

5

Born around The First World War: Refining Gender Complementarity With Monica Rudberg

Men's Work and Women's Work

We didn't have many earthly possessions. But we did have our own house and enough food ... We had a good and happy childhood, at the same time as we had to work. And we have taken care of each other ... During the summer, when my father worked at the docks—when all the coal boats came in—he earned 1200 kr. And then we bought flour and coffee and sugar, margarine, potatoes and such for winter, in bulk so that we'd more or less get through the winter. He also had a boat he sometimes used to go fishing for dinner, when the weather allowed it ... And mother always cooked, she was good at cooking. They bought pig's trotters that she pickled herself. We could eat that instead of bread, so that was in order to save bread ... Quite amazing how she made the money go round ... She also used to clean people's houses when they needed it, she did that too ... My father helped at home as much as he could. And then he was a cobbler. We never had to stay home because we didn't have shoes. Never! (Martha, b. 1913)

Martha's account of her childhood in a working-class family in a small fishing town in northern Norway gives us a glimpse of how it could be to grow up in the early part of the twentieth century. The key words are industriousness, thrift and solidarity. It was a poor childhood of simple living conditions and hard work for the majority of children, but not descending into starvation (Danielsen 1990; Kjeldstadli 1994; Nielsen 2006). The vast majority of our 21 interviewees from the eldest generation, born between 1899 and 1927, grew up, like Martha, with many siblings in families of smallholders, farmers and fishermen. They were working-class, lower middle-class or small self-employed families where money was scarce and the income insecure. As mentioned in Chap. 4, such were the living conditions of most people in Norway before the introduction of the first public policies on social security from the mid-1930s onwards.

A gendered division of work was part of the struggle to survive. Yet it took on different forms according to the rural/urban divide, which was of huge importance at a time when the majority lived in rural areas. Economic and cultural class differences crossed this main divide in a variety of ways. Borghild, a rural girl born in 1911, characterised her family as '*a family of fighters with the women inside and the men outside*'. In farmer families women would assist in men's outdoor work when they were needed, or they would do all of the work if the husband for some reason was absent. In city families, if the father had a small enterprise, the mother would assist him in different ways. In one case a mother opened her own shop, but named it after her husband. There was less flexibility the other way round, but on rare occasions men assisted in household work, for instance, in periods of male unemployment or on special occasions like the annual slaughter or at Christmas. In rural families the father generally handled the money, but the mother could occasionally make some of her own money by taking in washing and sewing jobs for people or by selling eggs and vegetables from the farm. Conversely, in the cities the father usually handed over his salary to the mother so that she could make sure that it was used in the most economical way (see also Åström 1986; Thorsen 1993a). Most people in this generation say that their fathers made the major decisions, while their mothers made decisions concerning the household and child rearing.

What is worth noticing in these descriptions of the gender divisions of their childhood is that both parents' contributions are seen as *work*. Fathers provided money through their work on the farm or outside the family, but the mothers' contribution to the family's survival is considered just as essential. Like Martha, the other informants describe how their mothers' superior skills at household work and needlework meant being able to stretch funds to provide enough food and clothing. The women in this generation give detailed accounts of their mothers' work, while the men mainly remember the food she served. Einar, who grew up at a smallholding, still remembers this with fondness and in great detail nearly 50 years later:

Mother made something she called chopped potatoes. It was a bit of fried pork and some chopped-up potatoes from the day before. And I thought that was delicious. And then there was a lot of oats, raw oats with milk. We had good milk since we got it from the farm. And then mother fried roe and waffles, and she made the best of what she had. I'd say that. And mother's meatballs! I've never tasted meatballs like these ever again [laughs]! (Einar, b. 1923)

Children, especially those growing up in rural families, were introduced to this gendered division of work early on: girls were supposed to help their mothers inside the house, while sons helped their fathers outside the house. Children from urban working-class families also helped out, but here the practical circumstances sometimes led to less gendered divisions of work. Martha describes how she and her nine siblings were given their share of the work according to age, not gender: when they were five or six years old, the job was to take out the goats and sheep to pasture; when they were older, they delivered coal to customers in the mornings before school, in a wheelbarrow during summer and on a sledge during winter. If there had been a storm, they would collect driftwood underneath the piers. Later again they worked folding newspapers, or they delivered the newspaper or bills to people. All the money they earned was handed over to their mother. Martha still remembers that they got 2 kr. for folding 3000 papers—*and that was actually a barrel of coal*. Martha's father died when she was 17, making her the main breadwinner in her family until she married at 25. She recalls, clearly moved, how her older brother came

back from sea and gave her a gold watch as a sign of appreciation. Most of the children who helped out in their families emphasise that it gave them a feeling of belonging. The work could be strenuous, but it is never described as negative, as the long and cold walk to school and back was, for instance. Johanna (b. 1910), who grew up at a small farm and worked as hard as Martha throughout her childhood and youth, explains why she did not mind helping out: *'I wanted terribly to be part of what was happening'*.

There was generally greater flexibility in women's work both for the rural and urban children: girls would often assist their fathers as well as helping their mothers, whereas very few boys assisted their mothers with work inside the house. Both girls and boys remember it as positive to help their fathers outside. The only boy who reports that he and his brothers (he had no sisters) helped their mother in the kitchen on a more regular basis resented it and much preferred helping their father. He remembers with disgust that he and his brothers were called their mother's 'little servants' (Martin, from a smallholder family, b. 1905). Brothers also got more free time and their education was given priority over that of their sisters. As boys they were expected to earn their living outside of the family, unless they were due to inherit the family farm. For girls, the responsibility for their families extended into their adult lives, and in the cases where they stayed at home to help out, this meant having to ask their parents for money for all necessities (see Thorsen 1993a). But neither girls nor boys from rural families got much education at all at this time. For economic reasons, it was necessary that they started work early, within or outside the family. The men are brief when they talk about school—they didn't belong there, writing was difficult, they didn't do well: *'well, yes, school didn't go so well for me, I guess you could say ... we moved too much ... it became too much of a mess'* (Anton, from a smallholder family, b. 1900). Work counted more than school where they grew up and it was a relief when they could start apprenticeships as 15-year-olds. The women generally have more happy memories of school—often remembering themselves as clever—but the rural girls also saw it as pretty irrelevant even if it was enjoyable. Johanna, who is otherwise rather reserved, becomes quite ecstatic when she remembers how much she liked maths:

