3

Temporality in Methods

Temporality is a crucial dimension of the topic and methodology in this book. The book is based on interviews that are up to 25 years old and most of the issues the informants talked about had taken place many years prior to the time of the interview. The oldest informant was 92 when we interviewed him in 1991, while the youngest informants were 18. The generational transmission is in itself temporal and so are the different ages from which the generations talk about themselves and each other. Also included in the study is a longitudinal dimension of lived time as the youngest generation was followed over a timespan of 20 years (1991–2011). Finally, time has infiltrated the research process itself. The initial research questions and the interview guides were conceived in 1991 and the interview guides were extended and modified in 2001 and 2011. The interviews have been interpreted at different points in time and through different foci influenced by changing theoretical paradigms, by having been presented to different audiences and by the ageing of the researchers themselves. This chapter will dive into these temporal issues, provide information about the sample and the way it is presented in the book, discuss the concept of pattern and, finally, how it is possible to know about feelings of gender from old interviews.

H.B. Nielsen, *Feeling Gender*,
DOI 10.1057/978-1-349-95082-9_3

The Study and the Sample

Monica Rudberg and I began the study 'Young Women and Men in Three Generations' in 1991. The focus of the project was to explore how cultural modernisation had been associated with the psychological project of becoming adults in three generations. We wanted to understand more of the interactions between cultural and personal gender in a process of change in order to grasp how not only cultural norms but also subjectivities are historically embedded and, more specifically, how generational relationships in the family contributed to these changes on a psychological level. We also wanted to understand more about what different class cultures and youth cultural identities meant for these processes.[1] It originated as two partly independent projects: one about young women (conducted by Monica Rudberg and myself) and one about young men (a PhD project conducted by Kari Vik Kleven).[2]

The project was initiated by two weeks of ethnographic observation in five classrooms in two high schools in Oslo in 1991. One school, old and centrally located in Oslo, had a very good academic reputation and the students mainly came from middle-class families where the parents received higher education, but there were also a small number of students from working-class and lower middle-class families. The other school was a suburban school with a broader recruitment profile. We found middle-class students here too, but the majority were working class and lower middle class. All the students were in their last year of high

[1] The study has been presented earlier in a book in Norwegian (Nielsen and Rudberg 2006) and in several English articles, among others Nielsen (2003, 2004), Nielsen et al. (2012), Nielsen and Rudberg (2000, 2007), Rudberg and Nielsen (2005, 2011, 2012) and Rudberg (1995, 2009).

[2] As mentioned in the Acknowledgements, the PhD project was not completed. For many years the interviews with the male chain laid untouched as Monica and I had more than enough to do with our own data. For this reason, most of the previous publications from the projects are about women only. We did, however, take care to get the youngest men included in the second round of interviews in 2001. In around 2008 Monica started to work with Kari's old data. Not all data was possible to retrieve and for this reason we have less information about the men in some respects. Three articles about the male chains appeared in the following years (Rudberg 2009; Rudberg and Nielsen 2011, 2012). However, the analyses in this book are the first to see the dynamics *between* women and men in a generational perspective.

school and following the general academic track.[3] The vast majority of high schools in Norway are free and, at the time we did our study, admission depended partly on grades from junior high school and partly on where the students lived, giving priority to students living nearest to the school. In 1991 almost 40 per cent of the youth cohorts in Oslo attended the academic track in high school and another well 40 per cent attended the vocational track or other schools; thus, the students in our classes can be described as ordinary Oslo youth of that time, but selected from among those who took the academic track in high school and with variation according to social background.

The classroom observations will not be used in this book, but they are still important to mention since they were the basis that we used to select the informants in the youngest generation. After the observation period we invited approximately half of the students, selected in order to secure a variance in relation to social class, marital status of their parents, choice of academic subjects and activity profile in the classroom, for a life historical interview. Later we interviewed the girls' mothers and maternal grandmothers, and the boys' fathers and paternal grandfathers. Because the focus of the study was generational changes in the youth period for women and men, the single-gendered chains made sense. As we later became more interested in the family dynamics, it made less sense. However, as all generations were interviewed about their relationships with both of their parents and their spouses (where relevant), the relationships with the other gender is not absent.

Since it turned out that not all in the two older generations wanted to take part in the study (in particular, many of the fathers declined, and fewer of the grandfathers than of the grandmothers were still alive), we ended up with a sample of 22 female and 12 male chains consisting of either two or three generations.[4] In 2001 many of the youngest

[3] Norway has nine years of compulsory school and three years of voluntarily high school which is specialised into different tracks: some academic (the general academic track preparing for university admission) and some vocational. All the students in our study followed the academic track, but a few boys (among them Erik and Glenn, who are analysed in this book) were recruited from the sports track, which also counts as academic. The students enter high school at the age of 15–16, so the students were 18–19 when we interviewed them.

