

# 8

## Calibrating Time and Place

The longitudinal dimension in the study of the youngest generation helps to clarify some of the methodological effects of the design where three generations were interviewed at different points in their lives. The interviews with the youngest generation at 30 made it possible to check whether one talks differently about one's family and upbringing as a young adult compared to as a teenager of 18, and also to see whether one remembers the views held at an earlier age. The general finding in regard to the time span was that the overall content of what was said ten years earlier was well remembered, but that details may have been forgotten or reconstructed (for instance, what kind of education one thought about but did not pursue or what attitudes one had in relation to gender equality). In a few cases, emotionally difficult issues had been forgotten, while in other cases, the stories were told with almost exactly the same words. In most cases, however, it was the same content, with slightly modified details. With regard to what life phases mean for the perception of one's family of origin and relationship with parents, we heard more or less the same stories as the interviewees told at 18, but often more nuanced in light of what had happened later or as a result of having gained more life experience and maturity. This could sometimes contribute to a more

conciliatory and sometimes more critical account of a parent and the family life they had lived back then. The most considerable difference compared to the narratives at 18 was a somewhat more negative experience of parental divorces at 30. Thus, the accepting approach to their parents' divorces at 18 may be due to the child's new position in this generation as a 'responsible partner' in the family. However, completely new information was only seen in a few cases connected to very difficult experiences of divorces and of parental violence.

The interviews with eight of the informants at 40 also made it possible to see what kind of family models the youngest generation actually chose and how their attitudes towards gender equality turned out in practice. When the oldest generation was asked about gender equality, it mainly triggered their reflection about how it *was*, seen in the light of the new times. For the middle generation, we get accounts of how it *is* in their present life. And for the youngest generation at 18 and 30 years of age, the perspective is how they imagine it *will be*. At the age of 40, however, the youngest generation were approaching the life phase their parents were in at the time of their interviews in 1991. They found themselves in the midst of a hectic life where the main challenge was managing the work–family balance, and the interviews therefore tended to focus on this. Thus, these interviews may contribute to understanding more about the interaction between age/life phases (the point in their lives when they were interviewed), cohort effects (the life course of a specific generation) and period effects (the way in which a given sociohistorical situation affects the experiences). It is not possible to isolate the effects of each of these sources of meaning, but from what the informants tell us about their life at 40, we can see the impact of all of them. Decisions about family arrangements and what kind of gender equality that is desired or possible to attain also depend on how the three temporal dimensions interact in each case.

Another dimension considered in this chapter is the significance of *place*. To what degree are the patterns we found in our sample products of a specifically Scandinavian history and context? To what degree do they also display similarities with, for instance, other European countries? This question is of course too large for a sensible short answer, not only because three- or even two-generational studies are generally in short supply, but also

because the design, methodology and theoretical framing of the few studies that exist are often quite incompatible. That means that it is difficult to see what is actually compared. In addition, cross-national comparisons are particularly difficult because the context, whether nationally, historically, culturally or politically, for what is compared is part of the meaning of the comparison (on this point, see Bertaux and Thompson 1997; Chant and McIlwayne 1998). Instead of trying to cover everything, I have chosen to contrast my findings with some generational studies from Britain that cover the same generations, mainly the work of Julia Brannen and her colleagues, in order to catch sight of what may be specifically Scandinavian in the three generations analysed in this book.

## Life at 40

The consistency from 18 to 30 in the views on how to organise one's own family holds true from 30 to 40 as well. But at 40, the informants have also experienced that things were more complex than they had thought, including the issue of gender equality. As we saw in Chap. 7, the women who had their children early found it difficult to make their partners take their share of the housework. For those who had their children later (which includes seven of the eight informants interviewed at 40), the problem is rather that their own feelings make things more complicated—in addition to the different conditions in relation to the work–family balance in working life, especially in the private sector. The family practices described by the eight informants at 40 reflect different responses to this. The norm of sharing is stronger than in most of the families in the middle generation, and the awareness of not succeeding is more acute. In order to achieve gender equality, many of the families have seen it as necessary to hire domestic help. The assumption that modern Scandinavian families substitute women's work in the family by bringing in the men instead of outsourcing the work (Hochschild 1997) may not be true to the same degree any longer (Aarseth 2009b).<sup>1</sup> Different family solutions

