Gender, Love and Education in Three Generations

The Way Out and Up

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ABSTRACT The paths to adulthood for the last three generations of young Norwegian women have been accompanied by significant geographical and social changes. How has this process of modernization been experienced from 'below': from the perspective of everyday life and through the eyes of the young women themselves? This article presents results from a three-generational study consisting of interviews with a sample of 18-year-old Norwegian girls, their mothers and grandmothers. The significance of upbringing, parental identification and management of gender for young women's processes of modernization is analysed. These issues affect choices made in education and romantic relationships – choices crucial to social mobility. The study looks at how the processes of *social* mobility and *cultural* modernization have been associated with the *psychological* project of becoming adults for these young women.

KEY WORDS adolescence ◆ education ◆ generation ◆ love ◆ social change ◆ young girls

What is entailed in the process of growing up? There is little doubt that the answer to this question varies according to culture, social class and generation. Still, the following elements often apply: moving out from the parental home, becoming economically independent of the parents and involvement in sexual relations. How have these rites of passage been performed by young Norwegian women over the last three generations? In what order do they occur and what do they imply? What means have been available socially, culturally and psychologically for becoming an adult?

We discuss this topic by presenting the results from a study across three generations. A group of eight 18-year-old Norwegian girls and their mothers and grandmothers were interviewed, with the aim of analysing changing patterns in adolescence, with particular attention to gender

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constructions and gender identities as manifested across these three generations.[1] The eight grandmothers presented in this article were born between 1910 and 1927, most of them between 1910 and 1913 – thus they were adolescents in the decade 1925–35. The eight mothers were born between 1940 and 1948, the majority between 1940 and 1944 – they were adolescents in the decade 1955–65. The youngest generation was born between 1971 and 1972, and were teenagers in the decade 1985–95.

The paths to adulthood for these three generations of women coincide with significant geographical and social changes in Norway: there has been much immigration from rural to urban areas; during the early part of the century over 90 percent of the population received only seven years' schooling whereas now almost the whole population stays at school for at least 12 years; and whereas once the family model of male breadwinner was the norm, families nowadays tend to rely on both parents earning an income. Norway was a peasant society until 1905, with two-thirds of the population living in rural areas. By 1950 half the population lived in the countryside, but only a quarter of the labour force was still involved in farming. Today two-thirds live in the cities. Thus, the grandmothers in our study were born into an almost pre-industrial society, the mothers into a semi-urbanized society and the daughters into a modern, urbanized society. However, women have only just become visible on the labour market. Until 1970 Norwegian married women's participation in paid work was among the lowest, not just in Scandinavia but in Europe also, and the development of daycare provision has been similarly slow.[2] This means that we can observe the transition from rural to urban life and from full-time housewife to paid employment far more clearly in these three generations of Norwegian women than in corresponding generations of Danish or Swedish women. Compared with Denmark and Sweden, Norway lags somewhat behind in the degree of urbanization, the frequency of paid work among women and childcare provision, but not in regard to education. Thus, the case of Norway gives us a good picture of the impact of modernization on the lives of young women.

How has this process of modernization been experienced from 'below' – that is, from the perspective of everyday life and through the eyes of young women themselves? Our three-generational study looks at how this process, which can only in retrospect be registered as a process of geographical and social change, came about through the life sketches of young women at different points of time and in different social contexts. To what extent is the notion of gender integral to the process? The Swedish scholar Ronny Ambjörnsson (1996) observes, in his recollections of his own childhood, that gender often 'becomes homeless' on a class journey. And class journeys are precisely what this is about for many of our interviewees. In order to address these issues it is necessary to look at the correlation between the statistical data and the personal stories

regarding upbringing, family culture, parental identification and the meaning of gender. How, in other words, have the processes of *social* mobility and *cultural* modernization been a part of the *psychological* project of becoming adults for these young women?

The question is illustrated through an analysis of the eight female generational groups studied (see note 1). The patterns of social mobility are in general quite complex and it is only possible to focus on one particular area. In this article we have chosen to look at the generational stories of a segment of 'winners' in the social mobility race: young women moving towards higher education. In such a sample one would expect the processes of social mobility to play a major role, especially in the Norwegian context of delayed urbanization. Table 1 contains data on the localities, occupations and marital status of the parents, the number of siblings, and the actual or planned education of the young women in all three generations in our sample.

The figure shows how the processes of geographical and social change for these young girls have meant moving out and up: more and more young women receive an education and pursue a career, we see an increase in the numbers of divorces / single mothers, and a clear process of upward mobility. We also see the move from the countryside to the city, which is, of course, not surprising as we have chosen the youngest generation as our point of departure. Still, the figure shows that the rural roots of these modern city girls are quite close. Using the youngest generation as the starting point we know where these generational 'chains' have ended up so far: not only in Oslo, not only in high school, but in a high school with a good academic reputation. This can be explained by the fact that the young women of all three generations in our sample by far outnumber their peer groups with regard to high school graduation.[3] The upward social mobility seems to level out, however, in the four urban generational groups and especially once the women have attained higher education: the daughter of the lawyer becomes a librarian and the daughter of the doctor becomes a teacher. All the urban grandmothers have granddaughters who are quite vague about their plans for the future (one of them has not made plans beyond a summer rock festival in Denmark), while the granddaughters of the rural grandmothers are more goal-oriented towards higher education and a specific career. They seem to be continuing the project of upward social mobility, while it is much more uncertain what life projects the urban granddaughters are heading for.

CONTEXTS AND INTERPRETATIONS

It is a complex and multifaceted story to follow these eight generational chains through the processes of modernization, where not only the

TABLE 1
The Eight Generational Chains by Place of Upbringing, Parental Occupation and Marital Status, Number of Siblings and Own Education/Future Plans