[4] A total of 32 women and 25 men in the youngest generation were interviewed in 1991 at the age of 18. Of these, 19 girls and 17 men were re-interviewed in 2001. In this book, however, we have

Table 3.1 Overview over the informants and interviews on which this book is based

88 informants / *121 interviews*	*Oldest generation* 21 informants, born 1899–1927	*Middle generation* 33 informants, born 1919–1953	*Youngest generation* 34 informants, all born 1971/1972
Interviews 1991 (88 in total)	14 women 7 men (between 64 and 92 years old)	21 women 12 men (between 38 and 72 years old)	22 women 12 men (18 years old)
Interviews 2001 (25 in total)	–	–	19 women 6 men (30 years old)
Interviews 2011 (8 in total)	–	–	5 women 3 men (40 years old)

See the Appendix for a more detailed overview over family chains and distributions on social class

informants, now approaching 30 years of age, were interviewed a second time, and in 2011 eight informants, now approaching 40, had a third interview. All together this added up to 88 informants and 121 interviews (Table 3.1):

In 2001 we interviewed all the informants we managed to get in contact with and who consented (some of the men declined). In 2011 it was our own work situation that limited the number of informants we could interview. It would have been better to include more, but research projects running over several decades must live with compromises. We prioritised at that point to achieve a balance both in relation to gender, the schools they had attended and their class background. All those we approached in 2011 agreed to be interviewed once more.

The interview method consisted of semi-structured life-phase interviews focusing on childhood, youth and the transition to adulthood.

only included the cases of the 22 young women and the 12 young men whose parents and/or grandparents were also interviewed.

Biographical narrative interview methods had not yet gained the attention as a method in the social sciences that it received during the 1990s (Josselson and Lieblich 1993; Chamberlayne et al. 2000; Hollway and Jefferson 2000; Wengraf 2001). However, we also deliberately chose a semi-structured interview format because we wanted to compare information about childhood and youth from the different generations more systematically. For the two oldest generations of women, the interview started with filling in lifelines and genealogical trees.[5] The interview guide used in the 1991 interviews was the same for all generations (with some adaption to their age and stage of life) and focused on how they remembered their childhood and youth in terms of family life and relationships with parents, grandparents, siblings and friends, as well as activities, play, school, choice of education and political and cultural engagement in youth, description of self and others, the coming of age, the body, youth culture, courtship, love and sexuality, attitudes to gender and gender equality, and how they shared the work in their adult family. The interviews of the youngest generation at 30 and 40 years of age had three aims: to get information about what had happened in their lives since the last interview; to see whether they answered differently to some of the same questions that they were asked in the interviews at 18; and to check whether they could remember what they had answered to selected items at 18. In this way we could partly compensate for the methodological problem in the design that the two oldest generations were interviewed about their childhood and youth as adults, whereas the youngest generation was interviewed while they were still in the midst of it. As will be discussed further in Chap. 8, the concurrence between what they said at 18 and later was surprisingly good, and even though they had forgotten

[5] The interviews typically lasted between two and four hours and were tape-recorded. All interviews from 1991 were fully transcribed, while the interviews in 2001 and 2011 were summarised and only partly transcribed. The lifeline technique was simply that we drew a line on a piece of paper starting with the year the informant was born and ending in 1991. Then we asked the informant to fill in important life events and life transitions. The genealogical tree was a chart of names, years of birth and occupations of parents, grandparents and siblings of both the informant and the spouse(s). The lifelines and genealogical trees turned out to be of incredible value for orientation in relation to what was told later in the interview. It was Hedvig Ekerwald who taught us these techniques, for which we are still grateful. Unfortunately the lifeline and genealogical chart do not exist for the male chains, so for this reason our information about the men is sometimes less exact (for instance, we have less information about the jobs of their wives).

some of the details they had provided at 18, very few came up with completely new stories.

The way in which the study was designed and the time and place it was carried out had some consequences for the sample that should be kept in mind because it delimits the range of validity of the study. First, Norway is a small country with a population that was ethnically rather homogeneous until the late twentieth century and until recently the absolute majority of people were of Norwegian and European descent. There were (and still is) a small minority of indigenous population of Sami people from the northern part of Scandinavia and a varying but small number of people of Romani descent. As late as 1970, only 1.5 per cent of the population consisted of immigrants and their children, most of them from other European countries. The figure had risen to around four per cent when we did our interviews in 1991.[6] This specific demographic history explains why there were very few immigrants and non-white students in Norwegian schools at the time we did our study and why, as a consequence, the sample in the youngest generation consists of only white people of Scandinavian descent.

Second, it turned out that all the students we picked for interviews identified as heterosexual both in the first, second and third interviews. In the pre-queer times of the initial interviews there was generally little attention paid to sexual diversity or fluidity. Homosexuality was not illegal in Norway at this time, but it was seldom disclosed in classrooms either.[7] Thus, it was a dimension that was difficult to take into consideration when selecting our sample, but we have to admit that it was not something to which we as (heterosexual) researchers gave much thought either (see also Griffin 2000 on this). Issues regarding sexual orientation were not touched upon in the interviews in 1991, but were taken up in the 2001 interviews with the youngest generation. Here we asked about

[6] From 2000 the immigration numbers increased rapidly. In 2015 15.6 per cent of the population consisted of immigrants and their children, and only half of them were from other European countries (Statistics Norway https://www.ssb.no/en/).