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<sup>1</sup> A total of 11 per cent of Norwegian households employed cleaners in 2015. In the high-income families to which most of our eight informants belong, it was 32 per cent (Lavik and Borgeraas 2015).

and stands on gender equality within and outside of the family will be illustrated in the following mini-portraits of the eight informants interviewed at 40—Anders, Morten, Henrik, Pia, Tonje, Hilde, Charlotte and Kine—including some connections to their generational stories. Henrik and Charlotte are third- or fourth generation middle class with academic degrees. Morten, Pia, Tonje and Hilde are second-generation middle class with academic degrees. Anders and Kine grew up working class, and of these two only Kine received some years of higher education, although not an entire degree.<sup>2</sup>

Henrik and Anders have adhered to the relatively gender-egalitarian practices they advocated at 18 and 30. At 40 they each have three children and both they and their wives are working full-time. *Anders*, a working-class boy who did not receive any higher education and now works in administration in a private company, has remarried. Neither he nor his wife has particular demanding careers. He says at 40 that he was never very ideologically preoccupied by gender equality, but that it became a practical matter for him when he had to do his share of the work at home, and that he wanted to be a different kind of father to his children than his father had been to him. He formulates a strong inclination to have another kind of family than his parents' gender traditional arrangement, and he finds sociobiological babble about '*alpha males*' completely stupid. He come from a working-class family chain where all the men—his grandfather Anton, his father Arne and he himself—had the most positive parental relationship with their mothers. Anton and Arne were as adults also strongly identified with their jobs, something Anders is not. He is the only man in the youngest generation who talked about a strong desire to have a child when he was only 20 years old and who had one a few years later. He says he and his wife share the childcare 50/50 and he describes '*a quantum leap*' in terms of how much time parents devote to their children now compared to when he was little. He gives vivid accounts of his three daughters and how he has had to give in to their cravings for pink and glittery clothing: '*they become little girls*

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<sup>2</sup>In terms of recruitment, Anders, Morten, Pia, Tonje and Kine came from the new suburban high school, while Henrik, Hilde and Charlotte from the old academic high school (see Chap. 3).

*without you having anything to do with it*. He supports the father's quota for parental leave, but thinks it is long enough as it is now (at the time of the interview there was a suggestion to extend it from 12 to 14 weeks). He has well-qualified views on interior decoration, but since his wife likes another style, he leaves it to her to decide. He believes he does a fair share of the housework, but his wife does not agree, so they quarrel a lot about cleaning. He finds this quite tiresome and wonders if the marriage will last. Compared to his parents, he is very modern man when it comes to gender equality. His positive relationship with his mother and disidentification with his father in combination with low career ambitions may explain his active turn towards the family. In his case, however, his partner puts some limits on what he is allowed to participate in at home, for instance, that she wants to decide about the interior decoration. His pragmatic attitude to gender equality is a pattern that bears similarities to what we have encountered in some of the working-class families in the sample, but in Anders' case clearly in a modernised and reflexive version.

*Henrik* and his wife both have demanding jobs. He had a spectacular international career, but chose to change from the private to the public sector after his first child was born, as he never saw the child while she was awake. He loved his elite job with 60–80 working hours a week, but men in such jobs have wives at home, he says, and this is too high a price to pay: he wants an interesting wife and that implies that she has an interesting job. It is also important for him to have a good family life, close relationships with his children—and no divorce! His wife was home for a few years while they were abroad, which they all enjoyed, but back in Norway she is working again. With two full-time careers, three children and no hired cleaner, everyday life is rather hectic, and they try to use their flexible working hours and work from home in the evenings. It is quite tough because *'this isn't a sprint, it's a marathon'*. He thinks that they share things equally—apart from the periods when he has to travel. He describes ruthless priorities in the family: he has a leadership position at work and when *'the going gets tough'*, he is the one who goes to work and she stays home—but *'then I also have to give back much more afterwards'*. He is a warm supporter of the father's quota, even if he was not able to take it himself when the first child was born because of his job. An incentive is absolutely necessary to get men to do it, he says, and it is

