a car, and this guy was ... nineteen. (Kirsten, b. 1953)

Alas, Kirsten's wild youth only lasted a year as she became pregnant and the two families—her own and her boyfriend's—arranged for the young

couple to get married. This marriage did not last, since the young man proved to be both irresponsible and childish, never taking care of the baby but remaining one of the boys. In retrospect it is hard for her and many of the women in this generation to explain why they chose the men they did, and almost half of the early marriages ended in divorce.

The paradoxical liberation through sexuality on the men's terms seems to have implied stronger gender differentiation and heterosexual normativity among young women in this generation, in spite of their identification with their fathers and disidentification with their mothers. Yet, the lack of clear-cut moral guidelines also resulted in a stronger awareness of their own responsibility and a potential reflexivity with regard to the double standards involved. This may have instigated the frustration that for this generation of women would not remain a subdued irritation in the way it did for their mothers.

Gender as Power or a Fact of Life?

Seen in connection with the bland or negative emotional relationship with the same-sex parent, it may not be surprising that men and women in this generation have much to say about what kind of man/woman they do *not* want to be, whereas their positive alternatives are more vague or seem to develop only through the practices of their adult life. However, the energy to search for new ways of doing and defining gender can also be seen as fuelled by the energy of disidentification and cross-identification from their childhood and youth. The challenge they face is to redefine the meaning of their own gender through an identification with the other. The gender differentiation in their youth period may be seen as a temporary remedy, but they do not stay there and in their further life trajectories, women and men seem to handle the challenge of gender in different ways. Since the meaning of gender changed quite radically during their lives, especially among those who received more education than their parents, their reflections on gender in the interviews are tied more to a reflection on their adult lives. This, however, does not prevent a link also to feelings of gender stemming from their childhood and youth.

The women talk about gender differences solely with reference to differential treatment, inequality and power relations. Two formative experiences are relevant to many of them: the unequal treatment they experienced compared with their brothers and the lack of equality in their marriages, the latter of which led to the many divorces. Nearly all of the women who had brothers remember with resentment that their brothers had to do less housework, were the mother's favourite and, in a few cases, were given better educational possibilities. Yet the differences they report are quite minor compared to what the previous generations experienced with much less resentment. In contrast to their mothers' sibling rivalry, which was most often directed at their own 'league' of sisters, the women's jealousy in this generation is directed towards their brothers. Boys and men have become someone they compare themselves to and any potential relevance of gender differences is banished. It is remarkable that so few of the men talk about sibling rivalry and, if they do, it is connected to competition between brothers. This may reflect their position in the gender hierarchy and their more self-evident right of being.

Many women in this generation describe themselves in gender-neutral or traditionally masculine terms: *'quite strong, quite social, quite creative, to some extent ambitious'*, says Nina, a rural working-class girl born in 1944, who received higher education. These qualities are not seen as masculine, but rather as expressions of modern femininity, compared with their mother's old-fashioned domestic femininity. This degendering of modern femininity also reflects the fact that 'masculine' skills were at this time increasingly valued in the course of education and work for those women who became middle class. In spite of the strong cross-gender identification with their fathers, the women construct their identities almost exclusively along the lines of female generational difference, rather than as gender difference. For the women in this generation, the negative relationships with their mothers and positive identification with their fathers seem to block the view to the fathers' part in the creation of the mothers as fussy housewives. Their mothers' personal qualities are described as the negative opposite to what they see as positive in themselves: whereas their mothers were occupied with minor details, lived for others, were dependent and submissive, occupied with facade, perfectionist, manipulative, personally insecure, ignorant and old-fashioned,

they see themselves as engaged in society at large, doing things on their own, independent and demanding equality, relaxed, open and honest, standing up for themselves, enlightened and modern. This is clearly a construction of the 1950s housewife from the perspective of the Women's Movement and the modern gender equality norms that came with the 1970s. It is based on an exaggeration of their mothers' identities and practices as housewives, and also seems to feed on their feelings of gender from their childhood.