[7] Sex between men was prohibited through legislation in Norway until 1972, which was very late compared to the other Scandinavian countries. In practice, however, it was only subject to prosecution in cases where there was a big age difference between the men or if the sex was exposed publicly. Sex between women has never been illegal in Norway (Rydström 2011).

their experiences with and attitudes to non-normative sexualities, and what they remembered about this from the time when they were in high school (see Chap. 7).

Third, since we chose classes of the academic track in the two city high schools, the sample turned out to be characterised by a high degree of social mobility across the three generations. Whereas the vast majority of our youngest generation received higher education, many of them had parents who grew up in working-class or lower middle-class families, most of them in Oslo. A majority of the grandparents (12 out of 21) grew up in the countryside as sons and daughters of farmers, fishermen and smallholders, and only three grew up in the bigger cities of Norway (see the Appendix for details). Thus, the geographical mobility happened with the oldest generation and the mainly upwardly social mobility happened with the middle generation. This is not an unusual generational trajectory for these generations as Norway was late to be industrialised and urbanised (see Chap. 4). In particular, it illustrates how close in time traditional rural life is to modern urban life in Norway. Many of our young informants had grandparents who had grown up in environments that reminded us of rural life in the nineteenth century. Given the character of our data, the research question was extended to explore how processes of cultural modernisation *and* social mobility had been associated with the psychological project of becoming adults in three generations.

Analysing Patterns

In psychosocial studies today the most used methodological approach is to employ either biographical narrative interviews or clinical vignettes and explore single cases in their richness and complexity in order to see how specific societal conditions are processed, adapted to or protested against by the person in question (see, for instance, Roseneil 2006; Layton 2010; Rudberg and Nielsen 2012; Hollway 2015). I have chosen another approach in this book: to look at the whole sample and find the commonalities in patterns of feelings between the singular cases, and then try to see the connection between these patterns and societal conditions that formed them and on which they also may have a transformatory effect.

As argued with Eric Fromm in Chap. 2, analysing the individual case and analysing patterns are not mutually exclusive alternatives, but the choice of focus depends on the purpose of the analysis. Both approaches have their limitations: the single-case approach may lose sight of the general patterns that in their aggregated form may become a social force, while the whole-sample approach does not explain the variation and may lose out on the individual context and specificity. However, since the single cases are the foundation of the patterns of meanings and feelings, they must first be summarised and analysed in their individual specificity in a whole-sample approach. Thus, the patterns that emerge in the analyses in Chaps. 5, 6 and 7 were preceded by thorough work on the level of the singular cases. But in order to make visible the shared patterns, much of the individual context and variation had to be excluded in the subsequent process. Any found pattern can always become more specified by highlighting the differences within; however, categories are analytical constructs and their usefulness will depend on the theoretical potentials of the category in combination with the research question rather than the degree to which they grasp empirical variation in any absolute sense.

So what is a pattern in a whole-sample analysis? A pattern in the context of this study means similarities across individual cases along a certain dimensions of meaning, like feelings about parents, bodies and sexuality, ways of organising work and care, ways to reflect on gender, and the ways in which all these things may interact. A pattern may exist even if it does not cover everything or is contextual-dependent. This is obvious in quantitative studies, but in my view the same is the case for patterns of meaning in qualitative studies (Nielsen 1995). It may be equally important to see the similarities in the seemingly different as seeing the differences in the seemingly alike. As illustrated by chaos theory, levels of order and disorder in complex and non-linear systems are dependent on the scale employed: in a close view, patterns may disappear, but they may re-emerge when seen from a greater distance and vice versa (Kamminga 1990). In this way identifying patterns is both dependent on regularities in the studied object itself and a view from the outside that makes the patterns visible. Here I take a critical-hermeneutic position, trying to avoid both the extreme naturalist and extreme constructivist positions. The object of study has its own ontology, but the scale or the approach

of the researcher also conditions the result of the analysis (Nielsen 1995, 1999).

In our analyses of the narratives of the three generations, much of the work has been about finding the distances from which significant and meaningful generational patterns emerge. Sometimes a pattern becomes visible because there are marked quantitative differences between the generations. An example of this is the mother–daughter relationship, where nobody in the oldest generation and very few in the youngest generation have negative descriptions of their mothers, compared to the middle generation, where this is the case with more than half of the informants. However, since we are working with a qualitative sample, significant quantitative differences do not in themselves give evidence of general patterns, as they may be purely accidental. Thus, also a numerically based pattern must be argued to make sense in connection with other dimensions of the data or find support in relation to what has been found in comparable studies. In the case of the shifting mother–daughter relationships, the found pattern makes sense with regard to both the structural changes in women's lives in these three generations and the ways in which they engage in heterosexual relationships. These things also fit with bits and pieces of other studies, even if these other studies do not describe all three generations. Since numbers in themselves are not the main argument in qualitative studies, it is consequently possible to argue conversely that a pattern can also be significant in cases where it is only found in a limited number of informants. An example of this is the way some of the men in the oldest generation talk with compassion about their too-hardworking mothers. Less than half of them mention this. However, seen in relation to the invisibility of the mothers in the narratives of the other men and compared to the generally elaborated description of fathers, the connection between femininity and weakness emerges as a generational pattern among the oldest men. The arguments almost all the men have about not wanting their wives to work makes this connection even clearer, and this pattern is not seen in the younger generations. Since frequencies are only—and not even necessarily—part of identifying patterns of meaning, I have abstained, also for the sake of readability, from operating with exact numbers in my analyses, but instead have used rough amounts like 'few', 'many', 'a majority' and so on. When it comes to comparing details

in the empirical Chaps. 5, 6 and 7 with other studies, I have mainly used other Nordic studies, whereas the whole 'gestalt' in Chap. 8 is compared with selected generational studies from Britain. The many 'see also…' references are used to indicate when a found pattern of our analyses matches findings in comparable studies.