	GRANDMOTHERS Born 1910–13 (–27)[a] Youth period approx. 1925–35 (–49)		**MOTHERS Born 1940–4 (–48) Youth period approx. 1955–65 (–70)**		**DAUGHTERS Born 1971–2 Youth period approx. 1985–95 (–91)[b]**	**Future plans of the daughters**
RURAL	**The rural worker's daughter 1** (F) 5	RURAL	**The rural worker's daughter 1** (F) 1	URBAN	**The computer assistant's daughter** (M) 2	University (engineering)
RURAL	**The rural worker's daughter 2** (F) 3	RURAL	**The rural worker's daughter 2** (F) 1 *(unmarried mother)*	URBAN	**The high school teacher's daughter** (M) 2 *(parents divorced at 2)*	University (political science)
RURAL	**The farmer's daughter** (F) 6	RURAL	**The bigger farmer's daughter** (F) 6	URBAN	**The teacher's daughter 1** (M) 3 *(parents divorced at 12)*	University (economy or design)
RURAL	**The bigger farmer's daughter** (F) 5	URBAN	**The contractor's daughter** (F) 2	URBAN	**The teacher's daughter 2** (M) 3	University (French and history)
URBAN	**The shopkeeper's daughter** (F) 2	URBAN	**The officer's daughter** (F) 2	URBAN	**The librarian's daughter 1** (M) 2 *(mother widowed at 1)*	The Roskilde rock festival
URBAN	**The bank manager's daughter** (F) 1	URBAN	**The lawyer's daughter** (M) 3	URBAN	**The librarian's daughter 2** (M) 2 (*parents divorced at 13)*	Design?
URBAN	**The sailor's daughter** (F) 4	URBAN	**The chief nurse's daughter** (M) 1 *(parents divorced before 0)*	URBAN	**The doctor's daughter** (M) 3	University (subject?)
URBAN	**The grocer's daughter** (F) 10	URBAN	**The doctor's daughter** (M) 3 *(parents divorced at 14)*	URBAN	**The teacher's daughter 3** (M) 3	Italy

Key: (F) indicates the father's occupation, (M) indicates the mother's. The father's occupation is used only in the case where the mother does not have any further education or occupation . In the first two generations where father's occupation is used, the mothers of the rural girls are farmer's wives, while the mothers of the urban girls are houswives. The numbers below the occupations indicate the number of siblings in the family (the daughter included).

Notes: [a] The majority of grandmothers were born between 1910 and 1913 and, thus, their period of youth is from the mid-1920s to the mid-1930s. A few were born later – the latest in 1927. With the mothers the majority were born 1940–4, the youngest in 1948.

[b] Since the interviews took place in 1991 we only know about the youth period of the daughters up to this point.

difference in growing up in the city or in the countryside has significance, but also social class, family culture and more specific circumstances. These sociological variables seem to have an amazingly clear effect on the biographies, but because the different variables interact with each other, the context they work within becomes decisive.[4] It is not possible here to trace these complicated patterns in detail. In a short article like this one we have to paint with broad brushstrokes, but it is important to remember that the relation between the sociological variables and the strokes of the brush are never direct or simple. The aim of a qualitative analysis is not to make claims about the average effect of such variables, but to focus on how such effects might come into being in concrete cases. In our painting of the three generations we focus on what significance upbringing, parental identification and management of gender have for young women's processes of modernization. These things affect choices made in education and romantic relationships – which are again crucial for social mobility. The analysis is mainly empirical, but this should not prevent readers from keeping various theories on modernity in mind, as well as other studies of young people from across these generations, for instance Margot Bengtsson's studies of parental identification in youth generations from the 1950s to the present (Bengtsson, 1985, 1990, 1996).

The interviewees in a three-generational study like this one represent different phases of adolescence, of their adolescence, and they speak from different points in the life cycle. The two older generations have access to more interpretative contexts than the youngest. They can switch between how they saw things then, and how they see them now. Sometimes, this makes it difficult to say to what extent a recollection should primarily be seen as a construction of the present – for instance when the grandmothers lament the absence of educational opportunities or the inadequate sex education available in their youth. There is a marked shift in the degree of self-focus and cultural reflexivity between the first and the second generation. While the grandmothers often make comparisons between then and now, for instance by complaining about the hardship they endured compared to the youngest generation, or, the other way round, complaining about the moral decay of today, the mothers seem more occupied with their own changing interpretations of things and, thus, more reluctant to make clear judgements (for instance, I *believe* that I had a happy childhood, but maybe I have just repressed the bad memories?). Due to limited space we cannot go further into these matters, which are all to do with fundamental questions of what recollection and memories are, and what kind of knowledge they can give us about the past. We do want to stress, though, that what we present here is taken from the young women's *stories* of their roads to adulthood – the way they construct their childhood and adolescence when they talk to us.

THE GRANDMOTHERS

Two Points of Departure

The eight generational chains start from two rather distinct societal patterns: one characterized by social and geographical stability and one by individual mobility. The differences between the four rural and the four urban grandmothers are significant. While none of the rural grandmothers, as girls, had more than seven years of elementary school, every second day – 'it was three years with the mistress and four years with the master', as one of them says – three of the urban grandmothers are high school graduates who continued into higher education. All four rural girls had parents who were born and raised in the same community as themselves, and all four found their spouses in the local community or, in one case, in the neighbouring village. This means that they stayed in the community as adults also. Only one left – because her fiancé was not due to inherit his father's farm, but was an enterprising carpenter who went to Oslo and did well as a contractor. Among the four urban girls only one was raised in the same town as her parents, and none of these girls spouses came from her home town. In many ways, in terms of mobility these urban grandmothers seem to be a generation ahead compared with their rural sisters: three of them had parents who had grown up in farming communities and experienced the same geographical stability.

While listening to their stories, one could almost forget that both rural and urban girls actually belong to the same generation. We caught ourselves several times thinking of the urban girls as the daughters of the rural girls![5] But they do belong to the same cohort and have been touched by many of the same societal events at the same age. In the stories of the rural grandmothers, where time almost seems to stand still from today's perspective, we also find some indications of a new and larger world to come. Without having been asked about it, six of the eight grandmothers mentioned relatives or friends of their parents who emigrated to, and in a few cases also came back from America. The arrival of the radio in their families was also described as a major event by both urban and rural grandmothers. They remember the travelling cinemas showing American films – Charlie Chaplin was an old acquaintance for our rural girls. And in the communities not too far from Oslo the rural girls would enviously notice well-dressed urban girls on holiday, who could idle about while our rural girls had to work. For the youngest of them there was the Second World War, which on the one hand restricted opportunities for leaving the community, but on the other hand, after the liberation, also brought in soldiers of all nationalities, whom the rural girls would watch with a mixture of fear and fascination. Thus the modern world made itself known to the rural girls, just as much as we also find elements of an old way of life in the stories of their urban counterparts. So a simple time

delay in the advent of modernization is evidently not what occurred, but rather modernization had different effects in the village and in the city and in different social classes. Furthermore, these rural girls seemed to have caught up with the urban girls, as their granddaughters have all ended up at the same elite school in Oslo and are on their way to higher education. How did this happen? Can we identify some of the societal, cultural and psychological conditions for this process of 'catching up'?