The negative evaluation of traditional femininity is also seen, especially among the middle-class women, when they talk about girlishness or sexualised femininity. Some of them say that they have never felt comfortable with too much intimate talk or preoccupation with appearances; others remember girls from their childhood who excluded other girls who did not conform to a stereotypical girls' culture. They renounce their own youthful selves as submissive, ignorant and traditional. It was only later and under the influence of education, divorce or the general atmosphere of the Women's Movement that they '*woke up*', they say. In this way, the contrast between the old-fashioned and the modern femininity is also a narrative about personal development and increasing enlightenment: the emphasis is on how they fought their way out of a restricted gender role by themselves and became the self-determined persons they are today. Nina describes it in this way:

I don't think I became free until I reached thirty. And then I divorced, and yes, felt like I really made a choice for the first time, that I chose something myself, for real ... So in my thirties I felt completely superior in a way ... economically independent despite having two small children. And I did my job well, I thought I was a good teacher ... a very good period and I was very strong ... I felt very much like I was running my own existence. (Nina, b. 1943)

The men's developmental narratives are almost the opposite. Whereas the women see themselves as having gone from a problematic femininity as young girls to a mature individuality, the men in the same period describe a route from a self-evident masculinity in their youth to an adult masculinity that is more often experienced as 'in crisis'. The issue of gender raises more difficult questions for the men than for the women, as the

men tend to define gender more in terms of difference than in terms of generation. Most of them, regardless of class, want to become a different kind of man than their distant and 'bad psychologist' fathers, but instead of neutralising traditional gender traits as the women do, they ponder to what degree this wanted generational difference might make them 'feminine'. Kjell says:

I probably have ... yes, I have always had an affinity for softer values, well, a little. I guess I'm what I consider a feminine man without being feminine. But I guess I have some, and then I mean positive traits that entail daring to show feelings and daring to cuddle with animals and children. Men often feel insecure about things like that. I guess I am more secure there. And today I must say that the ideal man, that's got to be me. (Kjell, b. 1946)

A way to secure the gender border is to underline sexual difference and attraction, which most of the men do regardless of their stance on gender issues. They may be critical of the macho behaviour of their youth, but not of their belief in gender differences. As a result of this dilemma between gender and individuality, we find an often quite paradoxical mix of claims of gender equality and claims of gender difference in the stories of almost every male interviewee of this generation, a combination that is much less present among the women.

In different ways the men work to redefine or extend or adjust their masculinity without losing it. For some of them, like Kjell, this project involves a strong critique of traditional masculinity and a concomitant embracement of behaviour that connotes femininity, like emotional openness and adopting 'soft values'. Kjell's account of traditional masculinity bears traces of feminist critiques from the 1970s and 1980s:

What do you think they [men] talk about when they're out? Work and money. Status and money. Women can talk about children, they can talk about a lot of things. They can talk about economics and status too. And they talk about environmental issues. While men care about money and status. How much do you make in your current job? What are you working on right now? They can talk about football. And cars. If you start talking about children, what do men do? They glance at their watches and say that they probably have to go soon. They become insecure right away. (Kjell, b. 1946)

The psychological discourse also finds its way into these men's self-descriptions. They talk about situations where they have felt secure or insecure, or about feelings of 'alienation', 'inner rage' or 'the importance of being yourself'. They describe themselves as a different kind of man than their fathers, with a more developed inner life, softer values and emotional capacities. But having already gendered these capacities (or the absence of them) so strongly, they face the problem of indirectly feminising themselves. This is a brand-new generational pattern—even if it does not apply to the majority of the men in this generation. Some have more classical critical remarks against what they see as the unsympathetic aspects of women's behaviour, especially gossiping, talking behind people's backs and exposing private details about their husbands to others, and they tend to believe that this constitutes expressions of innate or natural gender differences. Geir, for instance, the working-class man who talked about his stay-at-home mother with humour and loving respect, simply cannot stand 'ladies' talk' and feels completely suffocated by it:

I don't think they talk about anything. No matter what they talk about, it doesn't interest me. If they talked about football, I wouldn't bother to listen to them. I can't explain it. Like up in the cafeteria here, maybe the ones I work with in particular. If there's a table of women and I sat down, I wouldn't have been able to get my food down. No, I can't explain it. But for me it's completely out there ... My cousin's husband, he's a woman, because he likes to sit in the kitchen and babble with women. So he isn't quite right in the head in my opinion. There's something wrong with him, in my opinion. The two of us have nothing to talk about. (Geir, b. 1948)

But even among the men with more traditional views of gender, we find expressions of the necessity for men to learn to be more open and talk about their feelings or 'handle strong emotions'. Formative experiences later in their lives have made this clear. One is the experience of divorce, which made quite a few of them more aware of their own emotional vulnerability. Another is being aware that communicative skills, emotional openness and being 'a bit of a psychologist' have also become important as work qualifications (see Illouz 2007; Aarseth 2009b). Ragnar, an upper middle-class man born in 1936, and thus one of the

older men in this generation, took a course in Personal Development in connection with work and has decided to send his two teenage sons to this course too, in order to help developing their self-esteem and positive attitudes.