Comparing Generations

Generational studies have several methodological issues to them that need to be addressed, but to which it is not always possible to find good solutions. The notion of 'historical generation' is not the same as the concept of 'cohort', as a generation will most often include several cohorts and not necessarily with any clear border: generations tend to be 'clearest at their centers, but blurred and fuzzy at the edges' (Rosow, cited in Alwin and McCammon 2004: 41). The concept of generations becomes even more fuzzy when they are used in generational studies, partly because the design itself separates what is a gradual historical development into more or less incidental 'generations' and partly because these generations will be broader the longer the distance to the anchor-generation. In our study, the youngest generation that is our anchor-generation represents a birth cohort (1971/1972), whereas the two older generations cover approximately 30 cohorts each. Most of the informants in the oldest generation are born between 1910 and 1925, most of the middle generation in the 1940s, but there is also an overlap among the men in the two eldest generations as two men from the middle generation in terms of age could have belonged to the oldest generation. Furthermore, as women tend to be younger than men when they have their first child, the mothers and grandmothers in our study belong on average to younger birth cohorts than the fathers and grandfathers. Yet, the middle generation may also be seen as a parental cohort since they all had a child within the same year, something that may have given them some similar experiences from the period in which their child grew up, despite their different ages. But this cohort effect is, of course, not relevant prior to their parenthood.

It has been argued that the imprecise concept of historical generations makes it difficult to connect it to social change and that the operative

concept of cohort seems to be more straightforward. However, Alwin and McCammon (2004: 25, 27) also make the opposite argument: the concept of generation has more potential for understanding the origins and nature of social change as generations are more a matter of quality than degree. Even though cohort and generation are not the same, it may still be the case that cohort effects are 'given life' though interpretative and behavioural aspects of the generation. In this way the combination of cohort and generation may also contribute to a better understanding of the agency of a given cohort. This inclusive approach to cohort and generation makes sense in relation to our study. Some patterns emerge from informants in a generation clustering around certain birth cohorts, while others may emerge from informants sharing similar conditions or formative experiences as children and youth. Informants who are on the margins of these main clusters may show something important about the gradual character of the process of generational change: the oldest informants in the middle generations often combine patterns from the oldest and the middle generations, for instance, when it comes to obligations to their parents or the work ethic. This again leads to a perception in their children of having 'old parents' with different ideas and values than other parents, and by this the child may also have a modernising effect on the parents and contribute to further modifying them as border figures between historical generations. In this way one can argue that a generational data set with 'fuzzy edges' may actually be an advantage to understand the gradual emergence of generational patterns. Used with methodological precautions, the value of the study of intergenerational transmission in a historical context is that it may grasp some of the more elusive aspects of social reproduction and change. As Alwin and McCammon (2004: 42) conclude: 'Generations lack specific boundaries and are meaningful in their distinctiveness largely as subpopulations, but offer the potential of being used as powerful explanations in and of themselves for distinctive patterns of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors'—and, once again, I would add feelings.

Another consequence of not being able to control the characteristics of the generational samples derived from the anchor generation is that the class composition of each generation becomes unequal. In our case the social composition of the different generational groups reflects the

process of social mobility of these three generations: a majority in the oldest generation grew up in rural areas, the majority in the middle generation grew up urban working class, and the majority in the youngest generation grew up urban middle class. The slightly higher social profile among the women compared to the men in the youngest generation may illustrate that upward social mobility through the school system was a track generally used more by working-class girls than by working-class boys in the middle generation (see Chap. 4). Even though the imbalance in social profile between genders and generations reflects general aspects of the process of social transformation, it also indicates that comparisons between groups must be made with caution, in particular when it comes to distinguishing class differences from generational differences There is no doubt that the differences we found between the generations are accentuated by the imbalance of the geographical and social composition of the different generational groups. However, since the demographic movements in society during these three generations did increase the urban population and the number of people belonging to the middle classes, the class differences in fact reflect a generational change.

A third issue that complicates generational studies is determining what items it makes sense to compare. Because of structural and demographical changes, such as those related to increased standards of living, the increased level of general education and the increased prevalence of divorces, the same experiences in different generations of not getting an education, being poor or having divorced parents attain very different cultural and emotional meanings. It may make more sense to compare different items that address the same dimension of experienced meaning to achieve more relevant comparisons. Instead of comparing single items like the level of wealth or the number of divorces in the childhoods of the different generations, working on the level of context and meaning of the experience of poverty in the oldest generation and the experience of divorces in the youngest generation may be a more relevant comparison: as the oldest generation knew that poverty and the deaths of parents were calculated risks in life, so did their grandchildren know that parental divorces were, and that there were no relational safety nets against it. They learnt how to handle divorces in much the same way as their grandparents learned to handle the hardships of their childhood. The increased

consciousness of the fragility of human relationships became the backdrop of life in the youngest generation. Whereas the conditions of life taught the oldest generation skills of frugality and modesty, the youngest generation learnt, for good or ill, to take different perspectives, to differentiate between different social relationships and norms, and to handle ambivalent feelings. As 18-year-olds, most of them had come to the conclusion that their parents were just not the right match.