External and Internal Gender

The cultural division between urban and rural life seems to be so marked that the grandmothers' stories must be analysed according to this divide. We start with the rural girls. They all described a childhood which entailed much hard work and thrift. When asked to describe their relationship to their parents they related in detail how hard their parents had to work and they emphasized that no one was allowed just to sit down and moan. As other studies have shown (see, for example, Thorsen, 1993), in the traditional farming culture there is a strictly gendered division of labour: the men work outdoors, the women indoors. The women can do men's work if necessary, but not the other way round. The men control the household economy, while the women's influence, if any, is indirect. From the stories of the rural grandmothers one gets the impression that gender mainly finds expression in this division of labour, and that the gender roles are to a lesser extent anchored in the personalities. All the rural grandmothers described themselves as active and strong girls, both as children and adolescents. They all did well at school and several of them especially remembered how fond they were of arithmetic. An otherwise rather reserved grandmother became quite ecstatic when she talked about this:

> Oh I enjoyed doing arithmetic so much, I enjoyed arithmetic so much, oh I was, oh I was . . . I just can't tell you *how much* I enjoyed doing figures and figures and figures . . . and do you know what? I still like doing arithmetic!

They related a life of freedom and little parental control once the gender-based work was done. In their leisure time they could play rough and tumble, ski, skate, swim or go fishing with their brothers. As young girls they 'grew into' an already existing collective of youngsters. They would walk arm in arm in mixed groups from the store to the post office and back again. The most important youth scene was that of the Saturday night dance at the village hall, which consisted of waltzing to the music of an accordian, and they were allowed to go if they had finished the dairy work in time. They would look for good dancing partners for the duration of the dance, but when it was over at four o'clock in the morning, the group of youngsters would escort each other safely home. No curfews

were needed. When these girls some years later chose their husband they did not choose the man who had been good at dancing, but the solid working man who was good with his hands and who was calm and would think before he acted.

All the rural girls helped their parents inside and outside the house, but there were important differences between the two farmers' daughters and the two daughters of the rural workers[6] when it came to their attitudes to these domestic chores and to their parents, and the differences seemed to be significant for their roads to adulthood. The two farmers' daughters liked to help out and were proud of the skills they learned from their mothers and fathers. Helping dad was most fun, and the farmers' daughters told us that they were good at physical work and traditional male skills like driving a horse and carriage and using tools. But their first duty was to assist their mothers, and as they also saw their mothers as strong and competent, they identified positively with traditional female tasks such as housekeeping, dairy work and needlework, which they regarded as valuable work. Their relationship with their mothers was good, but more mundane and obvious than their relationship with their fathers, whom both girls spoke about with even greater warmth and respect. What was attractive about the father was his knowledge ('Father was like a reference book!' one of them said), his helpfulness, his links to a larger world and, finally, his economic power, because he held the purse strings, and as the 'natural' head of the family. He was placed in juxtaposition to the more dependent and nagging mother.

This idealization of the father was also found among the two daughters of the rural workers, but here the stories were more low key, for father was so little at home. He worked hard to earn money for the family, and when he returned he was always exhausted. One girl related how she had longed for him to notice that she had had her braids cut. However, father would also bring with him a taste of the outside world, for instance when a father took his daughter in a cab to the nearest small town and she was allowed to choose shoes, hat, scarf and gloves for her confirmation. These two girls' idealization of the father was of a more abstract kind, and at the same time their estimation of their mothers' competence was much weaker compared to the testimonials of the two farmers' daughters. Their views of their mothers carried stereotypical connotations, which we see fully developed in the next generation, of the housewife with 'dust on her brain', and the daughter's departure from this kind of femininity: 'Can you imagine – she ironed all the cotton underwear so it didn't feel tight!', one of them sneered. With the daughters of the rural workers we notice a tension between a male-associated individuality and a female-associated ordinariness, which is where they knew all too well they belonged – a tension far removed from the experience of the farmers' daughters. Merely living in the countryside is depicted as a problem (in sharp

contrast to the farmers' daughters' devotion to the ancestral farm): it was a place where nothing happened and from where you could not escape either because there was no bus in the evenings or because the roads were not cleared of snow in the winter, or because the river flooded in spring. 'I reckon it was a good thing that I got used to getting the least', recalled one of them rather bitterly, going on to remember how her sister always took the largest piece of the chocolate they always had to share.

The Rural Girls: Out and Upwards through Marriage and Female Competence

Even though all the rural girls did well at school and, through their fathers and small glimpses of modernity, dimly became aware of a larger world out there, the question of further education did not arise. The reasons given for this were that education was not seen as important for girls, that there was no secondary school in the village, or that there were no means of transportation to the nearest town – and last, but not least, the girls were needed at home. 'Mother definitely needed help', says the daughter of the farmer with the bigger farm. 'I couldn't let my mother and father down', said the daughter of the other farmer, whose only sister had already left home. But the urge to get away was still there. One of farmer's daughters said that she wanted very much to get 'a little bit farther out' to see how other people lived, get a job and earn her own money – but still, 'not so far that I could not get home again'. So there they were, helping at home from when they were 14–15 years old, with no pay, maybe with an urge to get away, and with knowledge of sisters and cousins who had made it and were now making their own money. The threat now was that of being stuck there forever. One of the farm girls who married at 28[7] spoke about her anxiety that she would not get herself a breadwinner and end up in a room at the farm like she had seen many unmarried women do.

For the other farmer's daughter, who came from a smaller farm, this marriage strategy seemed to be connected to an incentive to achieve upward mobility and her competence in traditional female work became an important resource: she wanted to become a farmer's wife! Her path as a young woman consisted of her carefully planning her own education in order to achieve this 'career': she learned at home for a couple of years, then she took a post for a year as a dairymaid to get to know other farms and, finally, she spent half a year at a school of domestic science to learn the theory behind what her mother had taught her in practice. 'I was well able to do farm work', she recalled. She succeeded in her career plan: when a middle-aged bachelor from one of the biggest farms in the area was in need of a wife who knew about dairy work, he focused his attentions on her. She stayed in the community but by developing her

own competence she got away from home and made a satisfying leap upwards in the social hierarchy. At the same time, the marriage was a final farewell to getting further away – it was now the husband who decided her movements. The daughter of the bigger farm owner was less goal directed, but finally she also succeeded in her marriage strategy. She was the one who married the contractor. They moved to Oslo, where he built up a successful enterprise. The girl's aptitude in arithmetic proved to be a benefit – as his wife, she would work out all the estimates and keep the accounts, working at the dining table at home. And her competence as a housekeeper was put to good use, both in preparing dinner parties for the husband's business contacts and because, in the new housing districts of 1950s Oslo, the ability to bake cakes was an important social resource. Hers is also a mobility story with traditional female work as the prime resource: from the farm kitchen to modern housewife. She says, for instance, that she would have liked to learn more about flower arranging, serving and decorating food and haute cuisine, because at home on the farm it was just simple dinners and rustic fare.