A different way of extending masculinity is found among some of the other older men in this generation, who had children at a late age and whose focus is less on psychological self-development than on the wish to become a different kind of father and combine this with a responsible masculinity. Trygve, middle class and born in 1919, is a case in point. As a young man he lived a very adventurous life as a sailor, hunter, mountaineer and participant in the resistance movement during the war. Even though he connects his choice of being a present father to how old he was when he had children, it doesn't even occur to him that the tough 'masculine' values of his youthful activities should be incompatible with being a warm and caring father. But even in the stories of Trygve and the other men who chose to become more present fathers than was usual in their generation, gender differences frequently appear, not so much with reference to body and appearances, but in different orientations and psychological capabilities. Helge, who shared both housework and childcare in his marriage, says that there are, after all, also innate gender differences. He refers to his own children's toy preferences and says that there *are* differences '*even if the mother and the myths say otherwise*'.

In different forms, new versions of masculinity and old gender dichotomies live side by side in the men of this generation, whether they want to reform their own role radically or not. But their adherence to gender difference does to a very limited degree lead them to support their fathers' gender complimentary model. Gender difference is no longer seen as a moral order, but rather as a fact of life, most often connected to body and sexuality, but sometimes also to psychology and behaviour. This is not well adjusted to the women's ideas of gender as mainly a dimension of social convention, power and inequality, and their striving to become more like their fathers. Thus, this generation also enters their marriages with latent gender tensions on board, but it is a different sort of tension than in the previous generation.

The Battle of Gender Equality

The middle generation established their own families in the 1960s or earlier, before the Women's Movement or modern gender equality politics gave words and direction to the discontent they felt with their own parents' model of gender complementarity. But that a mental change had already taken place is seen in the fact that none of the women imagined becoming full-time housewives as young women, but wanted to combine family and work. They did so by choosing jobs where this balance was easier to accomplish (teacher or nurse), working part-time or staying at home only when their children were young. They wanted to combine a life inside and outside of the family, and they also wanted a more open and equal relationship with their children than they had experienced with their own mothers. Many of the women remember some pressure from parents and in-laws, who were alarmed by their returning to work after maternity leave and who feared the negative consequences for the children. The fact that the women ignored this critique indicates the presence of a new generational project from the women, even though it was not yet formulated in terms of gender, and even less in feminist terms. It appears not to have included much reflection on gender relations in the family either. As we saw in the previous section, the women's emotional reactions to their childhood family included negative feelings towards the housewife-mother, not towards the working father. This may have made them initially blind towards the fact that a change in the female role in the family also presupposed a parallel change of the male role. The question of what husbands thought about their wives taking up paid work—a pertinent question in the previous generation—does not make sense anymore. The men we interviewed did not seem to have reflected much upon what consequences their wives' employment would have for their own situation. Many of them said in the interviews that they knew they wanted to be closer to their children than their own fathers had been and to contribute to an emotionally better upbringing. However, this is seldom formulated either as a wish to share the work at home in general or to engage less in work outside the family.

Although the *life project* of the middle generation is less defined than that of the previous generation, it does have a clear direction, especially for the women but also to some degree for the men, in the respect that it moved towards *combining work and care* within and outside of the family. This life project met the increasing need for female labour in the expanding welfare state in the 1970s and 1980s, and, as a consequence, gradually also the need for men's presence in the home. Thus, also in this generation we can see an historical moment where the biographically formed subjectivities, including a specific way to feel about gender, and the structural and cultural conditions reinforced each other to create social change in gender relations. The political structures in the form of kindergartens and family policies adjusted to the dual-career family came as a result of this change during the 1980s and 1990s.⁶ This generation started their own families in a political and personal 'void'—they knew what they did not want, but not exactly what they wanted or what this would imply in practice. Lacking clear alternative family models or new family politics, many of the young couples of this generation soon drifted into a relatively traditional gender practice—albeit with the important change that the women *did* work on a more steady basis outside the family than their mothers had done and the men *did* engage more in the daily life of their children than their fathers had done. There are very few men in this generation who do not know how to change a nappy or cook a simple dinner; a huge change from their parents' generation. Still, the insufficiency of this arrangement, especially when it came to the women's orientation towards combining work and care and the fact that women, through their paid work, became less financially dependent on the men contributed to a high number of divorces in this generation. In our sample more than a third of the 33 parents were divorced when we met them in 1991.