And I really wanted to do math, I really wanted to do math, I really wanted to do math, and I was, and I was, can't explain how much I wanted to do math all the time ... and you know what, I want to do math still, yes, I do. (Johanna, b. 1910)

What came after compulsory school was less clear for the girls than for the boys. Most of the rural girls stayed home helping their mothers or took jobs as domestic servants in other families until they married. Johanna did both: first she stayed at home to help out because her sister had already left—*'I just couldn't imagine leaving father and mother and put them out, no, I just couldn't'*, she says—and later took up a post as a dairymaid at another farm. Finally she stayed half a year in a school for domestic science to learn the theory behind what her mother had taught her in practice. This turned out to be a perfect route of preparation for marrying a wealthy farmer, which she did when she was 23. For urban girls, there were more chances to continue on to middle school because there were more schools in the cities and their families did not need them in the same way. The urban girls in our sample recall that their mothers played an important role in letting them continue in school, often against the wishes of their more traditional fathers who thought education was not necessary for girls who were going to marry anyway. Clara (lower middle class, b. 1912), for example, had a mother who prioritised the education of her daughters because her sons could become sailors after compulsory school and thus had a career mapped out for them. In Martha's poor family all the siblings completed middle school thanks to an ambitious mother who herself had problems with reading and writing. Because of her good grades, Martha got into the telegraph school, and it was with this qualification that she could provide for her family when her father died in 1930. Some of the rural girls eventually saw a chance to get away from home by taking jobs as domestic servants for urban families. These families often took gross advantage of their proficiency in household work and acceptance of hard work.¹ The smallholder daughter Karen remembers with pride her first job as servant girl in Oslo:

¹ In 1930 40 per cent of all women with gainful work were domestic servants. In 1950 it was 25 per cent, but at this time the majority of them were employed in farm work, not in the cities (Melby 1999).

I was used to working and then, oh, I got so much praise, oh, I got so much praise ... I remember Mrs Herman Andersen, he was a wholesaler, they lived on the ground floor, then she came and was like, 'Look at Karen, oh, how nice she has made it.' And you know, I cleaned and really went at it, because I thought ... Everything was so easy, you know, compared to what I had at home, so I thought it was really fun, and you were paid for it! (Karen, b. 1924)

What has been labelled in cultural history as 'the mentality of work' (Le Goff 1978, as cited in Thorsen 1993a) or the moral imperative of 'being of use' (Gullestad 1996) was thus installed particularly among the women in the eldest generation during early childhood. For those who did not enter into social mobility, it was kept as a strong and guiding moral value throughout their life.

Growing up urban middle class during this time did not automatically imply better material conditions or increased security than for the working class. Even if it did, the basic moral of diligence and frugality was similar. Some of the middle-class women of this generation in our sample also experienced having to leave school and start working to help the family to survive economically when the father died. However, with regard to family culture, values and life expectations, these poorer middle-class girls still share some traits with the very few informants from this generation who belonged to relatively well-off families. Harald (born 1899) and Dagny (born 1911) for example, who both grew up upper middle class, also describe a gendered division of work, albeit in quite a different version. The idea of work is here usually limited to describe the fathers' activities outside the family. However, the fathers' work is mostly implied by the fact that they needed to rest when they came home. Harald had a father who taught at the city's best upper secondary school:

Father always had a nap. In the afternoons he laid on a chaise longue, I guess you could call it a divan. Then we had no business in the room next to the dining room. We had to keep away. He was to be completely undisturbed and he needed that because he ... and when he was done napping, he drank coffee. And then he marked papers, you know. And he had private pupils. So he had enough to do. He also worked in the handicrafts association, when he was a secretary there. (Harald, b. 1899)

Well-off urban families had maids to do the harder household chores and Harald's mother's most important responsibility was rearing and educating the children. The father did not interfere, not even with the homework of the children, but he was present as a silent authority behind the mother. His word was the 'law'. When the children came of age, including Harald's two sisters, their father participated more actively in their future educational choices. Dagny also received higher education, backed up by both her parents (see Lorentzen (2012) about the bourgeois father's presence in the family in the early twentieth century).

Both Harald and Dagny did some work at home. Harald chopped wood and Dagny learnt to wash her own clothes when she came of age—the latter much to the dismay of the elderly maid who had been with the family since before Dagny was born. Other middle-class girls talk about doing the dishes, but nobody even comes close to the amount of work we heard about in the more ordinary childhoods. In the middle class during this time period, upbringing is not done through work, but separated off as a specific task of its own: children had to learn to behave, to bow and make curtsy, to dance, be polite to their elders, to develop good table manners, to speak properly, to do well in school and to not be greedy or egotistic. Assisting the mother's charity work, however, could be seen as educational work since it taught the children compassion with the poor. Dagny was a single child, adored and spoiled by her father, who was a wealthy bank manager in their small town. Her mother was a good pianist and dedicated much of her time to charity work, where Dagny had to assist:

You should've seen the amazing Christmas care packages mother made for people in the hard 1930s, when people were really struggling. Yes. And they weren't paupers' gifts either, far from it! They had those bazaars for Christmas and the money they made off of them went to the city's needy, as we said back then ... All the tasks mother gave me! I was supposed to sing, then do this, then do that, you know, then do the flowers ... There was no mercy, it was like that to have an active mum. Get ready to work! (Dagny, b. 1911)

Thus, the distinction between work and care, which in the less privileged families was depicted as a continuum of gendered work and the provision

of food, is in the upper-class families separated into the father's *work* and the mother's educational *care and compassion*.