For the two daughters of rural workers the way out and up was not so obvious. They differentiated themselves from their mothers, but they did not have access to many alternatives. What they seemed to do was to improve themselves in areas of female competencies that their hard-working mothers did not have time for: fine needlework and time for children. It is worth noticing that these alternative female competencies in many ways were more 'modern' than the farmers' daughters' competencies in dairy work and farm household chores. Was this a case of rural workers' daughters, less protected by a traditional farming culture, being thrown earlier into the process of modernity, without having the resources to meet the challenge? They both got pregnant, but only for one of them did marriage come along. She jumped out of the frying pan into the fire, as they say, because this marriage implied moving into the house of her mother-in-law, from where she longed for her home. The other girl, who did not get a marriage offer, was 30 years old and stuck. She stayed at home and looked after first the child of her divorced sister, then her old and sick grandfather, and by and by also her old and ailing parents until she herself was 47 years old. It is worth noticing that, as middle-aged women, both of these girls finally succeeded in translating some of their modern female competencies into waged work, as both became child-minders. But still, in their stories there is a sense of longing for a life that could have offered them more. One of them summarized her life in these words: 'There were no big adventures, and no great love stories either.'

In all the cases of our rural girls we see that the lack of education and the possibility for learning more were a *privation*, not least because these were girls who had seen their fathers' world as more exciting than their mothers', and had seen sisters who had made it into town. At the same

time, it is quite clear that their regret over not having pursued an education was a retrospective interpretation from the point of view of modern society with its emphasis on education: they were not curious enough, they said, had never made any choices, had given too much to others. The bitterness was clearest with the grandmothers who were daughters of rural workers, but was also discernible with the farmer grandmothers for having been loyal to a moral code that had been abolished over their lifetime. In illustration is the story of the richer farmer's daughter who, as a 75-year-old woman, had still not used the 25 kronor[8] she got as a present from her uncle at her confirmation:

> And then I put this money in the bank and it has *never* given me any joy . . . I have been too thrifty all my life . . . but now it is too late . . . well, I guess it will be given away to the children and grandchildren just as we have always done, so . . .

For the farmers' daughters, however, female competence and positive identification with their mothers' work tasks seem to have been a good alternative means to get out and move upwards. For the daughters of the rural workers, who could not connect positive femininity to the farming culture's image of the strong woman, a more modern, alternative femininity came into play on the way, but it was not very useful. Their only alternative was to hope for a solid breadwinner so they could get away from their parental home. A project which in these cases either did not succeed, or cost them the freedom that had been the original the goal.

Urban Girls: Out and Upwards through Education and with Mother behind You

The gender-based division of work is also clear in the families of the urban girls, with the mother bringing up the children at home, and the father as breadwinner. What gives the stories of the urban girls a more modern touch is their depiction of another family culture and another youth culture. The upbringing they described was child centred and their parents were portrayed as caring and affectionate, in contrast to the rural girls' description of their clever and hard-working parents. The values of the rural society in respect to honesty, thrift, strict norms and respect for adults were found here too, but they were taught explicitly through rational methods of upbringing, instead of just being integrated into the way of life.

None of the urban girls helped at home very much – their mothers would tell them to concentrate on their homework and, besides, the mothers preferred to do the household tasks themselves to ensure that they were done properly. One girl who later complained to her mother that she had not been taught how to cook got the response that, honestly,

hadn't she got this nice recipe book at her wedding, and now that she was a high school and a university graduate, she should have been able to digest that book too! The urban girls admired their mothers and portrayed them as their human and democratic ideal and this also applied to their principles for upbringing. The girls also had a positive relationship with their fathers, but interestingly enough, it was not the competence, power or knowledge of the father that was emphasized, but his looks: father was such a nice and charming man!

For the urban girls it was a matter of course to continue in middle school.[9] In addition to doing well in school, however, it was crucial to have parents who could afford to pay, as middle school and high school were expensive both in terms of tuition and provision at home. This was a decisive factor for the one urban girl who did not go to high school even though she had clear goals and plans for further education, and had her parents' backing. Her father died when she was 15 and her mother had to provide for her and her little sister. She had to give up her plans and spoke of this as a catastrophe – as opposed to the rural girls she had thought that education was within her reach, and thus its loss was felt much more keenly. But her moral response to the situation resembled what we saw with the rural girls: she felt she had to take responsibility, she understood that her mother could not do without her salary and decided on her own not to apply for a grant to high school. For the bank manager's daughter, money was no problem. For the remaining two, who came from lower middle-class families, their education was accomplished through huge economic sacrifices by their families.

Three out of four going to high school is an unusually high rate even for urban girls in this period (2 percent for the cohorts born between 1911 and 1915, see note 3), especially when one takes into account that only one came from a well-off bourgeois family. It may have been a decisive point that all these girls came from families where the women were strong figures, and where their mothers especially urged them to pursue their education in order to be able to provide for themselves, independently of a man. When, for instance, the grocer's daughter wanted to go on to higher education after high school, her father considered this as foolish, as she would probably get married, but mother supported her:

> Mother wanted women to stand up for themselves a little bit, that's for sure, without saying it, she liked that . . . she would have liked to have somewhat more to say about financial matters in the family. And then father gave in: 'Well, you can give it a try then', and that's what I did.

Attending middle school and high school opened up brand new experiences for our three urban girls. The curriculum was made up of different subjects where one could have aptitude for some and not for others. A more specific image of one's own competence would develop. It also

provided them with experience with different types of teachers whom they would have to learn to handle, and in this way the figures of authority – the mistress and the master – which the rural grandmothers still think of as 'the teacher', are differentiated and dethroned. It also gave them experience of class differences. While gender was not remembered to have led to differential treatment at school, there were vivid depictions of differential treatment in relation to social class. And the girls also learned a lesson about the opposition between femininity and academic knowledge: in middle school powder compacts and lipsticks were confiscated if found and one never saw them again.

These urban girls' youth resembled what has been called 'a moratorium' – where they could try out different projects without taking on any adult responsibility (through work, for instance). They devoted themselves to a lot of different activities: membership in a theatre group, participation in the discussion club at high school, editing the school paper, as well as balls and courting. These girls were certainly active in the world – in fact, the more active in the world, the more romantic tales they related. The youth culture they described was also quite different from what the rural girls depicted, not only because jazz music, tango and foxtrot had arrived in town, but also because the idea of romance was celebrated. This moratorium was filled with infatuation and romance, and the scene was a far cry from the image of the mixed youth group the rural girls described, where boy and girl only met as a couple on the dance floor. The urban girls were telephoned incessantly by young admirers and invited to the theatre and to tea dances. Still, these urban grandmothers, just like their rural sisters, underlined the innocence of these youthful infatuations. It was never serious, they repeated over and over again – meaning there was no sexual intimacy. The period of infatuated young girl with a passion for dancing was a hiatus – adulthood required something else. Love was never supposed to be the meaning of it all, and the bliss of fun and devotion must be weighed against other commitments and values (see also Rudberg, 1996).