important because *'a baby is a fantastic way to ground a man ... to be contaminated with small children's love affects your choices later'*. The first time he was on parental leave, he had plans to renovate the house, but soon had to realise that he hardly had time left for his daily shower. He is the son of Helge, the hands-on father in the middle generation who did not want to *'marry a housekeeper'*, but who later felt deceived by the Women's Movement. Henrik, however, saw his mother as a positive and competent person, who, he says, also had good looks. He believes that he has always been more in favour of gender equality than most girls and refers to the influence of his feminist mother. He gets irritated by women who do not fulfil their potential or do not dare to *'go for it'*—or who think they have to become unfeminine to do so. He likes beautiful women with the capacity to make their own choices. At 40 he has experienced that life is more complicated than in his mother's feminist agenda. He appreciates sexual difference, but also thinks that individual differences are often more salient than gender differences. Today he feels somewhat estranged from the whole concept of gender equality, but emphasises that he certainly needs *'no moral lecture on gender equality'*. He believes in diversity, has organised courses at work about it and thinks that diversity also is key to economic growth. Henrik, who is among the most gender-radical men in the youngest generation, combines a positive relationship with his mother with having had a hands-on father. In his case, however, the demands of a high-powered job—and how important this job is to him—work counter to the full gender equality he feels committed to. Old melodies interfere when *'the going gets tough'*, and it was his career that brought the family abroad, not his wife's. From what he says in the interview, his wife accepts being in a good second place.

*Morten*, who at 30 was among the more traditional interviewees in terms of his views and who said he did not want to quarrel about housework, has at 40 just hired cleaners for his wife *'to help her'*. They also have three children, and even though he somewhat routinely admits that *'well yes, it's the usual, you have to try to balance your job and the lives of your children'*, he talks with much greater engagement and at more length about his career. When asked about the father's quota, his first response is: *'what's that?'* He has to ask his wife during the interview what exact age and grade his young sons are in, and his part in the childcare is to

take them skiing or engage in their leisure interests. He sees himself as career oriented and is building up his second business now, which he hopes will turn out to be a very good economic investment, and he has taken economic risks in order to succeed. He does not feel like '*coddling the children 24/7*'. He wants to create things and do things that interest him, whereas he sees his wife as a more '*all-round*' type. His nine-year-old son defends him by saying that '*dad doesn't do a lot at home, because there isn't space in his brain*'. It has caused tension in the marriage, but his wife switching to a part-time job solved these problems. She has a small business of her own and at the interview at 30 she made the same amount of money he did. But now that she is working part-time, it is also fair that she does most of the household work, he says, just as he said at 18. This is also a generational chain with positive relationships with both parents, although the mothers had more traditional roles in the family than in Henrik's case and the fathers higher professional status than in Anders' case. Morten's grandfather Martin was one of the warmest supporters of gender complementarity, idealising the kindness and moral superiority of women. His father Magne also thought that the old gender system, with clear roles for man and wife, was preferable because it led to fewer conflicts than what he had experienced in his own marriage. He was a creative man and an independent thinker, but also one who appreciated being alone and concentrating on his own things. At 30 Morten described his father as a dreamer and his mother as the strong and logical person in the family. He says that he prefers a female boss at work, but admits that he considers himself more similar to his father. He cannot imagine being happy without being deeply engaged in his job. The most important in a family is to find individual and flexible solutions, he says, yet the solutions he comes up with all sound very gender traditional. Morten resembles the 'in principle' men from the middle generation. He pays some lip service to discourses of gender equality, but is happiest if he is allowed to concentrate on his job while his wife takes care of the children and the home. Setting up his own business is risky and gender equality cannot be given priority in this situation. It does not seem to be an important issue for Morten either as long as he can avoid quarrels with his wife and see their arrangements as fair and flexible.