⁶Family research indicates that the change in Scandinavian fathers' participation in childcare came from the 1980s onwards (Brandth and Kvande 2003; Lorentzen 2012). Thus, our middle generation who had children in around 1970 represents a generation in between traditional and modern fatherhood. The mixed practices we find in this generation in our sample probably reflect this transition in daily life. That a transition took place during these years is also reflected in the statistics of how many people in different cohorts supported the idea of equal sharing of housework and childcare at the time of our interviews (see Hansen and Slagsvold 2012).

The majority of the women in our sample had had full-time or close to full-time paid work their entire adult lives, interrupted only by relatively short maternity leave or breaks to pursue further education. This also applies to the wives of the men we interviewed. Some stayed home for a number of years while their children were small, but returned to full-time or part-time work when the youngest child started school. None of the men stayed home, but two middle-class fathers, Trygve and the husband of Vigdis, worked reduced hours in order to take care of their children. In all the women we see a rather strong work identity and a concomitant devaluing of housework. A good deal of the women say they hate housework and that their house is a mess, whereas others say they like some aspects of it, for instance, cooking, gardening and interior decoration, and see these activities as relaxing and de-stressing. From being a female work skill, cooking and other home activities have attained the character of hobbies or creative practices.

There is no clear model of family practice in our middle generation. This is telling in itself: the missing model reflects a state of transition and new ways of doing things are learnt along the way, sometimes at high cost. In an historical period where women entered the job market on a large scale and neither clear family models nor explicit norms for how to organise family life were available, it also makes sense that practices were shaped by individual trajectories and experimentation. The majority of the men and women in this generation describe mixed practices in their marriages, which led to much discontent and eventually to divorces.⁷ All interviewees with 'mixed practices' are born after 1940 and most of them disidentified with the same-sex parent. In these families the woman works on a regular basis outside the home, full-time or part-time, but is also seen as the one who has the upper hand with care and housework. The men take part in the children's upbringing and describe themselves as much more present than their own fathers were—they talk with their

⁷ It is important to remember that what we know from the interviews are the subjective experiences of the general arrangement in the family and whether it is felt as satisfying or not—we do not have data on the actual division of work. It is also important to keep in mind that the men and the women are not couples (see Chap. 3). It is an established fact that men and women report differently how housework is shared, both tending to overestimate their own contribution (Kjeldstad and Lappegård 2009; Dworking and O'Sullivan 2007).

kids daily, are active in driving them back and forth to leisure activities and are also often engaged as coaches. They have different levels of ‘helping-out’ behaviour in the house—some have to be activated by their wives while others have predefined tasks like vacuum cleaning or washing the floors, in addition to gardening, tending to the car and repairing the house. Quite a few men think that they ought to help out or be present more than they actually are, but find it difficult to do it both because they are very engaged in their jobs and because their wives seem so much more competent. The mixed pattern crosses social class and political views. Per, who is modern and politically radical middle class, has a close relationship with his son, but with regard to housework he admits that ‘*traditionally my wife has been much more responsible than me. She is better at pure logistics*’. The working-class man Geir, the son of Gunnar who had the special ‘*knack for caring for children*’, says that he has been a very involved father to his three sons—from getting up at night with the babies and later paying close attention to their sports activities. He has no objections to taking part in the housework and he finds it quite fair to share as both he and his wife are tired when they come home from work. In practice, however, it is actually his wife who mostly cooks dinner, but from the defensive way he describes this, it is still clear that the norm has changed:

I admit that I'm not always that good, but sometimes I get it together ... I think it's to do with habit. Usually we come home at the same time. Then she usually heads for the kitchen to start making dinner. And I don't react until I'm asked to fry the meat or set the table or something like that. Then I get up and do it. Maybe those are things I could've done without being asked ... When it comes to food, when it's things I know how to do, it's fine. But I absolutely hate things like cleaning the floors and vacuuming. I can't remember the last time I cleaned the floors. I've passed the task of vacuuming over to Glenn [his son]. (Geir, b. 1948)

The discrepancy between new norms and old practices results in a good deal of what has been described as the ‘in principle men’ of this generation (Jalmert 1984): men who agree that sharing is the right thing to do, but who, unfortunately, do not find sufficient time to do it. The image offered by the Norwegian psychologist Hanne Haavind (Haavind 1987),

who investigated work division in families with small children in Norway in around 1980, rings true for most of the families in our sample in this generation: modern fathers have the skills to do all kind of household tasks, but it is up to their wives how much they actually do and 'everything she has not explicitly delegated to him falls on her' (Haavind 1984a, b).⁸ This also applies to the men who have invested in developing 'feminine values' in themselves. Maybe the combination between closeness to their mothers and their attachment to gender difference makes them play both sides? Half of the men who talk about mixed practices are divorced and explain the divorce in terms of both practical and emotional problems. Egil, whose father Einar thought of divorce as an act of irresponsibility, says:

Well, you could say it became very, I felt that it became pretty tiring after a while. It was really rigid, and I guess it has to be when you have, you always have something to do, you have all kinds of commitments. You don't take time for yourself and each other. (Egil, b. 1949)

These men have experienced conflicts with their former wives about the children after the divorce and regret that they did not fight harder to get custody. They do, however, think that they have managed to preserve reasonably good relations with their children after the divorce.