To sum up we can say that the urban girls, through their own abilities, the financial situation of their families and not least through the support of their mothers, progressed to middle school and high school. It was not feminine competencies they pursued, but the mother was clearly a role model, in the background, pushing them towards gender equality. This led on to new experiences, and also to the possibility of higher education and the opportunity to live on their own before they got married, and the opportuinty to pursue their own career. The problem for these girls seemed to lie in their being overqualified for the roles of housewife and mother. Only 4 percent of married women worked outside home in the 1950s in Norway (Furre, 1992). The three with higher education in our sample managed, however, to work at least part-time. The bank

manager's daughter did not use her law degree until as a 60-year-old woman she established her own legal practice! Before that, she utilized the musical education she had also acquired, teaching pupils at home. The daughters of the grocer and the sailor, who qualified as a doctor and nurse respectively, got divorced and for this reason had full-time jobs (almost as unusual as high school graduation in that decade: 5 percent of women were divorced in the 1950s). The choice was either marriage or career – but at least there was a choice. And apart from the fourth urban grandmother, who even today mourns the education that slipped between her fingers, we do not find any bitterness or sadness in their life stories as we did in the stories of the rural grandmothers.

THE MOTHERS

Devalued Mothers – Idealized Fathers

In our second generation, the educational policies and the general level of prosperity contributed to the fact that seven out of our eight mothers graduated from high school (against 13 percent for all Norwegian girls born between 1941 and 1945, see note 3) and also went on to higher education. But their way through the educational system was much more tortuous than one might think from a purely sociological perspective. A marked difference between the stories of this generation and the previous one is the very negative appraisals of their mothers – and this seems to be more important for the life sketches of this generation than the division between countryside and town. All eight girls said that they are *very different* from their own mothers. It was their fathers they resembled, they said, and the father was praised for being strong, calm, well informed, rational, with natural authority – but, alas, also often a bit distant. He was the one with the money to decide about and give away as he chose. Five of the girls – the three rural girls and two of the urban girls – whose mothers were housewives and who themselves had climbed socially upwards – were negative towards their mothers. The remaining three, whose mothers had been in paid work, also showed an ambivalent relationship with the mother, but were not so derogatory as the first five.

The strongest devaluation of the mother was presented by the three girls in this generation who grew up in the countryside, and resembled in some way a reinforcement of the pattern for parental identification we saw displayed by the daughters of the rural workers in the previous generation – those who were hit by modernization without having the protection of the farming culture and without any alternative resources to get away. In these very negative mother–daughter relationships we might see a hint of the cost of being one generation 'behind' in relation to the mobility from rural to urban areas. In our second generation, a daughter

of a rural worker said about her mother: 'I was the greatest event in her life, that she gave birth to me has been her main achievement.' And another rural worker's daughter said: 'If she hadn't had me, she would not have been anything, it was like that, you know.' In both of these cases pity for their mothers was mixed with devaluation, and both felt rotten talking in such a nasty way about their mothers, who had only desired to give them the best in life. But they thought that because their mothers failed to control their own lives, they became manipulative and irrational: 'Mother was in a way disciplined or has had to toe the line very much in her own life, so she found other ways to hit back, to survive, you know.' The image of a controlling and manipulative mother was also depicted in the story of the daughter of the owner of the bigger farm, but here with no trace of empathy: 'The only thing that counted was to work and work and work. Mother had to do everything 110 percent – she even embroidered my father's handkerchiefs!' For the daughter, to help at home was now only experienced as one more sign of mother's need to control. Even activities like singing with her mother, braiding her hair, or doing needlework together were experienced as mere coercion. These three mothers described themselves as modern and informed in comparison with their own mothers – they were of a completely different generation, they said, you could not really compare it at all. This is phenomenologically a much stronger generational divide than the one we found with the two girls who grew up in town with mothers who were housewives, even though these two also had a rather derogatory attitude towards their mothers. In these two urban generational chains we saw the same phenomenon as with the farmer's daughter, namely that the kind of upbringing that grandmother depicted in glowing terms regarding *her* mother was devalued in the next generation, 'Neat and proper' sneered an urban girl about her parental home, while her mother recalled with admiration how *her* own mother kept them so neat and proper, polite and obedient. and never raised her voice. This daughter continued, as a 45-year-old woman, to revolt against her mother: she would not make her bed in the morning before leaving for work, and she drank milk directly from the carton – and got a thrill every time she did it!

What could the reason be for this shift in the mother–daughter relationship between these two generations in our sample? It could be purely coincidental, but it does actually fit well with other studies, for instance those of the Swedish psychologist Margot Bengtsson, who has studied parental identifications over the last three decades (Bengtsson, 1990, 1996). If the shift is significant we could ask whether it mirrors an actual change during adolescence, or if it could rather be the contemporary constructions that differ. The life phase could have some impact – it might be easier to speak negatively of a living than of a dead mother. Resignation and reconciliation might be attitudes coming into the fore when things are

in the distant past and one can do no more about them. Another point is that the more respectful way of talking about their mothers, as narrated by the grandmothers of this study, can be connected to what they related about the norms of their childhood. What is real and what is constructed tended to merge here: was the point that the grandmothers would not talk badly about their mothers because it would be disrespectful (and especially to interviewers like us who, owing to our age, were in a daughter position)? Or was it the case that this norm of respect in itself implied that negativities were not formulated – not even for themselves – other than in extreme cases? Does it take less to be a 'bad mother' today because of different expectations regarding child centredness? Did the changes in norms with regard to respect for parents make it possible for the mother generation of our study to amass and express their reactions to the fracturing process of modernity in an aggression towards one object, the mother, while the same things were described in a tone more of sadness or bitterness in the narratives of the grandmothers? Another explanation might be that there was, between these two generations, actually a dramatic change in the lives of women (Skrede, 1996). The girls of the mother generation had a life very different from their own mothers, and a life where the competencies as a housewife or farmer's wife, represented by their mothers, had lost most of their value as general competence. We also see a shift in the power balance between mother and daughter: from being a helping hand for her mother, the daughter became the main mission in the mother's life. The Norwegian economist Kari Skrede (1996) has indicated that the welfare state in the early postwar period had one policy for the mothers and another for the daughters. The former was solidly based on the Parsonian ideal of the function-specialized nuclear family, the latter attacked all kinds of gender or class barriers in the system of education. It may be some of the psychological effects of this political contradiction that we see unfolding here.