The five women are fairly consistent in their views at 30 and their practices at 40 as well, but the bodily processes of pregnancy and breastfeeding influenced them more than they had believed they would. They have one or two children each and are all in full-time jobs. At 40 Tonje and Pia, both with academic degrees and married to men with the same educational level and also working in the public sector, describe very equal relationships in regard to childcare, housework, careers and salaries. *Tonje's* husband gives high priority to family life and she sees him as a man with many androgynous sides. He takes more interest than she does in interior decorating and he lays the table beautifully when they invite people for dinner. He claimed the full father's quota and she does not need to tell him what needs to be done in the house. She does, however, keep the overview and most of the organisation—she thinks it is like that in most families, and she does not mind. They have hired au pairs in order not to have too stressful a life, which would be bad for the children. Both Tonje and her mother Turid<sup>3</sup> had admiring but also somewhat distant relationships with their fathers and ambivalent relationships with their mothers. This complicated Tonje's youthful protest against her parent's traditional division of work when she tried to write lists that included her father and her brother in household tasks. However, she was also among those who at 18 were positive in relation to the idea of staying home for some years when she had children. At 30 this had changed because she had become very dedicated to her professional career (the same profession as her father), but she still believed that a woman could attain gender equality if she really wished to—something she at 40 thinks has, in fact, been the case for her. At 40 she says she is engaged in gender-equality politics, but she also wants to be allowed to think that there are inborn differences and that this does not automatically mean that women are oppressed. She does not experience any of the gender discrimination at work she mentioned at 30, but she admits that having children sets women back. She sees this as a fact of life rather than discrimination: '*Well, that's the way nature works, we're lucky to be able to be at home together with the children!*' She thinks it would have been boring when it came to erotic

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<sup>3</sup>The grandmothers of Tonje and Pia were not interviewed. Pia's grandmother was dead and Tonje's grandmother declined to be interviewed.



attraction if there were no differences between women and men. This does not concern capacities or personalities—she finds a good mixture of feminine and masculine traits in both herself and her husband—but about appearances and different approaches and opinions on things. In this way she advocates a model of gender complementarity when it comes to attraction and desire, in the midst of a very equal division of work and care in everyday life. Her emphasis on individual rights and on bodily difference may be seen in connection with her positive identification with her father and an improvement of her earlier ambivalent relationship with her mother. However, engaging in a demanding career and having a partner who appears to be quite gender radical have also given her more space for the principal support of gender equality than she to some extent had at 18.

*Pia* was also very upset with the work division between her parents, but she sided with her mother against her father, even if she also thought that her mother could have stood up to her father more. *Pia's* mother Paula was the oldest woman in the middle generation and had worked her way up to a high position in the private sector, but at the same time gave full attention and service to her family. This eventually led to her experiencing a burn-out early and retiring when *Pia* was in her twenties. This is a chain of mother-identified daughters. Paula had a mother who urged her to get an education and to put her own life before her obligations to her parents. However, Paula also had a very tender relationship with her father and married a man who had had a sad childhood and to whom she wanted to be kind. Whereas Paula was mild and compliant, her daughter *Pia* appeared a more self-assertive woman—albeit one who in her early twenties suddenly found herself in an oppressive relationship with an older man. She pulled herself together and left him and found her present husband, with whom she shares 90 per cent of the household work equally (only a few activities like changing tyres on the car, chopping wood and using the sewing machine are traditionally gender separated): '*We work until we are done.*' Having a cleaner come in every second week is also helpful. But to have children is a big change in your life and you have to prioritise, she says. For this reason she did not apply for a leadership job that she probably would have gotten. It has been easier for her husband to make such choices because he is less career-

oriented and ambitious than she is. He has taken more of the parental leave than the father's quota (and because of that caused a few raised eyebrows at his work place), and had wanted even more. But Pia insisted on taking eight months so that she could nurse the children at least for the six months recommended by the health authorities. This has been the only disagreement between them. She thinks that the feminist agenda sometimes is too inflexible: *'I don't know if I think it's a great step forwards for the Women's Movement that mothers carry breast pumps in their lunch breaks ... there's a lot of closeted nursing at night.'* But it was great to have a stay-at-home husband when she went back to work, because she felt it was so safe. Pia, who had quite a negative relationship with her father, seems to have identified consciously with her mother's skills and career, but also unconsciously with her submissiveness to dominant men. The positive part of the identification made her quite consciously go for another type of man and she is aware that this choice is what has made it possible for her to pursue the gender-equality values she has been a firm supporter of since she was 18. *'I have won the biggest prize in my husband'*, she says with a happy smile. But had he been *'a climber'*, she is sure that she would have lost the battle—that is a lesson she takes from friends whose husbands are in high-powered jobs in the private sector.