Idealisation and Ambivalence

What feelings of gender did this division of work leave in the children who grew up with it? And is it possible to see social patterns in such feelings related to gender and social class? Both women and men have most to say about the skill sets and activities of same-sex adults, but in the relationship with their own same-sex parent, this is not without emotional ambivalence. They also share an idealisation of the opposite-sex parent, but the sons' idealisations of their mothers are less intense than the daughters' idealisation of their fathers. Ambivalent or not, the fathers represented a world outside the family that the sons knew they would become part of, whereas the daughters knew that their main access to the outside world went through marriage.

Sons: Respected Fathers and Invisible Mothers

Across social class, most of the men in the eldest generation talk extensively and with great pride about their fathers, the respect they had for him, how clever or how sociable a person he was and the positions he held in the community. Fathers are perceived as persons with authority: Knut, from a smallholder family, says:

I had a lot of respect for my father. Maybe not as much for my mother, because she was quieter and calmer. But it was my father who could discipline us a bit, you could say. But we weren't scared of him. (Knut, b. 1925)

It is not primarily, or hardly at all, the stern and punishing father who emerges in the stories of the male informants. The father—and men in general—are depicted much more as the social gender, and as those who were creative and adventurous (see also Rudberg 1983). Several of the sons use the expression 'jack-of-all-trades' when they characterise fathers,

grandfathers and uncles, and in this image they seem to condense a feeling of a special combination of skills, creativity and pleasure associated with masculinity. Only Anton describes his father as more socially withdrawn, and here the son–father identification seems to be weaker. The main pattern is that fathers are seen as impressive people having things (a car, a beard, friends), doing things (making tools, repairing things, singing, playing instruments) and enjoying a good time (drinking and smoking, playing cards, talking, telling jokes). Gunnar offers this vivid image of his father sitting cross-legged on his tailor’s table, while other men dropped by for a chat and a drink:

You know that the joker in the deck sits in that position, because it was one of those long, old-fashioned tailor tables. And he tended to use snuff while he worked, because he couldn’t smoke then. And then he smoked a pipe whenever someone came by ... But he knew how to sew, because there was a lot of crafting skill going into his seams. Then he’d just sit on the table, talking excitedly. He kept going like that until he was almost 70 years old. (Gunnar, b. 1926)

The contrast is huge compared to how he describes his kind but invisible mother, who actually did much of the precision work in the father’s tailor shop:

It was totally like, ‘sorry I’m alive’ ... And, well, I actually remember less about her, because she always made herself so invisible, to put it like that. Couldn’t make time for anything, you know. Anything called leisure time—I never saw her sit down.

Gunnar’s mother died when he was only 13, so that might partially explain the faint image he has of her, but we find the same pattern in other men’s stories. Compared to the vivid and detailed depictions of their fathers, they have surprisingly little to say about their mothers. The mothers are mostly described briefly as extraordinarily kind and hardworking, but at the same time as rather anonymous. Mothers emerge mainly as persons to feel sorry for. ‘Mother was the kindest creature in the world’, Knut says. ‘Mother always did her best’, Anton says. When asked directly, the men may remember that she was the one who both comforted them when

they were miserable and who punished them when they did something wrong. But her services—the sweet as well as the sour—are taken for granted. One could interpret this as a defence against having to admit to their dependency on her, which may also be a reason for the need to exaggerate her weakness or her harmless kindness. They do remember their mothers' hard work, but imply that she worked *too* hard for a woman.

Even though women's work is seen as proper work in this generation, it stays within the borders of gendered work. Some mothers had to perform what the sons understand as men's work, and this calls for their compassion and may even trigger some critical remarks towards the otherwise admired fathers. In these cases the mothers emerge as stronger objects of positive identification. Einar describes his mother in very positive terms: she was strong and tough, but also a person who could allow herself a drink and a dance. Thus, she embodies both the strength and some of the fun normally attributed to men. But he thinks she had to do too much of the hard work on the small farm and says ironically about his father that '*he was afraid of getting dirt on his fingers*'. The compassion and identification with the mother here override the fact that the father worked most of the week as a road worker, which evidently also makes your fingers dirty. The working-class boy John, whose father died early, describes with a mixture of admiration and compassion his mother who '*worked like a man*'. She was '*her own boss*' and became unusually strong:

I could see mother was strong. We lived on the fourth floor and there were no washing machines back then. The washboard was the washing machine. Making a fire in the washhouse and everything. And a hand-driven mangle, and large and small wringers that thundered on. Mother picked up that tub like it was a basket of feathers and carried it up to the attic and hung the laundry. She was strong. But she must've made herself strong. You see that a woman can be strong too. (John, b. 1919)

Because she was such a kind person in life, the chapel was crowded at her funeral in spite of her having been just '*a regular, simple person*'. She is described through her generosity and hard work, yet John offers a much more colourful and enthusiastic description of his father who died from a venereal disease when John was only five. His father had been very clever

in everything he did, and even bought a car! In the accounts of Einar and John the mother emerges as a visible person because the gender order went wrong in one way or another. But no matter how strong women may be, they are still seen as victims of circumstance. Only the upper middle-class boy Harald depicts his mother in her own right without making her into a person to feel sorry for. She is described as an intelligent and educated woman who taught him to read and write, and who also maintained strict discipline among the children, sometimes with corporal punishment. However, in keeping with the other men in his generation, Harald is still much more elaborate in his descriptions of his father and his public positions.