Among the women who talk about mixed practices in their marriages, we find even more divorces. Some of them give lively accounts of 'in principle men', like the middle-class woman Jorun, who recalls how her husband was lying on the sofa reading Marilyn French instead of doing the dishes. The discontent with their husbands' lack of participation was clearly boosted by their educational experiences and later the feminist movement. Most of them drifted rather incidentally into gender-conventional educations as young women, but the educational experience itself made them discover a larger world than just their own

⁸ Holter and Aarseth offer another interpretation of women's activity and men's laziness with regard to housework in this generation where everybody agrees that work *should* be shared equally: it is less threatening to masculine identity to say that one is lazy or does not have the time than to display one's lack of skills and submission to the still-dominating female standard of how housework should be done (Holter and Aarseth 1993: 164).

family. When their children were born, they gradually realised that their lives were becoming like those of their mothers and they reacted with shock and divorce. They describe a process where they became more and more conscious of the situation, '*until I got so conscious that I got divorced*'. Nina says that she experienced how '*the centre of gravity suddenly changed, suddenly you were properly trapped*'. This became particularly clear for her after she and her husband moved to a new town because of his job:

In a way I noticed there that we weren't equal ... I had better results from university than he did, had more friends than he did, I was the extrovert one, I was the one making friends for us. There he was suddenly the important one in town, while I was at home and the only thing I had to look forward to was him getting home from work and eating dinner ... That was the first time in my life that I felt ... that I no longer was master of my own life. It was a truly terrible time. (Nina, b. 1943)

Nina's account illustrates how the gendered division of work loses legitimacy when it cannot be connected to complementary skill sets. The orientation towards having a family and the romantic dreams that restricted their choice of education when they were young was not about becoming a housewife.

On each side of this 'normal chaos of love' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995) we find some families with a more traditional organisation of work and care, and some families who share more equally. Few in these two groups are divorced. The men in the traditional families identify very much with their work and career, and they hardly participate in the housework. Their workload has also limited how much time they could spend with their children. Ragnar, who is upper middle class, says that perhaps he could have had a bit more contact with his son, but '*there's nothing that grates between us ... Absolutely not ... He is doing his thing and I'm doing mine*'. He believes there should be clear agreements between the spouses before having children about who will stay at home and take care of them. He is not against women taking up paid work, but since he was the one who made the most money, it made more sense that his wife was the one to stay at home. The women from middle-class families with similar traditional arrangements are strikingly less content with the situ-

ation. They are all full-time working women who are either married to men whose work implies frequent absences from home or who have not succeeded in making their husbands take their share. They have resigned themselves to the state of affairs even though it makes them very overworked and tired at times, and they have experienced intense conflict between their own career and family obligations. In some ways this family arrangement may be seen as a repetition of the middle-class families with educated and working mothers from the previous generation, but with the important difference that housemaids are not around anymore. Turid, who is upper middle class, says: *'I think it has been working much because of me.'* Her daughter Tonje finds the unjust arrangement ridiculous and Turid tends to agree: *'I do see that it's not right that one person sort of goes clear of everything ... Imagine if Tonje married a man like that—it would never work!'* Clara's daughter Cecilie, who has the same upper-middle class profession as her husband, struggles hard to combine job and family:

Work takes a massive toll mentally, it does. Then it can be hard to get home and sense ... that the children demand just as much. And a husband who maybe doesn't understand that you're tired and have to do most of the work at home, right. Even if he probably understands, but he doesn't see the problem, because he also has enough on his plate. (Cecilie, b. 1944)

In the few examples we have of working-class families with a traditional organisation of work, both men and women seem to be more content. In these cases it was the woman who wanted to stay at home with the children and the husband agreed to this priority even if it meant a somewhat lower standard of living. In their own experience it is not an exact repetition of their parents' model: Arne says that he has a closer relationship with his children than his father had with him, even though it is his wife who had most to do with their upbringing. Solveig emphasises that she has not been as occupied with her own home as her mother was, but has taken part in the larger environment in her community, for instance, by being a volunteer in child and youth work for many years. So, in the midst of reproduction, there is also change.