In many ways this devaluation of the mothers is rather unjust when it comes to what the mothers actually did for their daughters. First, we can see that the mothers encouraged their daughters to be educated, to become self-sufficient and not to marry at too early an age. They also defended the education of their daughters to their more conservative spouses. Second, standards were rather high in the homes of these daughters – everything was safe, regular and orderly with enough time, steady routines for bedtimes and meals, always clean clothes to wear, and freshly made sandwiches to take to school. In most cases we also observed a rather relaxed intercourse between parents and children. It was not yet permitted to remonstrate with one's parents, but one was allowed to speak up and to show irritation, to run up the stairs yelling: 'Goddamn!' and slam the door while mum and dad let out a deep sigh in the living room. Rules of conduct seem to have concentrated on language and table

manners. Most of the mothers described an upbringing of much freedom and few responsibilities. Except for the farmer's daughter and the doctor's daughter, whose mother got divorced with three children, nobody helped out much at home. They did some of the unqualified work like peeling potatoes, setting the table or washing up, but not the more qualified tasks like cooking, cleaning and laundry, which most of the mothers wanted to keep for themselves.

Compared with the previous generation, the traditional female competencies were not useful anymore for the project of social mobility. Several of the mothers said they still hated housework, while a few of them picked out cooking and needlework as acceptable activities. These feminine tasks were still valued, but they were now more hobby than work. One of the mothers said that these were values worth taking care of, which in itself points to their culturally marginalized status.

Freedom, Individualization and Vulnerability

Before considering what consequences the negative mother–daughter relationship had for the girls' road to adulthood, we want to draw attention to another important characteristic of this generation, namely the relation between freedom and vulnerability. There was definitely greater freedom, and yet there was also a strengthening of control in some regards. Now all the girls had a curfew and the vague rule of 'coming home when it ends' was substituted by exact times, differentiated for weekdays and weekends. The fear that the freedom of the girl would result in sexual escapades and/or social misalliances was indeed alive. One girl, who grew up in a small industrial town, was not allowed to go to local dances, and she claimed it was because her parents were afraid that she would fall in love with a factory worker. The sexual revolution was just on the horizon, and the girls secretly read *The Red Ruby*[10] and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. But sexuality was also dangerous for the girls themselves. All of them talked about the fear of getting a bad reputation or getting pregnant, and most of them had a rather late sexual debut and one that usually took place with the man they would later marry. Freedom also meant that morals seemed to become internalized in a way different to their grandmothers' generation, where the important thing was not to bring shame on your parents by getting pregnant. For instance, a girl from the mother generation who otherwise came from a very liberal home (her mother was the daughter of the bank manager) was so strict in her own behaviour that only after hard moral consideration did she permit herself to be kissed by a boy on a student trip to Copenhagen when she was 18. When at the age of 23 she had her sexual debut with the man she was going steady with, she had pangs of doubt. She consulted her mother who thought it was OK if the relationship was important to

her – but this just added to her agony for *was* this relationship really important *enough*?

The new individualization and freedom also seemed to imply a new form of exposure for young girls. The girls became more 'public', and were thus evaluated by other young people on the basis of their own qualities (in contrast to the grandmothers who were judged more in terms of their family or peer group). This is probably one reason why looks, social charms and popularity with the boys were so overwhelmingly important for the mothers as young girls. All the mothers portrayed themselves just as the grandmothers did, as active and confident as children, but as shy and self-conscious as adolescents. Almost all of them remembered how dissatisfied they were with their appearance, and, with Marilyn Monroe in the background, it was especially the pale, thin, long and lanky girls who suffered (while Audrey Hepburn was a consolation – and one of the girls remembered what a relief it was when Twiggy appeared!). The public scene combined with an etiquette which did not allow girls to take the initiative in forging romantic relationships, but just to place themselves 'in the right spot', seemed to be the great trauma for this generation of young girls, and the experience of being publicly exposed as sex objects for men might have been significant for their later feminist engagement. The humiliation of standing passively in a public hall waiting for somebody to ask you for a dance was something most of the mothers remembered vividly:

> I loved to dance, and I was always completely hysterical about not being asked. If I had to sit for one dance, I used to go completely out of my mind. Then I went to the ladies' room. I danced with anybody, just as long as I could dance: thick and thin, small and big ones – and then they had to have three dances . . .

The same mother remembered with horror a high school graduation ball with lots of formally dressed girls crying in the ladies' room. But the ladies' room was also of course a place where you risked being confronted by the giggling success of the more popular girls. The benevolent envy of girlfriends within the grandmother generation was perhaps slipping into a somewhat more brutal rivalry for this generation, as the free market seldom allows for sentimentality. Of course, there was still room for sympathy among girls – but they also knew that in the final event they were on their own. Only one of the mothers said that she 'always put her girlfriends first' – and she was of course a girl who knew how to attract boys and was never a wallflower. For the others the unspoken agreement was to give less priority to their girlfriends when the heart throbs arrived on the scene (see Rudberg, 1996).

The main point was that popularity among boys became a decisive criterion for a successful youth – and that there were now differences in

what different girls dared to do. Some of them did seize the new freedom. Such girls in the grandmother generation would probably just have been labelled cheap and certainly no one to envy. For the mother generation it was different and many of them still lamented that they had not dared to enjoy themselves a little more. One girl remembered sadly how she went off on a student trip to Copenhagen dressed in a small-checked tailor-made suit with a pleated skirt and jacket – 'just like any mother would like to see her daughter' – and saw another girl who just wore jeans. How she wished she had dared to do so too! The theme of popularity was also connected with a new imperative for girls, namely that they should *not* be boring good girls – although their 'wickedness' of course would have to be kept within limits. The 'fun' girls were the ones who got invited to all the parties, the ones who always stood laughing with a group of boys, the ones who – even though they were 'brain-dead' – were the centre of attention. The 'goody-goodies' were the ones who were 'ordinary', 'boring', 'thin, tiny, flat-breasted and clever at school', 'uninteresting' and 'with straight hair'. Most of the mothers in our study put themselves in the sad category of goody-goodies (although some of them broke out of it later). In contrast to the urban grandmothers, who combined popularity with activity, the mothers often seemed to construct this as a contradiction in terms: you were either popular with the boys or a clever, hard-working girl. 'To be popular was so important that you were ready to renounce everything else.'