Most of the men say they resemble their fathers, but the identification is rarely without some ambivalence. Questions of authority and competition seep into their stories: how well did they do in their own lives, compared to their fathers, uncles or brothers? Masculine competition appears to be an important underlying issue here. For some of them, the ambivalence is connected to an unfinished settlement with authority: Knut, who says that he admired and respected his father, also stresses that he himself is a less controlling person and a better craftsman than his father. He sees more similarities between himself and his paternal grandfather, who, he says, was kinder and better with his hands. On several occasions during the interview, he emphasises his own independence and support of equality. He has '*never grovelled for the boss*' and unjust treatment makes him extremely angry. This energy has made him very active in the union.

Hence, we may discern a class-related pattern of feelings of gender among the men in eldest generation where the mothers' strength is reinterpreted as weakness and disowned as feminine. Skilfulness, work and fun, but also issues of authority and competition are emotionally connected to masculinity, and they identify with this masculine world. The emotional meaning of femininity is associated with being a victim of hard social conditions or is idealised as a faint and abstract goodness, except when connected with enjoyable memories of food. It calls for their compassion because they are fond of their kind mothers, but not for engagement and positive identification, unless the mother also embodies some of the masculine values. The general pattern is that the identification with

the mothers is split off, and they try to be like their fathers—including the ambivalences that this identification entails.

Daughters: Strict Mothers, Kind Fathers

Quite a different image of mothers emerges in the interviews with the women of this generation. The women do not see their mothers as weak; quite the opposite, as they see them as very capable and hardworking people. Mothers were the first to rise and the last to go to bed. In most cases, mothers are described as competent, strong and healthy, often stronger than the many fathers who fell ill or died of exhaustion. Johanna, who grew up at a small farm, says that her mother did much of the ‘*men’s work*’ and that the mother tried to conceal this from her husband, who suffered from weak health. Her mother’s proficiency in household work and Johanna’s participation in this are described in detail, almost as bodily memories, and with considerable enthusiasm:

Mother had a great knack for all kinds of work, apart from using the axe; she didn’t know how to do that, no, no. But with food and cooking, and I really liked to be close to her when she was dealing with food, and know what she added here and there, and learn it all, also how to bake bread. I really liked being with her, because I had the impression that she knew what she was doing, her housework, and I got to learn it. She sewed shirts too, we didn’t buy them at that time, she made working shirts for the men. She weaved often, and then she sewed, and then I learnt how to sew, and that was the best of all! (Johanna, b. 1910)

Especially for the farmer girls, but also, as we have seen, for an urban working-class girl like Martha, femininity is positively associated with an ability to work, something that is also seen in the female informants’ depiction of strong, clever and nice grandmothers and aunts. These were in fact nicer than their own mothers, who are often described as rather strict and short-tempered. The mothers are the ones who smack them, and they seem to be the primary agents who convey the mentality of work and frugality to their daughters. So even if the relationships between mothers and daughters are close in practice, and the daughters

identify positively with the skill sets they gain from their mothers, we also find some relational ambivalence towards these powerful, competent and often quick-tempered mothers. In cases where the mother insisted that the young adult daughter should stay home and help out against her will, we find traces of bitterness that are quickly disowned as soon as they surface in their stories. However, bitterness is expressed with less reservation against 'selfish sisters' who just went away and left it to their younger sisters to stay and help the parents. This was the case for Ingrid (b. 1910), whose mother owned the shop carrying the father's name. Her mother needed a helping hand in the shop and the daughter stayed on from she was 14 and until she married at 25, working from 8 am to 8 pm with very little pay. Her sisters '*just left, leaving me behind, and then I had to stay*', she says, still resentful.

Compared to these strong and strict, clever and hardworking mothers, the father emerges as the kinder person in their memories of childhood and youth, calmer in his temper and often associated with fun and pleasure. He took time to talk with them and made toys for them. Ingrid remembers her father making skis and sledges for her and her sisters, and she describes her father as a calm and balanced man, who was never angry. He was also seriously engaged in moral questions and in the society around him. As with the sons, the daughters take pride in the fathers' positions in the local community; however, they offer more elaborate descriptions of the father as a person. Most of the women say they felt closer to their fathers than to their mothers, resembling their fathers more in terms of their mindset. Johanna, who we just heard enthusiastically describe how much she learnt from her mother, says with pride that her father always preferred her to help him with the work outside because she was so strong and persevering. While they worked side by side, her father told her many things about politics and about his travels around the world as a young man—'*he was quite an encyclopaedia*', she says. They never disagreed on anything: '*I felt very much ... on the same wavelength.*' However, she also understood that the political world was reserved for men. Girls could accompany their mothers to religious meetings or meetings in the farmer women's union, but not their fathers to

political meetings.² Even if the women in this generation felt attachment to and identification with their fathers, they do not consider their fathers' skill sets as models for themselves. Thus, their idealisation of him may be an expression of aspirations they had to abandon. The farmer's daughter Helga (b. 1918) conveys this indirectly when describing how she experienced the deaths of her parents: *'It was terrible when mother died, of course, but it was even worse when father died.'*

The relational ambivalence towards the mother never makes the farmer girls question their mothers' proficiency, and we do not find the competitive drive that is present among the men. On the contrary, the farmer girls stress that they themselves as adults never even came close to their mothers' level of proficiency and diligence. Among the rural working-class girls we find a more ambivalent evaluation of the mothers' work and a sadder tone in the descriptions of their admired, but often more distant and tired, fathers (see Lucey et al. 2016). Here the mother's proficiency is more often associated with perfectionism and exaggerated frugality than with the relatively high status of female work in the farming culture. Gerd, who grew up in a poor rural working-class family, mentions her mother's neglect of the children because she was so intensely occupied with housework:

She was good at it [housework], she sort of had, she potted around and sort of made the housework last the rest of the day [laughs], I have to say that. Because I'm the type that has to be done with it quickly and then sit down to do something else. But she potted around, ironed everything she didn't have to iron, ironed no-iron sheets and duvet covers, and all the undershirts. It was always ironed, she ironed at night, and it wasn't necessary, because you see, if you iron these things, they stretch. If you didn't iron them, they'd fit better. I've never done that, ironed like that ... They never knew what we were up to, oh no, we were by the lake, we lay by the lake all summer, and my youngest sister, she almost drowned. I don't understand that mum dared this, I wouldn't have dared. (Gerd, b. 1927)

² Martha is an exception here. Political Labour had a strong history and position in the town where she grew up. Her father was active both in the union and the party and her mother joined Labour Day marches and meetings about legalising abortions. Martha herself joined Labour's youth organisation.