The informants who talk about a more radical gender arrangement share both paid work and care work on a relatively equal basis (and we here generously include the cases where the men's cooking may most often be for special occasions or of a lower standard than the wife's—Helve, for instance, characterises his cooking as '*dad food*'). The women in these families have strong work identities and most of them disidentified with their own mothers.

For the men, the identifications are more varied. The focus of the men who shared more equally is first and foremost their children, and this is not described in terms of duty, but as a positive investment. They experience good and close relationships with their children today:

It has been very stimulating and interesting to be a stay-at-home dad. And nice. Of course it was terribly tiring when they were young. There's only two years between the oldest and the twins. So there were days when I didn't have time to read the paper. But ... I have that ... I think it has often been more fun to be with the kids than with adults ... It is important not to create anxiety and guilt in the kids. I feel like I've got three children who are cheerful and happy and easy to be around, and they haven't created any problems so far. (Trygve, b. 1919)

None of these 'new fathers' talk much about their jobs; it seems that their wives at least in periods have been busier in the world outside the family than them. A combination of experiences in their own childhood and a later life event appears to have been decisive for the choice of becoming an involved father. Trygve says that he would not have had the self-confidence to make this choice as a 30-year-old. Some of them experienced difficult childhoods that fostered in them a strong desire to give their own children a better psychological environment. This has probably made them receptive to grasp later chances in life, primarily in the form of wives who wanted an equal sharing of the care work and an economic situation and a modest lifestyle that made it possible for the couple to choose untraditionally. Trygve was also influenced by the radical discourse of psychoanalysis in the 1930s. Another case is Willy, who is lower middle class and remarried and became a father at a mature age. His second wife suggested that he became the principal care person for their youngest child

since she had night shifts. He describes this with gratitude towards his wife, as a gift she gave him, and also how it boosted his skills:

I had taken care of the other children too. But not quite as consciously and wholeheartedly as I did with Vegard. Then I really consciously went for it. Kept her away from the care work. And I cared for Vegard and I washed diapers and I cleaned him and even mended his clothes. For 17th of May [the national day of Norway] I even made him a new suit. Everything like that. (Willy, b. 1925)

The last hands-on father is Helge, the son of the upper-class boy Harald who chose to become a farmer. Helge, who is upper middle class himself, resembles the few men in the previous generation who identified positively with both parents and were closer to their children than other men of their generation. However, Helge criticises his own parents' gender complementary marriage and says that from early on he knew that he did not want to marry a 'house-keeper', a way to describe his parents' marriage. This decision was then radicalised when he married a woman who became a feminist around the time of the birth of their children. While she was busy with feminist politics, he stayed home and took care of the kids:

Well, she was, she lived in so many milieus. She was so engaged in so many other things. And was out flapping in all directions and then it was me who was home to care for the children and the house too, when I came home from work. I worked all the time. And we had a nanny. When we came home we made dinner and tended to the children and put them to bed and so on. I did most of it, I'd say ... But then Women's Liberation came along and then everything turned around ... She thought she had sacrificed herself terribly to be home with ... I thought that was completely grotesque. (Helge, b. 1938)

This marriage ended in divorce. Helge appreciated getting rid of all the nagging and he is glad his new wife has managed to become liberated without being a torment to others. When he met her, he felt the joy of 'embracing a woman who is a woman and not a Protestant'. Helge blames the Women's Movement, but does not regret that it led him in to a different kind of father role. For him, as with the majority of men in this generation, the increased presence in childcare also led to an experience

of strong attachments to the children and to a questioning of the mothers' custody priority in case of divorce. Helge achieved an agreement with his wife of shared custody.

The stories of the women with more radical patterns of sharing are less dramatic or spectacular. It is not a single biographical event that led to their practice, but rather a gradual development that came with their increased engagement in education and work, and their partner's positive attitude to sharing. They describe the sharing at home either as something principally important for them (middle class) or as a matter of practicalities (working class). These women also experience conflicts between work and family, but more in terms of feeling guilty for maybe having let the children pay the price for a dual-career family: '*Torn in all directions. Feeling inadequate. Feeling guilty*' is the way Vigdis summarises it, the only woman in this generational sample who had a husband who worked part-time in order to take his share at home.