Escaping from Mother's Life through Education and Love

The combination of easy access to education with, on the one hand, quite negative mother–daughter relations, and, on the other, the demand to be popular among the boys, seemed to result in these young women being much less goal directed towards education and career than one might have thought. One might say that the kinds of restrictions they experienced due to their gender were not external, but internal. 'Gender' seemed to have become more of a psychological trait, part of the 'personalities' that the girls experienced themselves as being. The girls pursued good grades in school, and they knew that they, unlike their mothers, were going to have a career of their own. But what sort of career was less clear, and this might be the reason why the incentive to pursue their education seemed to become mixed up with other kinds of projects. For the three rural girls it was the wish to get away from home that became decisive. The one who decided not to go to high school did so because the high school was located too close to her village, and she therefore opted for a one-year business course in Oslo. The most extreme case was the daughter of the bigger farm owner. She wanted to get 'away, out, and never come back'. She was nearly driven to despair by the municipality's plans to open a high school near her

home village. Luckily this did not happen and thus she could, at 17 years of age, move 100 km away from home to go to high school: 'Then I felt, *finally*, now I am gone' – gone so far away that nobody knew her family, or could comment on whether she was like them. The two urban girls, whose mothers were full-time housewives, did not have such a strong urge to get away from home even though they were irritated by the their mothers' high domestic standards. They stayed at home, being waited on by their mothers until they married at 22. But their school life in return was influenced by the fact that they found that forging relationships with the older, more exciting boys was the most interesting activity in their young lives. The majority of our eight girls had steady boyfriends at quite an early age and seemed to see this as much more important than their own career plans. In the 1950s and 1960s in Norway the average marrying age for women was 22 years (Skrede, 1996) and this holds also for our sample. In contrast to the grandmothers, who did not see love as the main focus of their adulthood, these young girls seemed to see it as the meaning of life. This could be connected to their battles for autonomy with their mothers – in such a battle a knight on a white horse can be an obvious solution – but it could also be connected to their vulnerability and the demands of individualization. They seemed to lack the psychological readiness to act as individuals in public, and such individualization is furthermore constructed as antidotal to success as a gendered human being.

All this may explain why the mother's route through the educational system seemed to be characterized more by coincidence than by conscious choice. Several of them told us that 'it just happened', that girls became teachers or nurses, and boys went to engineering or medical schools. The contractor's daughter agreed with her girlfriends at high school that, for a girl, the job as a teacher was convenient and easily combined with family obligations. When one of the teachers at the teachers college recommended her to continue with an education in sports, she rejected the idea as she was going to marry and become a mother. During the last six months at teachers college, she and her girlfriend spent all their time buying outfits and preparing for their weddings. The one who attended business school said that today she would have liked to have studied further, but by that time 'I was so busy getting grown up, having a family of my own, and felt I was so short of time that I couldn't waste more time on school'. Four of the girls cannot even be said to have had their future family as a focal point, for them it was rather coincidence, laziness and a lack of choices that determined their way. Interestingly enough among these girls were the two whose mothers had university degrees. They both said that they saw their parents as much more clever than themselves and thus lost motivation – and they both ended up with a lower education than their mothers. One of them used the expression that she had 'drifted along in life' most of the time.

To sum up we can see that the main ambition for many of these girls was to move away from their mothers' lives and that education was now available as an *obvious choice*. Gender was not an issue for them, and where the road would lead was less clear, and in this situation boys became the main characters in their lives. Love and having a family became the main aims, but they also stuck to their career *because* they wanted to have a different life to their mothers'. This led by and by to an adoption of feminist approaches – and for some of them also to divorce. For one of them the prelude to the divorce came while the husband was reading Marilyn French and preached about women's lib instead of doing the dishes! Being popular was a contradiction to being clever in school, and seen as taking advantage of the new possibilities falling into the lap of girls of this generation. At the same time, these possibilities, and also the belief that gender was irrelevant, were a kind of time-bomb lurking behind the love project, and also fuelled this generation's many projects of further education.

THE DAUGHTERS

Partnership between Children and Parents

We met the daughters, the youngest generation, as 18- to 19-year-olds the summer they graduated from high school and thus just before their choice was made with regard to further education. The daughters made up a homogeneous sample with regard to demography and social class: same cohort, same school, Oslo, and all middle class. Their family life and upbringing appeared relatively similar compared to the differences in their generational backgrounds. From the interviews at least, it was hard to see the tracks of class cultures, except for the different degree and kind of cultural interests they reported their parents as having. What was striking first and foremost, comparing the daughters' stories of their upbringing with the two previous generations, was that something had happened to the relationship between children and parents. It was, to a much higher degree, an equal relationship that was depicted. In contrast to the grandmothers, who spoke of their parents with *deep respect*, and the *strong emotional outburst* of the mothers, the daughters' portrayal of their parents took on a new tone. The parents were depicted in *a warm-ironic way* and were made objects of both psychological and historical explanation. For instance, a father's tendency towards old-fashioned strictness could be explained as an ideological time-lag – he was himself brought up in an old-fashioned way and had really tried to improve, but one must understand that it was not that easy for him. This particular father's clumsiness in performing household tasks was also depicted in a good-humoured, understanding way: the dad was unpractical in domestic

tasks, the rest of the family had to tell him 15 times how to put on the dishwasher and had to give him a detailed list when he went to the supermarket. He really tried to show his good intentions albeit through doing things awkwardly, for instance taking things out of the dishwasher and then washing them up once more!

In the modern dual-career family, time is scarce and domestic standards have dropped considerably (and this is *not* a construction – as the interviews took place in the homes of the mothers and the grandmothers we had the chance to compare!). The girls described a rather stressed family life with weary parents and family members running in and out of the home as if it were a railway station. This implies that these girls have had to contribute to the household tasks more than their mothers did at the same age, and that they by and large have mastered most of them. Unlike their mothers, who as girls mainly did the unqualified jobs at home, these girls could cook and clean (at least in their own opinion). And they did not seem to react negatively to these duties, but accepted them as a matter of course. Among other differences in this generation was the fact that offspring were allowed to quarrel with their parents. A certain measure of civilized vocabulary was demanded by most parents, but otherwise arguments could get heated. Most of the girls told about conflicts in their early teens, but now things were quite peaceful and none of the girls felt rebellious. They planned to live at home during their first years at university, not because it would not be nice to get one's own apartment, but because they could not afford it and after all it was OK at home.

A marked difference from the previous generation was that the sex life of the adolescents had moved into the parental home. Not that there was much discussion of sex – that was not at all necessary because the girls believed they 'had always known' the facts of life. Here the contrast was considerable with the grandmothers' stories of taboos and covert cautions from their mothers, and also with the mothers' hectic hunting in bookcases for Agnar Mykle (see note 10) and D.H. Lawrence. Furthermore, several of the girls did not feel embarrassed to hug and kiss their boyfriend in the presence of their parents. Three of the five who had had their sexual debut were allowed to have the boyfriend sleep overnight and they left their birth control pills lying around openly in the family bathroom. Two of the girls were not permitted to have their boyfriend sleep over and they did not understand it at all. One of them said:

> You see mum doesn't want him in the bathroom in the morning. I don't understand this. She thinks it would be so awful if he was around, I don't have the faintest idea why she thinks that. But that's how she wants it.