In this case Gerd comes close to a disidentification with her mother. She explains her own choice of having only one child with reference to this: she wanted to have time for the child. She also mentions her own mastery of fine needlework, one of the few things that her clever mother was not good at. In contrast to this ambivalent description of her mother, she describes her father with tenderness and compassion, but also portrays him as a weaker figure who died early of the hard work. *'Father was too good to live'*, she says, still sorrowful after so many years. She has fond memories of how she sat on his lap as a little girl when her mother was away and that he had sweets in his pocket. When she came of age, their relationship became more distant, but she still treasures one memory from her youth when her father took her in a cab to the nearest town to buy her clothes for the upcoming confirmation: *'you can decide for yourself, he said, yes, both shoes and a hat and gloves, and I ... yes, he gave me that'*.

What we see in the stories of all these women are variations of a tension between an ambivalent identification with the strong mothers' world, to which they belong, and a positive but socially impossible identification with the idealised fathers, who live in a bigger world that is inaccessible and sometimes even unthinkable for them as girls to strive towards. This psychological tension may have been intensified in this generation of youth through the signs of a new and bigger world brought to the most remote farming communities in this historical period by budding communication technologies: radio, films, magazines and the first traces of youth culture and youth fashion. The rural working-class girls, who were not to the same degree protected by the high status of female work that characterised the traditional farming culture, seem to have been attracted to this modern world quite early on. Thus, they dethrone their mothers in a way that we will see became the general pattern in the next generation. Another sign of an emerging bigger world at this time was the increased geographical mobility. Many of the women talk about aunts and sisters who made it to the city or even to America. They may criticise and envy these women, especially if they were their sisters, but also criticise themselves for not being bold enough to do the same. For some it was because of external restrictions, while for others it was their own fear or ambivalences that kept them back. Johanna says that listening to

her father's adventures had made her want to get out there, maybe get a job, see how other people lived, '*but no further than I could get back home*'.

The least degree of ambivalence towards mothers and the least idealisation of fathers are found among the middle-class girls. They also see their mothers as strong and competent, but rather than focusing on her skills to run the household, their emphasis is on her persona as intelligent, educated, mild, caring and loving. '*There are no weak women in our family*', Dagny claims with pride. Dagny also adored her father and she was often allowed to visit him in the bank nearby, where he worked. In other middle-class families where the fathers were not much at home, the fathers are depicted by their daughters as rather vague figures, living in a different world. They may be described as good-looking and charming men and thus as attractive 'others', but seldom present enough to compete with mothers as objects of identification. This seems to represent less of a problem when the mother, as in these cases, is seen as both strong and caring and also associated with a broader repertoire of skills than merely household work. However, as we shall see later, these self-confident girls were partly out of sync with the social possibilities of the time: even for them, there were few routes out of their families other than through marriage.

The emotional relationships with the parents expressed by the women and the men in this generation display both complementarity and asymmetry. Both women and men identify positively with the knowledge and skill sets of the same-sex parent. However, the ambivalence that often comes with this identification appears to be of a different kind. For the men, it is connected to competition between men, the question of whether they managed to become the equals of their fathers. Their identification with their mothers is split off, maybe because it represents their own weakness and dependency on them, except in their legitimate need for food. For the women, the skill sets of the same-sex parent are inflected by the mother's strictness and sometimes her perfectionism, which stand as contrasts to the father's kindness and calmness. They belong to their mother's world, but there is also a world outside that may hold more attractions and that has a much stronger contour and presence in their narrative about their fathers than the men's muted depictions of their mothers' world. Thus, the ambivalence towards the same-sex parent and

the idealisations of the opposite-sex parent appear to have different psychological dynamics. For the women, the question is not whether they became their mothers' equals, but was being like her actually anything to strive for? Was mother clever or was she a too hardworking, nagging and overachieving perfectionist? In the case of the women, the identification with the gender order is thus undertaken with some emotional reservation that we do not see among the men.

(Female) Bodies and (Male) Sexuality

The gender complementarity experienced by the eldest generation is also found in the way they talk—or do not talk—about bodies and sexuality, including the gender specific emotional ambivalences we just heard of. Bodies, and especially the generative and problematic aspects of bodies, are more or less associated with women, whereas sexuality is construed as an exclusively male urge to be lived out or kept in check.

According to the Norwegian social anthropologist Marianne Gullestad (1996), women in general tend to talk more about the body compared to men—both its pleasures and problems. This is not quite borne out in our study, where the men also often inform us about injuries and diseases, both due to the war and their old age. However, these stories are still associated with male strength and outward activity, since they are usually told in order to underline the importance of enduring and overcoming personal bodily suffering. Thus, the experiences of their own bodies reflect their general mentality of work and their feelings about masculinity. The contempt for weaklings who lack the stamina to overcome such troubles is often brutally clear, and the taboo against complaining is evident. It is not unreasonable to interpret this as a defence against the fear of losing masculinity. Knut also says in the interview that, in his eyes, a man who is occupied with his appearance is not a man.