*Hilde's* experiences confirm this. Her husband has a career in the private sector, whereas she holds a PhD and works in the public sector. She was also one of the radical girls at 18 with regard to gender equality. Like Tonje and Pia, she criticised her parents' work division, in spite of it being actually quite equal. At 30 she postponed having children, as she was aware of the *'gender trap'*, not least since her husband comes from a culture that is quite distant from Nordic ideas of gender equality. At 40 they have two children and she describes a sort of backlash in her own generation, not so much because of her husband's cultural roots, but because of his job. She now acknowledges that her parents shared much more equally than she and her husband are able to. He is exhausted when he comes home after long workdays, and even though she understands this, she insisted that he hired a cleaner to do his share. They share a good deal of the childcare, her husband does the shopping and she does most of the cooking and all of the laundry. Taking the cultural differences between them into account, she acknowledges that he has already changed enor-

mously compared to the gender culture in which he grew up. She does not want to waste time on conflicts to get everything exactly equal—they have reached a level of sharing that she can live with. It also helps that her parents are now retired and live close by. Without their help, it had been difficult to manage the busy everyday life. She has had to compromise her equality standards to accommodate her husband's situation, but still claims at 40 that equality is the 'core value' that she will never give up. She gets irritated by the double standards of older feminists: first they told young women to work as much as men, and now they also encourage them to stay at home as long as possible to enjoy their babies! In Hilde's generational chain we see positive relationships with both parents, but the mothers tend to be the more competent and rational figures, and the fathers the more social and warm figures (in addition to making more money). Both Hilde's grandmother and mother married thrifty men with lower class status than themselves. Hilde's grandmother Helga wanted more education, but had to settle for doing the accounts in her husband's growing enterprise. Her mother Hanne became a teacher and was an inspiration to her daughter when it came to being engaged in women's rights. In Hilde's case the positive engagement in gender equality is connected with her positive identification with her mother. Maybe the warm relationships she has with her father and her husband also support her willingness to make compromises. Her life situation has made it difficult to pursue her values completely, but this has not made her abandon them. She keeps her values and her compromises as two separate realities in her life and seems to be reasonably OK with the balance.

Charlotte and Kine are both newly divorced at 40. Division of work played some part in both cases, but in different ways. *Charlotte*, who holds an academic degree, says that her ex-husband 'was a modern man, but...'—and the idea was that they should share the work equally. However, he always changed the rules to his own advantage. For some years she accepted following his career needs as well, something she will never do again. She is now a single mother with her own sole enterprise and thinks life is good. Echoing her grandmother Clara, who divorced before her daughter Cecilie was born, she does not miss a man in her everyday life, but thinks it is fun to date. She identifies with her role as a mother and her own independence. It had been great not to work—'I'd rather be just a mum

*and take care of myself*—but this is not an option. With her own company she can regulate much of her time, which is the important thing for her. She was interested in gender issues neither at 18 nor at 30, and she detested all kind of stingy ideas of meticulous sharing. In her family chain there are marked shifts in parental relationships, from her grandmother Clara's very close relationship with her strong and kind mother to Cecilie, who had a positive relationship with Clara, but also felt very different from her and attached herself to her father, whom she only met as a young girl. Cecilie experienced considerable difficulties in her marriage, especially with making time for her own career. Charlotte had a negative relationship with both her parents at 18, especially her mother, whom she blamed for all the tiresome quarrelling about housework and for neglecting her children. At 40 Charlotte combines a critique of traditional gender norms as completely outdated with a new 'maternalism', where she thinks that the bodily processes of pregnancy and nursing make women and men react very differently to having children. For this reason she is also against the father's quota, which she thinks is mainly used by men to paint the house or only doing activities with the children that they enjoy themselves. In Charlotte's case we see more emphasis on individualism than on gender equality, something that, as in Tonje's case, might be related to identifying more with the father than with the mother. She did not think gender made any difference at 18 and 30, and when she later encountered gender discrimination, her solution was not to become a feminist, but to do without men in her daily life. Her negative relationship with her mother has given her an incitement to become a better mother than Cecilie was,<sup>4</sup> including not giving in to a domineering man as her mother did. This mix has turned into a kind of maternalism where men are not needed—other than as sexual partners if one happens to be so inclined.