The gender battle in this generation reflects the gradual change of what gender meant for men and women over the course of their lifetimes. For the women, it was an often paradoxical appropriation of autonomy, towards more individuality and less gender. For the men, it was an often reluctant appropriation of intimacy, but without giving up the importance of gender difference. These different trajectories created much emotional and practical turmoil for this generation, but it is worth noting that the experience of divorce radicalised both genders' support of gender equality. For all in this generation, the battle of gender equality also shaped them as a different sort of gendered parents to their children.

Equality versus Difference

None of the women in this generation are negative towards gender equality. For the majority who had negative or bland relationships with their mothers, their feelings merge with the discourse of women's rights and modern gender equality politics. For those with more positive relationships, it is rather the compassion with their subdued mothers that feeds into their feminist engagement, as we saw with Olaug, who described how her preoccupation with women's rights started when she as a seven-year-

old saw her mother wear herself out for the family. Most of the women in this generation say that they did not care about gender equality questions as young girls; the engagement came during the 1970s, after they were married and had children. Their positive attitude is not surprising when taking into account how little gender difference appears to be part of their own grown-up gender construction. Why shouldn't individuals be equals? The views of the women in this generation vary from a radical stand for women's rights and against individual discrimination to a general support of gender equality politics addressed at a group level, and to a more pragmatic individual approach where justice comes second to necessity. Whether the fight for gender equality should take place mainly inside or outside the family is also a dividing line. Educational level combined with their experiences in marriage influence their stand here.

The overall pattern is that it is the women who share on an equal basis, or who divorced in frustration at not getting the husband to share, who take the radical stand. Many of them are class travellers. They all received higher education and were often radicalised as students. Few of them have been directly politically active; rather, it is the injustices in their daily lives at work and in the family they address, and they have been consciously communicating these lessons to their daughters. Olaug, for instance, has taken care not to make her daughter too good at housework in order to prevent her being stuck with this in her later relationships with men. Hanne says that she and her daughter Hilde '*fight the women's struggle all the time*' in the family. In this struggle they have constructed themselves as a new kind of women, different not only from their mothers, but also from traditional norms of femininity. This gives some problems with keeping up the solidarity with women as a group, an issue that will become much more pronounced but also much less guilt-ridden in the youngest generation. As middle-aged, they still identify with women's rights, but say that they are not as radical today as they used to be. Some of them admit that they became a bit extreme, for instance, in insisting on sharing everything according to a ruler.

Other women in this generation, with or without higher education, but with more traditional gender arrangements in their families, or those who chose to stay in marriages with mixed practices tend towards formulating their support in terms of gender equality politics:

it is important and desirable to share the work both within and outside of the family, but this should be applied neither too mechanically nor in a way that ignores taking into account that there *are* some gender differences in physical strength. Equality in work and care may coexist with gender differences in other areas. Solveig says she actually appreciates men who still open doors and pull out the chair for a woman, and that she cannot see why gender equality should be incompatible with that. Turid and Astrid, who live with a traditional gender arrangement in the family, say that they are interested in gender equality mainly professionally in their work as teachers. Those who are least engaged in gender equality—but not against it—are a group of women with little further education, who share domestic work fairly equally in practice, but without making it a gender issue. They think jobs and work in the home should be divided fairly between men and women, but since they find this is largely already the case, it is nothing to make a big deal about. Gender equality is most important in relation to work and in society at large, but they do not see the point in struggling against gender differences in other areas of life and they distance themselves from what they see as exaggerated gender policies. Like her mother Borghild, Berit is the most sceptical among the women in her generation:

I've never been a feminist ... this gender equality business. But I can agree that there are many things in society I think that ... That revolt that happened a few years back, yes, at the beginning of the seventies, I thought that it was maybe ... if not exaggerated then a bit much at times, that ... it went a bit too far, to put it like that, in many ways. (Berit, b. 1949)

Among the men in the middle generation, the distaste for the Women's Movement is more pronounced. We already heard about Helge's bitterness about how his wife's engagement in the Women's Movement destroyed their marriage. Ragnar is also quite upset on behalf of '*traditional women*'. In his account we see a defence for the equity he finds inherent in the old gender-complimentary division of work, as well as an emotional reaction towards the aggressive femininity that emerges as a contrast to the mild and kind motherliness of the feminine carer:

I remember in the worst redstocking⁹ period, we went to parties and there were quite a few women in my wife's circle of friends who were redstockings. And we started talking, and I told them exactly what I thought of them: I think you are ruthless. You're making these great Norwegian women, who have given their all for their families and society, you're making them feel really inferior. Just because they haven't worked outside the home. And that made me furious. That these know-it-all redstocking girls could brand an entire generation like that. (Ragnar, b. 1936)