Narratives in Time

All biographical interviewing raises the question about the relationship between lived life and told story, but this problem is amplified in a generational study where people are interviewed at different ages and with different degrees of distance to the issues they talk about. Memories are always reconstructions in the present of what happened in the past, and the narratives will therefore be characterised by selections, linking of memories, interpretations and chosen perspectives (Josselson and Lieblich 1993; Bruner 2003; Rosenthal 2004). Evidently, the stories of the informants' childhood, youth and family life are seen through discourses or 'lenses' that belong to different historical moments, some of them of more recent date than the time they are telling us about. For the eldest generation, such later lenses providing narrative perspectives are the increased standards of living, the possibilities for education and changed norms of morality. In particular, the men emphasise the moral decay in society, whereas the women are more occupied with the increased openness about sex and bodily functions, and the diminished social differences among people. Hardly any of the lenses of the older generation are present in the stories of the middle generation; instead, their narrative perspective highlights the increased enlightenment, the psychological approach and the norm of gender equality. Several of the women in the middle generation tell stories of 'coming out' as feminists, with somewhat ironic depictions of themselves as young girls. They often describe themselves as caricatures of teenage girls, very different from the oldest women who may talk about their youth with humour, joy or sorrow, but never with irony. The self-caricature may also be due to the fact

that the women in the middle generation describe themselves much more as members of a specific generation—and their recollections of their own youth, as well as the interviewer's response to them, seem to merge with the media images of their generation as young people. In comparison, the older informants had neither this youth generational identity nor such a strong discourse about the historical period. 'The hard times' in the early 1930s seem to have a much more limited generational reference than the all-inclusive concept of 'the 1950s'.

Time also marks the interviews through specific narrative styles. Across generations there are different 'genres' at work in the ways in which the informants talk about the world and their selves. The oldest generation tends to construct their stories in a rather deterministic 'structuralist' way. As they often say: 'that was the way it was back then'. Many of them are good storytellers. They offer broad and generalised pictures of their family life, their activities and the community they grew up in, but also include many vivid details that almost evoke a feeling of standing in front of a naturalistic landscape painting:

> I must say that I grew up in a good home. I must say I did. And father was a carpenter, so we always had skies and ski sticks. I had an awfully long way to school, so in winter we went on our skies, if the snow was good. And we had sleighs, too. We lived close to the railway station, so when we went to school, we had to go all the way down into the valley, and across the river—I think we had a 6 km-long walk to school. (Ingrid, b. 1910)

It is the outer things that are made central: what one did, what happened, what one had and what one ate, often illustrated through concrete episodes and events. Much more often than the following generations, they talk in terms of a collective 'we'. The descriptive and non-individualist perspective is also seen in their evaluations, where nuances and reservations are seldom conveyed: things were either good or bad—and criticism of parents and homes are very rare. To say that you are discontented seems to go against deeply rooted norms of modesty; only war, death and illnesses can be openly lamented. This also reveals a clear distance from modern reflexivity and psychological discourse. When asked whether they ever experienced adolescence as a difficult time, the (rural) women

would typically respond: 'We did not have so many problems in those times' or 'I can't remember that we had like puberty and all that stuff. I can't say I had that'. The old men talk in much of the same genre, but seem a bit more reticent than the old women. Their stories are abbreviated to their absolute essentials. However, the men more often tend to start their tale with the generation before their own—as if they need to place themselves within a larger ancestral network.

The non-individualist and emotionally low-key style of the oldest generation is echoed by the working-class men in the middle generation, who seem quite embarrassed at the request to describe themselves. However, most of the men in this generation rather willingly produce more self-focused narratives. Psychological concepts have become everyday discursive tools, and psychological models are brought in to interpret their lives and feelings:

> I was in rebellion from I was in fourth to fifth grade, so I was a rebel. Against everything, actually. First parents, and that was as it usually is at that age. So then you had few things to hold on to otherwise. I think I was quite a vulnerable child, and I have it today, too, an understanding of how people are, and can detect it very quickly … It may be a bit sentimental, but the image of dandelions growing through the asphalt. Like, always the chance to get through as long as you don't stop. But I've also seen myself in the image of being someone who climbs up a hill made out of quicksand. (Per, b. 1947)

The self-presentation here refers more to a psychological discourse, always problematising one's own motives, seeking the answers in childhood experiences as well as reflecting upon one's own reconstruction of memories. Whereas the men often use this discourse to depict their own personalities, the women instead tend to provide us with lengthy descriptions of family relationships and dynamics. Their recollections of activities and events often slide into interpretations and evaluations. This also seems to imply the removal of a taboo against talking negatively about others—which often involves blaming their parents, especially their mothers. Such statements can now be understood within a legitimate field of analytic and interpretative activity, not as final assertions about

how somebody 'really' is. Such a distinction does not seem to carry much meaning for the older generation.