*Kine* was not very radical when it came to gender issues at 18 either, but at 30 things had changed. She had made an impressive career in a big

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<sup>4</sup>In their study of motherhood in a generational perspective, Thomson et al. (2011: 118) note that that young mothers who did not have a positive relationship with their own mothers often tended to invest more heavily in peer maternal cultures. This may also be the case with Charlotte. Ida (see Chap. 7)—who felt her whole psychic landscape changed when she became a mother—also fits into this pattern.

public enterprise and took some university courses along the way. This radicalised her view on gender equality and she has been fighting actively for it in the workplace. At 30 she was cohabiting and was very content with the equal division of work at home. She is the first in her family to receive an education. Her grandmother Karen, however, is one of the few in this generation who kept a full-time job after she got married because she liked it. Kine was the product of the unplanned pregnancy and arranged marriage of the working-class girl Kirsten, who had a bad relationship with her parents. This start gave Kine a difficult childhood, with young, irresponsible and eventually divorced parents and later also violence in the family. She had to be responsible for her parents from a young age: '*Kine is born an adult*', her family says about her. This resilience is probably also one of the reasons why she has managed her career so well. At 40 she is unwavering when it comes to fighting discriminatory structures at work and tells us about the difficulties that face young female leaders like herself. Privately, however, she has become more doubtful. She and her partner were both career oriented and had good salaries. They had an almost reversed division of work where he did the majority of the household work and made decisions about the interior decoration of their home, whereas she painted the house and took care of the car. She says that he has strong feminine sides and she has masculine sides, and observes that their daughter is much more feminine than she is. But she also felt that she became superfluous in the house and this made her feel even less feminine. The erotic attraction also faltered since she perceived him as not masculine enough. She had a period of being burnt out, but a leadership training course got her back on track again. This also made her realise that she wanted to end her marriage. She is all in favour of gender equality in society and in the workplace, but at home she would have liked to keep the gender roles more distinct and to feel that her contributions to the home *as* a woman made a difference. Sometimes she also wants to be allowed to be weak and taken care of, she says. She thus started out with the working-class pattern of a non-ideological, pragmatic attitude to gender equality and became middle class and ideologically radicalised. She found her own way since none of her parents was suitable as objects of identification. Her attraction to a more traditional gender pattern at home while demanding gender equality at work may be seen as an

emotional bond with the gender culture in the social class she left. In her case, however, the longing she has for not always having to be responsible and in charge may also have interfered here.

In all eight cases, feelings of gender from their own families of origin, both class-wise and individually, and the projects they had for their own lives at 30 were partly maintained and partly changed. What changed them in the intermediate decade were material and structural circumstances, the education and the work they undertook, and the partners they chose, in addition to the surprise at the experience of the biological dimensions of motherhood, and in some cases also their own psychological and erotic attraction to gender difference. This also informs the emotional basis for the political stand they take towards gender-equality politics. As a generation they share an emphasis on individuality that does not work well with the idea of a gender battle between two groups. They tend to go for compromises rather than to fight, including the compromise that a divorce may be. They think that people should be allowed to stick to their preferences and that gendered choices in some areas can live well with gender equality in other areas. The issue of the new market-driven gender separation of childhood—pink for girls, blue for boys—is not something they find important to engage in. *‘They’ve expired, those issues’*, says Henrik, and it is difficult to find anyone among the eight interviewees at 40 who disagrees with him on this. The equality-minded Pia says that there is a *‘high dress factor’* among her little daughters and that she cannot see this as a problem as long as they can play freely. Tonje says that *‘such things are completely insignificant, it’s not worth fighting the kids on it’*. As a default she buys pink and purple for her two daughters because then she knows everyone is happy.

Judged from the eight interviews at 40 and with a glance at the bigger sample interviewed at 30, it seems like that the variations in family models and practices of gender equality can be related to the interviewees’ parental identifications in combination with their choice of job and partner. The most important precondition for a gender-equal practice among the men seems to be a positive relationship with the mother and a perception of her as having been equal in status with the father. This may indicate that the father’s role for positive identification with gender equality is more indirect (see also Bjørnholt 2014). The men’s engage-