The men who shared childcare and domestic work and were not divorced also thought the feminist rhetoric of the 1970s was over the top. Their distaste for radical feminism also has to do with their preoccupation with preserving sexual and psychological gender differences. The idea of equality in sharing the work within and outside of the family in a fair way is a much more acceptable idea than feminism and women's rights. In contrast to the women, educational level does not interfere much with their standpoint on gender equality; rather, it is the practice in their own family that guides their view, in addition to a relatively close match with their parental identifications. Those who had positive relationships with their mothers are in most cases positive to the idea of gender equality, although their practice may lag behind, and those who have daughters are even more so. The men who have traditional arrangements in their marriage have the least to say about gender equality. The upper middle-class men Ragnar and Magne say that this is not an issue that engages them much or that difference is exactly what they find attractive about the female gender. This emphasis on sexual difference does not necessarily lead to a negative stand to homosexuality. Two men, both with traditional gender arrangements in their families, make references to homosexuality. One is Magne, who says that he believes more diverse sexualities will become a normal thing in the times to come:¹⁰

⁹In Scandinavia the word 'redstocking' is often used as a popular and sometimes condescending reference to feminist activists in the 1970s.

¹⁰The other is Arne (b. 1930), who espouses the opposite view by saying that he thinks that gay men are not 'proper men'.

Gender roles are more or less indistinguishable now. There aren't housewives who stay at home and the roles at work are mixed as well, so why not sexually too? So I don't disregard the possibility that they're having sexual interaction with both boys and girls. And I'll say that's almost natural, the way they grow up today. I'm not saying it's necessarily natural, natural is a relative term, but naturally in relation to your environment and the times you live in ... You can't judge, I think it's got a lot to do with our environment. That's why I really like having diversity ... What I'm trying to say is that things are getting more equal. But a lot of what makes a woman attractive, and now I'm talking about myself, is that she's different from me. (Magne, b. 1938)

The men who have mixed practices in their marriages think that sharing housework is OK and they are quite positive towards gender equality in the workplace. The working-class men Geir and Jan feel that companies with no women are 'old-fashioned' and that men who cannot bear that women surpass them in position and salary are pathetic. However, they react negatively towards the idea that gender equality should make women into men, including the negative aspects of masculinity. In addition, the middle-class men who want to reform masculinity by embracing more feminine qualities are aware of the danger that too much equality could threaten the difference that makes women attractive to them and talk about women's biology as special and unique. Only the two still-married men who share work and care with their wives are unconditionally in favour of gender equality. They support women's rights (although they also share the aversion against what they see as the exaggerated feminism of the 1970s and 1980s) and want their wives to be partners in all areas of life. Trygve thinks that too many women have a double burden today because many men are shirking their responsibilities. Willy says that there should not be any '*class difference*' within the family. But even for these gender equality-embracing men, the worry is that too much similarity may come at the expense of femininity, romance and sexuality. The discomfort of being the criticised gender, the effort it takes for some of them to follow up housework in practice, and the importance they attach to sexual gender difference make almost all men in this generation somewhat awkward in the way they address the issue of gender equality, even though they support it in principle, especially at work or on behalf of their daughters. Gender does not represent an economic role or a moral order as for their fathers, but a fact of life that must also

be taken into account in the struggle for gender equality. The men's road to gender equality could initially be said to have been less personal, for instance, more connected to gender equality politics at their jobs. However, their increased presence in childcare and their experience of strong attachments to their children gradually also gave them a personal engagement. This seems to be the most important emotional link to gender equality for men in this generation, but it came later than that for the women. There is a time lag, but also partly a different agenda: for the men, gender equality is a care project, while for the women, it is a project of sharing more equally both care and domestic work. For the radical women, it also entails being involved against the sexualisation and objectification of the female body. For the men, the experience of being more actively participating fathers raises the question of gender equality from the men's perspective, especially in connection with divorce and child custody. In the account of Egil, we can see how the intensity increases as he moves from talking about women's rights at work to men's rights after divorce:

Girls can do a lot of jobs just as well as boys, and I guess I think there should be gender equality in that regard and that there should be equal pay for equal work. I think that. But I don't think one should strive towards becoming the same. I think there should be differences between boys and girls. And if we're talking about these things, what annoys me the most about the things to do with gender equality: those girls who've worked hard to show the places they've been treated unfairly, but they've probably been aware of places where men have been treated unfairly too. But I don't think many women have fought for that, in the situation of separation and divorce. It's clear who the loser is there. I don't think many of those working with gender equality have cared about that. (Egil, b. 1949)

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