The women in the youngest generation still make use of this psychological discourse, but it is often at the same time ironically negated (belonging not only to their mother's generation, but also to a trend of confessional intimacy in the media, which some of them find ridiculous). Instead of a 'story' of their upbringing, the youngest generation give us bits and pieces, held together more by the underlying emotional tone than by the actual information or a storyline. A reason for this is that what they describe is something they are still in, compared to the temporal distance to the childhood/youth of the older generations, but this does not exclude it from being told in a characteristic generational narrative genre:

> Well, mostly we eat at home, but not dinners really. We just have a sandwich system. We make dinners when we feel like it and have sandwiches when we don't feel like it. My mom got quite frustrated. Like every time she had made something I said: 'Ugh, are we having *that* for dinner?!' [laughs] 'Ugh, I don't want *that*. Phew!' If it looked kind of boring. (Eva, b. 1972, 18 years old)

In some ways this is a much less personalised genre than their mothers' descriptions of family dynamics, but still with a relational focus. Among the middle-class boys, the psychological perspective is more prominent than among girls from the same social background. But the young men also tend—just like their fathers—to use the psychological discourse to enhance their own uniqueness by underlining an explicit outsider status in a constant need to prove themselves as 'unique' and 'different'.

Evidently, these generation-specific genres stem from varied sources. One could be the specific life phase of the informants: it is different to talk about your childhood and youth when you are in the midst of it, when you have children who are in the midst of it or when both you and your children survived it. It may be harder to talk negatively about dead parents than about those who are still around. Another source of the different generational genres could be the relationship in the interview situation: to the oldest generation, we as interviewers slide into the position

of the respectful daughter (grandmother/grandfather tell stories about their childhood long ago), to the middle generation, the position of a female friend (intimate confessions), and to the young generation, which is on the threshold of entering university, the position of an admirable researcher (eagerly providing us with information about contemporary youth cultures) or, especially with the young men, a motherly caring figure to whom they can open their heart. Such positionings probably also colour our interpretation and analysis of the interviews as researchers: more curiosity and respect towards the oldest generation, more recognition and (self-)critique towards the middle generation, and more affection and hope when we analyse the informants who are the same age as our own children. There was yet another twist of time in the second round of interviewing where the young informants had become adults. At 30, both men and women now used mainly the psychological and relational genre, also employing it in their often-lengthy tales about jobs and careers. At 40, the focus was rather on how to manage the stressful work-life balance. At this point they were almost the same age as we as researchers had been at the first interview. It is difficult to say exactly how these things influenced the interviews, but it indicates the importance of awareness towards the age of the informants and the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee as co-producing the narratives and the perspectives chosen.

The different perspectives and narrative genres may also tell us something about historical shifts and how people come to understand themselves in different historical contexts. Viewed strictly as historical sources, all the interviews are remnants from 1991. But the fact that people from the same generations so clearly tend to pick similar discourses when constructing their memoirs of childhood and youth also makes it feasible to view these discourses as 'small pockets of history', preserved in the individuals. The rise of modern reflexivity, for instance, is evident in the narratives across the three generations. The concentration on the outer world among the oldest generation seems easy to understand in light of the scarcity in their childhood; the relational interest in the middle generation could be interpreted as a result of new possibilities of leisure and self-realisation; and, finally, the observing, ironic style of the youngest generation would be hard to imagine without their extensive access

to the media, just as their fragmented stories might be an expression of the actual relational havoc surrounding them. The generational stories with many of the same concrete recollections indicate that there are indeed experiences to be interpreted, not only inventions of the present. As Jerome Bruner, and many others, have stated, understanding the self relies on selective remembering to 'adjust the past to the demands of the present and the anticipated future' (Bruner 2003: 213).

Still, the intertwinement of discursive perspectives and memories of the past evidently presents a challenge when it comes to *comparing* the life situations of the different generations. For example, the older women give much more elaborated accounts than their daughters of the social hierarchies in their local community and also of political disagreements, for instance, right-wing fathers and left-wing uncles yelling at each other at family reunions. Does this exclusion of a political world have to do with the obsession with psychology in the middle generation? Or rather with the fact that their childhood coincided with a period in Norwegian history (the 1950s and 1960s) when the construction of the welfare state really took off and was based on important political compromises both between political parties and in the labour market? Due both to this and to the rapidly increasing standards of living, income differences between people actually decreased.

On a purely theoretical level, problems like these may point to the futility of asking what the informants are 'really' talking about. However, if one poses the question on the textual level, it is often possible to get an idea of what belongs to social practices and discourses of the past, and what belongs to later discourses or the present of the interview situation. A close textual reading can, for instance, detect discrete messages about discontent that underlie the old women's assurance that one did not have any problems in those days, or the vulnerability and seriousness that infuse the funny stories of the youngest generation. Sometimes the informants themselves highlight the difference between how they saw it then and how they see it now. As Gabrielle Rosenthal says, narratives of experienced events refer both to the current life and to past experiences. The point is to understand the course of action of the experienced events both when they happened and when they are told. What was the

meaning of the event then and what is the meaning now (Rosenthal 2004: 49–50)?