The fact that a male body, ailing or not, is obliged to take responsibility for himself and others is strikingly formulated by Einar, who was injured in the war. He reports numerous surgeries, bleeding wounds and continuous pains. This has evidently ruled his whole life and has made everyday activities into almost insurmountable challenges. Yet being a

man who stakes his honour on providing for his family, he expects to endure this. The self-evident masculinity personified in the strong, working body is central when it comes to providing for a family. It is also important as part of a competitive comparison between men, often in connection with size and strength. Harald describes his own bodily assets with great satisfaction: when he was 15, most people thought he was 18, in contrast to his tiny and frail brother. He thinks that the brother's later grudge against him is due to this difference in size and strength. At the same time as size/strength are important factors, they should come 'naturally' (meaning through work) and the body itself is not yet objectified or dwelled upon unless it fails as an instrument. The interest in bodies per se is felt as feminine, and biological, age-related changes ('puberty' is not yet a term common in this generation) are associated with girls, not boys. For Knut the happenings in the world around clearly overshadowed his own experience of the bodily transition from child to man:

How it is with girls, I don't know. But right now I'll only talk about myself. I felt like I never had a problem when I was 14, going on 15, 16, 17. Because you could say that I came right into the outbreak of this war. There was a lot of excitement around that. You wondered how it was going. You saw that the Germans were advancing on and on. And then they were suddenly retreating, and others came in. I don't think you had a lot of time to think about yourself, for there was so much excitement around what was happening in the world ... So that bodily change and that you changed from being a child to becoming an adult—I think girls notice that much more than boys do. (Knut, b. 1925)

In many ways the women confirm the men's conception of the body as a particularly female sphere of interest. Although some working-class and farmer girls deny having had any time to 'sit and mope' over their own bodies, there is no taboo on talking about the sick or suffering body. In fact, it seems that it is only when the generative body can be understood as a sick body (and not as a sexual body) that it can be talked about at all (Thorsen 1993a). It is not hard to get the women to talk about their menstruations. Mundane activities like knitting and washing sanitary towels, then hanging them out to dry in public make the generative body a constant presence in their lives. But only the upper-middle class girl

Dagny had a mother who told her about menstruation before it happened. For most of the other women, menstruation forms a narrative of being scared almost to death as a totally unknowing young girl, then silence about what had happened, excruciating pain and more work (sewing and washing sanitary towels), as well as unbearable public embarrassment when they sometimes experienced bleeding through their clothes in the classroom. Some of the women talk about the relief they felt when they finally reached menopause. The discourse is quite straightforward: this is the 'women's curse', literally revealing the shame associated with one's own bodily impurity. The body gains more positive connotations when it comes to appearance. A nice figure and thick or curly hair was a good resource on the marriage market, as was being good at household work. If you did not possess any of these bodily advantages, there was not much to do about it. Nobody remembers dieting, but they put some effort into getting their hair done. Only among the middle-class girls do we hear about more specific worries like an ugly nose, short legs or pimples, but there was not much they could do about those either.

Seen from a psychosocial perspective, the self-evident male body in this generation seems to be part of the strong same-sex identification among the men, emotionally invested in the ideal image of the father, but also involving an undercurrent of possible humiliation and competitive loss both in comparison with other men and with regard to the fear of female weakness. For the women, the inherent ambivalence in the same-sex identification with the mother, who is both competent and yet not quite what one wants to emulate, might be reflected in the way they relate to their own generative body as more of a burden than a source of pleasure.

If the body is understood as 'female' immanence by both men and women in this generation, sexuality is as clearly and unanimously understood as 'male'. However, some of the gender similarities in *practice* are surprising: the norm of abstaining from sex at least until formally engaged was quite strong for both the women and the men. Martin says that he never kissed a girl before he met his wife when he was 29 years old. Later he wondered about the reasons for this and thinks that it might be because he did not want to hurt the girl:

No, and I thought about that later. Why didn't I do it—I was afraid that I would make her sad if I wasn't sure about it. That was what lay behind it. It wasn't that I didn't want it, I don't even need to tell you that. It wasn't ... But I thought that ... I didn't have relations with my wife before we were married.

Q: So you waited?

Yes, we did. You could say, we were engaged to be married when I came home, which we weren't the first time. But I know that mother had made up one bed for us. We were going to sleep in the same bed.

Q: When you were engaged. So your mother did that.

Yes, I thought it was strange. I told my mother, no ... And I asked her quietly to ... (Martin, b. 1905)

Martin shows not only a great amount of self-control; he is also a moral guardian compared to his own religious mother. Some of the men are quite vague about sexual activities, but indicate both feelings of guilt and the necessity of self-discipline. Harald asks rhetorically: *'What is the problem with a little masturbation? That doesn't hurt anyone.'* At the other extreme, Gunnar talks about his wild youth, involving a lot of female liaisons and detailed prescriptions for seduction. The consequence of all this activity was that he got a venereal disease, which he presents as yet another hilarious story from his youth. But even such sexual excesses are socially regulated: starting a family acts as a sharp boundary between wild, irresponsible youth and grown-up masculinity. Gunnar assures us that after marriage he was never unfaithful again. Today, he claims that a real man is a man who does *not* carry on the way he did when he was young:

Maybe I'm not the right person to, I have admitted to my childhood and wild periods. But if we say that a man gets to the age when he stands at the threshold of starting his own family and does so. And then doesn't give a shit about it and says 'as long as I get my desires satisfied' by purchasing them, and it affects the family. I don't consider that a man. Those people ought to shoot themselves. (Gunnar, b. 1926)

In the case of these two young men—the sexually restrained one and the sexually 'wild' one respectively—we may discern different feelings of

gender: Martin, who is afraid of hurting women, is one of the men who felt close to his own brave mother, while Gunnar idealises his socially extrovert father and depicts his mother as quite anonymous. Although the psychological and motivational points of departure are different, the results will in both cases be a strong emotional investment in gender difference, and in the moral order that sustains such differences, including the complementarity that is seen as necessary to bridge the gap.

