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FEELING GENDER

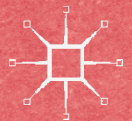
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A GENERATIONAL AND
PSYCHOSOCIAL APPROACH

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HARRIET
BJERRUM
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Harriet Bjerrum Nielsen

Feeling Gender

A Generational and Psychosocial Approach

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Harriet Bjerrum Nielsen
Centre for Gender Research
Oslo, Norway



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Acknowledgements

This book is based on a project that started 25 years ago. In 1991 Monica Rudberg, Kari Vik Kleven and I found ourselves as participant observers in five 12th grade classrooms in two schools in the Norwegian capital of Oslo. We wanted to explore to what extent the expressions and doing of gender among young people had changed since the feminist studies of gender in the classrooms were initially done in the 1970s and 1980s. After some weeks of observation in each class, we invited about half of the students to a biographical interview. We also invited the mothers and maternal grandmothers of the girls, and the fathers and paternal grandfathers for a similar interview, with an emphasis on their childhood, youth and transition to adulthood. In this way we ended up with 22 female and 12 male chains of two or three generations in each. For different reasons it took considerably longer to analyse the data than anticipated, but this gave us a chance to follow up with new interviews of the youngest generation as they approached 30, and for some of them again ten years later when they were approaching 40.

To gather data over such a long period of time has advantages as well as risks. One of the advantages was that it gave us a unique set of data that combined a generational study with a longitudinal dimension, and thus a possibility to track in detail some of the ways in which gender relations have changed gradually during the twentieth century. One of the risks is that the questions you want to explore change with time. Another is that

the situation of the researchers themselves may change. Kari Vik Kleven, who as a PhD student had been in charge of the male chains, sadly had to give up her project due to an unexpected life event. Her data was archived in the early 1990s, but Monica Rudberg and I, who were in charge of the female chains, took measures so that also the boys Kari had interviewed as 18-year-olds in 1991 were followed up with new interviews in 2001 and 2011. For the initial several years Monica and I worked only with the female chains, on which we published a number of articles in English and a monograph in Norwegian in 2006 (Nielsen and Rudberg 2006). After this was done we went back to Kari's old interviews and discovered that the story of changing gender relations gained completely new dimensions when the men's voices were included. Gender is indeed a relational thing, and what emerges as a gender order at any given time is negotiated and adapted between both women and men. We published some new articles about the men and started to work with the manuscript of the present book. Unfortunately, due to health reasons, Monica had to back out and left it to me to conclude the joint project. However, Monica had at this point of time done the groundwork of the analyses of the male chains and had also written drafts of the analyses of the three generations' experiences of body and sexuality. For this reason she is the co-author of the three empirical chapters, which in many ways can be seen as the backbone of the book.

The first people I want to thank are these two colleagues with whom I started up the project so many years ago: Kari Vik Kleven, who generously left her data to Monica and me, and Monica Rudberg, my closest colleague during a period of 30 years. Many of the thoughts and ideas in the book have been developed in a close interaction between her and me during our many years of cooperation and friendship. The somewhat inconsistent wavering between 'we' and 'I' in the text also reflects this. I wish we could have completed the work together, but I am happy to know that she appreciates the result.

Other good colleagues have also helped me on the way. Rachel Thomson was the first to suggest that Monica and I ought to translate our Norwegian book on three generations of women into English. Gradually the idea changed to publishing a new book, now including the three generations of men. Lynn Jamieson, one of the editors of the Palgrave

Macmillan Studies in Family and Intimate Life series, also supported the idea. I admire her engagement as an editor to help bring studies from the non-English-speaking world to an English-speaking audience, understanding that such studies are neither more particular nor of less universal interest than studies from the UK and the USA. She, Rachel Thomson, Valerie Walkerdine and Barrie Thorne helped us to understand how a book proposal should look outside of Scandinavia. Without that engagement and support and the positive decision of Palgrave Macmillan, this book would not have come out.

I owe much to Nancy Chodorow for academic inspiration over many years and, in connection with the present book, not least for introducing me to Hans Loewald and the American ‘intersubjective school of ego psychology’. Lynne Layton’s engagement and important work in the psychosocial field and her always forthcoming way of helping me developing my own ideas has been invaluable. In addition to Nancy and Lynne, other good colleagues have also read and commented on early drafts of single chapters (feedbacks which in some cases lead to a complete rewriting): Sasha Roseneil, Helene Aarseth, Trine Rogg Korsvik and Elisabet Rogg. Thank you for giving so generously of your time! I am also grateful to my dear life companion Sverre Varvin, who, as a psychoanalyst, not only was on hand for consultations about psychoanalytic aspects of the book, but also developed a brand new vegetarian cuisine to keep me going during the last intense winter months of writing.

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The institutional settings for my work have been very important. First and foremost is the open-minded and interdisciplinary academic community at the Centre for Gender Research at the University of Oslo, where I have spent most of my professional life since 1993. Here I have

found not only young colleagues who master the English language so much better than I do myself, but also colleagues from a number of research fields who offer to read drafts and give advice on all kinds of academic issues. Two sabbaticals at the University of California, Berkeley in 2001 and 2011 both gave inspiration. A special thanks to the then 'Centre for Working Families' headed by Arlie Hochschild and Barrie Thorne. Finally, I want to mention the stay at the Norwegian Centre for Advanced Studies where Hanne Haavind and I together led the interdisciplinary research project 'Personal Development and Socio-cultural Change'. That year was in many different ways important for my thinking about what kind of psychosocial studies I wanted to engage with in the book. Thank you to Hanne and all the other wonderful colleagues from Norway (Agnes Andenæs, Mona-Iren Hauge, Aina Olsvold, Anita Moe, Monica Rudberg and Helene Aarseth), Denmark (Katrín Hjort and Jette Kofoed), Sweden (Eva Magnusson and Margareta Hydén), the UK (Wendy Hollway, Helen Lucey, Ann Phoenix, Rachel Thomson, Valerie Walkerdine, and the late Cathy Urwin) and the USA (Lynne Layton, Jeanne Maracek and Barrie Thorne) who spent the academic year of 2010/2011 with Hanne and myself in the old beautiful house of the Norwegian Academy of Science.

Harriet Bjerrum Nielsen
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