Reading Feelings

A last methodological issue to be considered is how it is possible to read 'feelings' out of research interviews. This question is especially pertinent when the theoretical perspective on feelings draws on psychoanalytic theory, which is developed for and validated in a clinical setting. An in-depth study of emotional meanings is admittedly hard to accomplish in empirical research outside of clinical practice. This has been a target of much debate in the field of psychosocial studies, where some argue that it is not only a possible but also a vital resource for social researchers to make use of transference/countertransference processes in the reading of the informants' unconscious processes, while others have been critical to this (for the discussion on this, see, for instance, Walkerdine 1997; Hollway and Jefferson 2000; Bornat 2004; Frosh and Emerson 2005; Roseneil 2006; Frosh and Baraitser 2008; Hollway 2015; Woodward 2015). My position on this is that using psychoanalytic perspectives in social research does not imply that the researcher should relate to their informants as psychoanalysts to their patients. One issue to consider is that even though qualitative interviews as compared to surveys, experiments and tests may be seen as rich materials and 'thick descriptions', they are indeed very 'meagre', as Chodorow (1999) puts it, when compared to clinical data that stems from often many years of clinical encounters between the patient and the analyst. Another issue is that most social researchers lack proper training in handling and interpreting what goes on in the transference in the interview situation, so the danger of 'wild analysis' cannot be excluded. A third issue is that the analyses of interview transcripts are not (and in my opinion should not be) validated in an interpersonal space that includes the informant. What social researchers basically work with are texts, and texts are not persons (and definitely not when analysing interviews that are 25 years old).

However, when psychosocial methods are implied in social research, it is not primarily the psychobiographical specificity of individual stories

but the social patterns to which they speak that is the target (Roseneil 2006: 848). In my case, the whole-sample analysis does not work on the level of individual psychobiographies, but on the level of shared psychological patterns. It is not the defended subjects I am aiming at, but rather the patterns of defence across individual cases, no matter how varied the individual trajectories to this pattern were. Furthermore, the concept of the unconscious I work with is not only or even primarily understood with reference to the dynamically repressed, but rather as a part of the self that organises experience and informs creativity and agency on an emotional level (see Chap. 2). For this reason I relate to my interview transcripts not as persons, but as texts. I regard the interviews as a corpus of text in which I try to find the emotional meaning as an integrated part of what is said, directly or indirectly. Just as narrative perspectives open up 'outwards' to social change, they also open up 'inwards' through conveying the emotional meanings attached to such change (Rudberg and Nielsen 2011).

It is possible to work with a psychoanalytic ontology (Hollway and Jefferson 2000; Roseneil 2006) and to employ a context-sensitive textual analysis and a psychologically sensitive reading that acknowledge that an emotional meaning is always present in what is said, without analysing individual unconscious conflicts. From the way the informants talk and the words they use, it is possible to learn something about their personal images of parents and thus to gain some insight into how also emotional aspects of meanings of gender are part of a person's biography. I have found the psychoanalytic concepts of identification, disidentification, projection, disavowal, idealisation and ambivalence (see Chap. 2) useful as ways to interpret what the informants say about their relationships with others and their own bodies. They may work as 'small pockets of feelings' in the text. What people say about their feelings is sometimes relatively straightforward, while at other times it may be more hidden or ambiguous. The relation between utterance and textual context is an important cue here. If an informant says 'I had a good relationship with my mother' and then proceeds to describe her relationship with her father with much more enthusiasm and detail, then this textual context lends significance to the claim. Another informant could utter exactly the same phrase, but the context of the interview could give it a different meaning

compared to the first case. In addition, non-verbal cues like voice, tearfulness, pauses, humorous comments, slips of the tongue or simply the intensity of the tone can be important contextual cues, which are preserved in transcripts (Nielsen 2003). Feelings may also reveal themselves from the textual organisation: what are the contradictions or difficult points in the stories, when do they not make sense? What model of the world and of self–other relationships makes itself known in the way in which the informants talk? In looking at interviews as textual structures with conscious and unconscious layers of meaning, I follow the insight of Ricouer that both meaning (content as structure) and significance (content as reference to the world) are vital parts of the interpretation of texts. Life, Paul Ricoeur says, can be seen as 'an activity and a passion in search of a narrative' (Ricoeur 1991b: 29). When we construct a narrative of our life, we produce a textual structure that 'underscore(s) the mixture of acting and suffering which constitutes the very fabric of life. It is this mixture which the narrative attempts to imitate in a creative way' (Ricoeur 1991b: 28). When we tell a story of our lives, the point is not only to make our lives more intelligible, but also more bearable. We can make ourselves heroes of our own story— however, we cannot actually become the author of our own life. Thus, even though a narrative strives towards homogeneity, it will always be a synthesis of the heterogeneous—a structure of 'discordant concordance' (Ricoeur 1991b: 31).