Although male sexuality has to be kept in check, even harsher rules apply to women: while men can be wild for a certain period and then develop into responsible adults, women do not enjoy the same freedoms. To be sexually wild will destroy their quality as potential mothers and wives. To the men, the possibility of female sexuality seems to go against nature, and the few who have experienced being approached by women find it almost monstrous. They cannot relate female sexuality to their emotional experiences of femininity, and sometimes their unconscious fears about it are activated. The women themselves also stick to the distinction between 'cheap' and 'nice' girls, although most of them did have sex with their future husbands after being formally engaged. There seems to be less feelings of guilt involved in this for the women than for the men, possibly because the initiative came from their fiancés. According to all the women in the eldest generation, the positive aspect of the strict norms was the lack of pressure on a girl to have sex before she was engaged. If a girl was pressured (and many tell us about hot and impatient suitors), she had the unquestionable right to say no. Unlike the men, none of the women say that following those rules was in conflict with their own sexual needs.

The women are even less willing than the men to talk about their own sexual experiences in the interviews. One says straight out that she does not want to talk about this, and in other cases this unwillingness is so strongly implied that the interviewer simply skips the questions related to sexuality. Those who do say something about their own sexuality are very brief. Ellen, a middle-class woman born in 1923 who waited to have sex until after her wedding, says briefly that she experienced it as a natural thing when it happened and that she had just followed her own feelings and instincts. But apart from Ellen those who say anything at all refer to sex as something they did mainly because their male partner wanted

it. To be disinterested in sex is here seen as a fact of life, a part of female nature, maybe even inherited from their mother, as Borghild explains:

I was the type who didn't really care for sex, you know, not everyone does, and I think I inherited that from my mother, because I think she was like that too. I understood it, saw that she didn't really want to go to bed, no, many probably felt like that, and many I've spoken to said that they didn't think it was such a big deal...

Q: That the boys were more interested?

Yes, that, that is difficult, when you get married, because you think that ... You have to do it whether you want to or not, satisfy your husband, but I had a kind husband, yes. I've been sick a lot and various things, I often had bronchitis and that affected my stomach badly, so I guess it was, yes, he was very kind. I told the doctor once that I have such an extraordinary husband. So yes, he understood, and he was scared to ruin me that way ... Well, but we still had four kids, so it was all right [laughs]. (Borghild, b. 1911)

Although sex is depicted as something one engaged in primarily for one's husband's sake, there are also stories of youthful attractions to rather 'wild' and dangerous young men who were good-looking and good at dancing. Sometimes they could even be foreign soldiers during the Second World War, but the women who admit to this quickly assure us that they never acted on it.³ Middle-class girls who were more confined by parental control indulged in romantic ideas rather than actions. Some of these women describe themselves as 'butterflies' flying from one infatuation to the next. Dagny recalls that she 'fell for all boys—anything in trousers ... I was constantly in love'. However, for all the women, regardless of class, there were strict limits to observe. The female informants have little empathy with girls who became pregnant out of wedlock, thereby imposing great social shame on their parents.

³And if they did, this is probably not something that can be talked about in this kind of interview. In one case we learned only in the second interview with the woman's granddaughter (when the granddaughter was approaching 30) that the grandmother had in fact become pregnant by a German soldier and that the granddaughter's mother had been the result of that pregnancy. The only thing we registered during the first round of interviews with the three women was that they told incompatible stories about their grandmother's marriages and divorces.

For many of the women, especially those who grew up in rural areas, deliberations when it came to marriage followed a different logic than their youthful infatuations: the exciting dancers were rejected in favour of men who had the potential of becoming solid providers in marriages based on complementary gender roles, although they were not necessarily much fun or good at dancing. Helga, a farmer girl whose husband became a successful building contractor in the city, says the following when asked about why she married him:

It had to be his calm, sober way of being ... A properly solid guy ... Kind and ... but ... He could've been a bit more ... fun, in a way, but that's ... Then it's the matter of his work being his interest. (Helga, b. 1918)

Helga met her future husband when she was in her mid-twenties and she remembers how anxious she had been before that about never getting married. This would have meant ending up as an old unmarried aunt at the farm.⁴ It is not difficult to understand that accepting a decent marriage proposal in this generation could be a result of pragmatic considerations. But by silencing their own youthful attraction to the wild and dangerous men, they also split the relationship with the husband off from the image of the playful, fascinating father. The men, on the other hand, could in many ways safeguard the image of the 'good' mother in the shape of their wives, including their feelings of guilt towards this kind angel. They had to overcome their own wild, youthful masculinity in order to become responsible. When it comes to marriage, the women in this generation seem to have a more pragmatic view than the men, who often express a more romantic or even sentimental approach to companionship. They talk more about love in connection with their marriages than the women do, but also indicate that love deepens when the wife does a good job in the family. In this way both parties cooperate to establish the complementary gender order of nice women and responsible men. For the women, however, the emotional investment in this

⁴As mentioned in Chap. 4, from 1860 to 1930 there was a surplus of women in the population due both to higher mortality rates among men and to immigration. This meant that many women stayed unmarried all their life in this historical period. Thus, Helga's fear of not getting married and ending up at the family farm was based on real-life experience (Hagemann 1999; Melby 1999).

gender difference does not seem attached to their feelings of gender in the same way as for the men. If he could be said to be marrying an image of his good mother, she is clearly not marrying her fun father. The different and gender-specific emotional investment in the complementary gender order will, as we will see later, represent an unsolved tension in this generation's marriages.

Asymmetries or Irregularities in the Gender Order?

Variations in feelings of gender difference emerge once more when women and men reflect more explicitly on gender. For most of them, across gender and social class, gender complementarity is so self-evident that they do not have much to say *about* gender. Answers to questions about this most often boil down to the observation that there are natural differences between man and woman, and that these differences are expressed in the division of work. However, as we have seen, the interviews also convey the informants' knowledge of irregularities, asymmetries and inherent hierarchies in this assumed natural gender order: irregularities like women who had to work like men or men who got ill from doing men's work and even died from it; asymmetries in men's and women's, girls' and boys' work, duties and rights in rural families; hierarchies of what was seen as more or less important or exiting, or who held which privileges. In farmer families the dimension of inside/outside and the access to money and leisure time in particular contain messages regarding the hierarchy implicit in the acclaimed gender complementarity with regard to work.

When asked directly, both genders say that girls and boys were brought up in the same way, but in the women's narratives this statement is contradicted by the practices described and their ironic or even bitter comments made in relation to these. Rural girls talk about how boys got away more easily because they only helped outside rather than having to do stable work in the mornings and evenings and housework around the clock, like the girls. This meant that boys got more leisure time. '*Oh, the poor boys!*', says Gerd and laughs bitterly when she compares the workload put on the

sisters versus the brothers in her family. Karen says about his brother: ‘*he had the rights to take over the farm and I did not, but that was how it was back then*’. Still, she had to help out much more than him with cleaning and milking: ‘*he did not care much about those things, no, boys could get out of it, you know, girls had to be there*’. Urban girls also remark on this, albeit with more emphasis on their parents’ preferences. Lilly, one of eight siblings and with a self-employed father, says:

I felt like the boys were allowed to do more than the girls were, really. I felt that they had more freedom. And mother really valued her two sons, you know, so ... Many of us felt like we girls weren't worth much. In some way or other. Because it was they who were ... Well, they were boys, you know. It was such a big deal. Oh, goodness! But they were nice boys. (Lilly, b. 1922)

The women clearly recognise differential treatment, but this recognition is quickly taken back when the interviewer asks about it from a modern perspective of gender discrimination—the women both know and don’t know. Agnes (b. 1912) was the daughter of a wealthy grocer in Oslo and was among the few in this generation who received higher education. She recalls how she encountered gender discriminatory attitudes from adult men, including her own father, with regard to her educational trajectory. But at that time, she says, you were so used to boys and men having privileges that you did not really think much about it. The combination of acceptance and discontent with the gender order may also explain why sibling rivalry is more clearly expressed as anger towards lazy and selfish sisters who took advantages that were perceived to be outside their scope as girls.

In spite of the almost preconscious form of this knowledge, the women of this generation are clearly more aware of structures of gender inequality than the men. What the women sense as power-related *asymmetries* inherent in the gender order, the men rather tend to see as incidental *irregularities* to be mended. The men who had seen their mothers and other poor women of their childhood striving understand this as a gender order gone astray. For a man to leave men’s work to his wife is interpreted as a lack of love. Einar, who criticised his father for being afraid of getting dirt on his fingers, says:

I would say that if it were me, then I would've done it instead of my wife. I think that's more of a man's job, to do those things ... What I find strange is that people who had so much, who depended on each other as much as they did, that they didn't show more signs of affection and courtesy ... But I guess it was like that back then. (Einar, b. 1923)

Whereas the women implicitly perceive the gender order as unjust, the men's perspective is instead to fight the irregularities and restore the order. Or perhaps they want to refine the order so that they can make space for more love and recognition than they had seen between their parents? The men are not making a plea for their own privileges as men, but argue for a system of mutual respect, dependency and contribution. Through this effort of restoration, we see a reformulation of the gendered division of men's and women's work of their childhood to a more idealised and complementary notion of *male work* and *female care*. It is seen in their reflections on gender where they refer to men's physical strength and role as natural providers, and women's special ability to care and give love (see Walkerdine & Jimenez 2012). More often than not, their gender ideals are exemplified by their own caring wives and by the indirect descriptions of themselves as responsible adult men. In this model of complementarity, women are strongly idealised, but only in the roles of mothers and caring wives. Compared to the muted idealisation of their own invisible mothers, this restored gender order values and renders visible female care. Martin expresses it in this way:

Then I would say that the woman, she is equal to the man. In all circumstances. Nothing to separate. I almost value her more since I think she has such an important and rich task in life. And she is more caring than we men are. When I think about all the way from birth and the entire ... I would say I respect her more than I respect men. Absolutely. I absolutely value her more highly. And even more because she has more tenderness and is more loving. Soft. (Martin, b. 1905)

For most of the men in this generation, divorce becomes the ultimate betrayal of the gender complementarity model. It makes a mockery of the mutual dependency and shared destiny between a man and a woman, and is devastating for the children. They become rather upset when they

talk about how women and men today go out alone with their respective friends instead of going out as a couple—they would never go anywhere without their wives! They criticise marital infidelity and the decreased work ethic, but most of all they lament the modern divorce rates. They take pride in the fact that they have been married to their wives for more than half a century. The moral decay embodied by divorce is seen in John's evasive formulations on the topic, the only man in this generation who says that he at some point contemplated divorce:

It went smoothly to begin with ... It was later, yes. But, and then you had to get yourself together because you started to get old, you know, and there was nothing to move out for.

Q: What did you think about then?

Oh, I had a lot of strange thoughts. But, it went away. (John, b. 1919)

In this way, the crumbling gender order of the present becomes the quintessence of the general moral decay for the men in the eldest generation.

We see no traces of such an enthusiastic recommendation to restore the order of gender complementarity among the women, which makes sense in light of their double identifications and their more pragmatic approach to the choice of marriage partner. While pronounced in the interviews with the men, attention to modern divorce rates is more or less absent in the women's interviews. The women's understanding of men's and women's toil in their childhood is different from the men's. Some of them rather question the strict rural work division of their childhood and say that work could have been more of a joint venture between husband and wife. Refining gender complementarity does not seem to be an obvious solution here. But as young women they were also so embedded in the gender order of their times that they did not offer any alternative to the men's project. And compared with the lives of their hardworking mothers, the cultural reformulation of male work and female care also had its temptations. One of them says:

I guess there was something implicit, that you didn't have to struggle so much, because you weren't going to support anyone ... Back then it was the man who was responsible for the support ... It was alright to be a girl. (Agnes, b. 1912)