Valerie Walkerdine (1997) and others have argued that there are also processes of transference in reading texts and that the employment of the researcher's subjectivity in the process of interpretation is indispensable and should not be seen as a source of error. This concurs with Paul Ricouer's view that the indecisiveness of textual meaning first turns into social communication (the significance of the text) when it meets its reader (Ricoeur 1991a: 63). However, in research it is problematic if the significance that emerges says more about the reader than about the text (see also Bornat 2004). It is therefore important to be able to document the interpretation on the textual level: interpreting the emotional layers of the text is not reading 'between the lines', but a broader interpretation of what is 'in the lines' than just reading the words in a very literal way. The German psychoanalyst Alfred Lorenzer and his colleagues, working in the field of cultural studies in the tradition of the late Frankfurt

School, have developed a method for 'deep-hermeneutic cultural interpretation' of texts (Lorenzer 1986). The point here is not to analyse the person behind the text, but to understand how the unconscious structures in the text reflect the world we live in. Lorenzer does not reduce the manifest meaning of a text to a latent meaning. While the latent meaning of a dream will often require additional information from the dreamer, the latent meaning of a written text has to be in the text, otherwise it makes little sense. The connecting point between the conscious and the unconscious is found in the symbolic accounts themselves. According to Lorenzer, in order to find the unconscious structure in a text, we have to read the text as openly as an analyst should listen to the talk of a patient. We look at the spots where it 'irritates' (Prokop 1996)—where something 'does not fit' or seems to be missing, where the text becomes contradictory or maybe too coherent, or where the rhetoric is experienced as ambiguous, touching or untrustworthy. It may have to do with content, but more often with form—selection, ordering, rhetorical figures and textual images. My focus of the generational patterns in feelings may actually have more in common with the way in which Lorenzer analyses the conscious and an unconscious structure of meaning in cultural texts than with psychoanalysis of individuals. According to Lorenzer, the purpose of drawing attention to the unconscious structures in symbolic forms is not to understand the specific biography of the narrator, as it would be in therapy, but to understand how unconscious desires and cultural activity are intertwined. While the psychoanalytic interpretation in therapy aims at changing the analysand, the deep hermeneutic cultural interpretation, by drawing attention to hidden 'life sketches', aims at changing the analyst (or the readers). Lorenzer calls this the distinction between 'analysing the production' and 'analysing the effects' of the text (Lorenzer 1986: 68). Through an autobiographical text, we may gain insight into how a narrator can contribute to the change of culture through the impact his or her symbolic behaviour—stories told or practices engaged in—has on others. In my case, looking for the feelings of gender has exactly this aim: to see how feelings of gender have been used as a creative potential of change.

Reading Generations

It is challenging not only to analyse generational material, but also to read it. I have given the informants names according to their gender, generation and class,[8] and have used the same initials in the names of the same chain (see the Appendix for a survey of the names and social mobility of the 34 chains). Each generation has been given its own empirical chapter, but the names should make it possible to see family links between the chapters. For different reasons, not all interviews were equally useful—and that is the reason that a chain sometimes 'disappears' in later chapters. For the youngest generation, it can also be due to a missing second round of interviews in some cases. In larger quotes from the two older generations, the name of the informant is tagged with the year of birth, whereas for the youngest generation it is the age at the interview (18, 30 or 40) that is marked. Quotes from the informants are in italics whether they appear as block quotes or are integrated in the running text. Most of the informants in the older generation have kept traces of the regional dialects of their childhood. In the translation into English, this class and time colouring was not possible to preserve.

All informants are presented with their class background the first time they are mentioned, both as children and adults. In relation to class division I have used a combination of education, character of work, position at work and economic capital in the family to make a simple system that works reasonably well with the different generations. It distinguishes between housewives (only women), farmers/fishermen families, working class, lower middle class, middle class, upper middle class and families who are self-employed (see the Appendix for definitions and more details). Sometimes, when it makes sense, I also characterise found patterns in terms of a rougher contrast of working class (including lower middle class) versus middle class (including upper middle class) where education or economic capital is the dividing line, but it is important to be aware

[8] In this the databases of Statistics Norway have been very useful. They give information about the frequency of different names in Norway since 1880 (https://www.ssb.no/a/navn/historisk-utvikling-av-jentenavn/ and https://www.ssb.no/a/navn/historisk-utvikling-av-guttenavn/). I am aware that non-Norwegians will probably not be able to appreciate this element of time colouring. However, I have avoided using names with the specific Scandinavian letters æ, ø and å.

that not all informants are covered by these binary pairs. Another issue is that social class can (and in this sample most often does) change from the childhood family to the adult family. I have used age categories to specify this; thus, being a 'working-class boy' means that this informant grew up working class, whereas being a 'middle-class woman' indicates the class in which this informant ended up as an adult. The quotes have been selected to make visible relevant class differences, but they are not in all cases balanced in relation to gender. The reason for privileging quotes from men in some sections is that less is known about men's experiences when it comes to issues like family, care work and bodies/sexuality, and therefore we wanted to pay special attention to this.

Several things should be kept in mind while reading the analyses. Unless something else is mentioned, 'the women' and 'the men' will refer to women and men in our sample, not the general population of women and men in these generations. Another thing that is important to remember is that the men and women in the same generations come from different families. Especially in the section about how the different generations organised work and care in their families as adults, it is important to steer clear of misunderstandings. For instance, when we write what the men or the women thought about their partners' contribution to the household, it is essential to remember that the men and women from the same generation in the sample are *not* couples.