The parents had been shocked when she had asked and she simply could not understand why they reacted like that. Both she and the other girl who could not have her boyfriend stay overnight found this a complete

hypocrisy as their parents did not forbid them from sleeping at the boyfriend's house. But the mere fact that the question was asked tells us about changed contexts. The relaxed attitude towards sex among both girls and parents has, of course, to do with developments like birth control pills and legal abortion.

In the introduction we asked in what order the three steps towards adult life – starting to work, moving out of the parental home and sexual involvement – were taken by these three generations. For the rural grandmothers the order was *work, moving out, sex*. For the urban grandmothers and most of the mother generation, both urban and rural, the order changed to *moving out, sex, work*. For the youngest generation the order seems to have become *sex, moving out, work*. The image of the modern girl in the family may be a bit paradoxical. On the one hand she exhibits independence with regard to education, sex and position towards the parents. On the other hand all of this is framed by a context where they are still children and have few adult responsibilities. Their many travels out in the world, which are at least partly financed by their parents, presuppose a home to return to and to call up if something should go wrong. One could also ask in what respect sex is a criterion of adulthood when it takes place in the teenager's bedroom in the house of the parents? Does the partnership with the parents result in an illusion of being grown up, both in relation to who actually sets the terms in the family (for instance when a divorce is coming up) and when it comes to their competence to manage on their own?

Strong Mothers and Kind Fathers

Compared to the previous generation, many of these girls reported that they had very positive relations with their parents and especially their mothers. Only one girl portrayed her mother in a very negative way. She was the daughter of a doctor, and felt that her busy parents never had time for her. She described her mother as always complaining and stuck in the 1970s, and a father who was slightly better – at least he was more rational and intellectual and it was him she resembled the most. It is worth noticing that the power balance in this family seemed to be strongly in favour of the father. His career had been given priority over the mother's, and the mother had fought for a more just division of the household tasks without any success. The two girls who had experienced parental divorce in early adolescence displayed some ambivalence towards their mothers, but the remaining five girls had a great deal of admiration for their mother. What they stressed was their mothers' ability to combine a career with having a family, to combine strength with care. The three who lived together with both parents were the most admiring of all, they saw their mothers as a model for combining work and family.

They also described their positive relationship with their fathers, and actually it was this relationship which was depicted with most warmth. What was emphasized about the father was his sense of humour, his kindness and permissiveness, his ability to relax and be easy-going. Their father had meant a lot for them as children, but as adolescents it was their mother they resembled and wished to be like. Common to all the girls was that they seemed to identify most with the parent displaying the most strength and intellectual ability, regardless of gender. And since this is a generation and a social class with many strong mothers, we can expect to get many mother-identified daughters (see also Bengtsson, 1985).

Individuality and Originality

No doubt the central value for these girls is originality, to realize one's individuality, to follow and develop one's own abilities, interests and desires. This was seen in multiple ways and was not least important in relation to changes in the meaning of gender. The traditional female competencies, which for the rural grandmothers were defined as *work* and also as *means for social mobility*, and which for the mothers meant *hobbies* pursued after a demanding day's work, have become for the daughters an inclination towards *art and aesthetics* as resources to shape one's own individuality. The traditional female competencies have been transformed through a modern intellectual lifestyle and have been disconnected from gender, and are thereby less strained for this new generation. The emphasis on individuality, however, has provided the girls with certain problems in relation to gender. Even though five of them were clearly in favour of women's liberation and believed there was a lot of gender discrimination going on, such an identification on the basis of gender speaks against the idea that one is first and foremost *oneself*. Traditional femininity is shameful – something which could be observed in these girls' pronounced contempt for 'ordinary girls' who are obsessed by fashion and dieting. Such girls, they maintained, also choose low paid women's jobs instead of developing their skills and abilities: 'EPA-girls[11] you know – very ordinary – lots of make-up – quit school after secondary', said one of the daughters when asked to describe a group of girls she used to hang out with when younger. Gender is something that befalls 'the others', and this has led to a somewhat suspicious attitude towards those girls who are not as successful as themselves in becoming individualized. Have they really made an effort? Can society be blamed for everything? This line of thinking also explains the lack of interest in feminism among the last three girls. They were in no way *against* equality between men and women, but they believed this was already the case, and that women had all the possibilities already if they just used them (see also Bjerrum Nielsen and Rudberg, 1995). At the same time, the girls were painfully aware of the

conflict between individualism and social responsibility. They admitted, for instance, that wanting to develop their own skills in a challenging job could be a problem in relation to others, not only in relation to their own children, but more in relation to the world per se (for instance if the company they worked for contributed to environmental pollution). It seems that the sphere of political action and solidarity for this generation has moved from the organizational level to a general principle of humankind and human rights. 'It is awfully complicated', one of them said, ' being an individual means that nobody can define you, but at the same time what you are really saying is you are better than everybody else.'

Tough Girls with Fluffy Insides

The issue of individualism, however, seems to have made these girls cope better with the public scene. Not only in school, where they would happily take the floor and speak out, but also on the youth scene, where the main point now is not to be popular, but to appear as a very special individual. The girls believed that boys fancy girls who are both intelligent *and* good looking, so the contradiction for girls between being clever or being popular has ceased to be a problem – but, in fact, being a success has become harder as you now have to be both clever *and* pretty! There is now much more to live up to. But the girls said they looked for the same qualities in boys, and one of them found this a problem because she knew of no boys who were both intelligent and good looking. In some ways the public youth scene has got easier to cope with. For instance, the dances where the mothers stood in formal dress waiting to be asked to dance have more or less disappeared. The daughter generation does not attend parties at school anymore, but drops in at a café or a disco together with friends, and if they want to dance they do so individually or in groups. And their attitude to the game of flirtation has also changed in various ways. All eight girls said it was perfectly acceptable for girls to take the initiative, both when it comes to giving the boy a ring or asking a boy for a dance, and taking sexual initiatives. The two girls who were going steady had arranged the seduction from the first phone call to the first intercourse. But it was not that easy for all of them. Most of the girls said that it was fine to do things like that, but they themselves would find it a bit difficult and embarrassing – they harboured also the politically incorrect feeling that it was more fun to be asked to dance than to have to ask oneself. They seemed willing to compromise, taking the initiative towards boys they were *not* in love with, and thus avoiding the risk of being turned down. They seemed to have developed a tough appearance, but as one of them said about herself and some squatter girls she hung out with outside school, 'actually we are rather fluffy on the inside'.

Love seems to be a more serious matter than sex for this generation. Many of the girls alluded to the risk of 'losing oneself' in relation to a boy. Young girls have to juggle with the problem even before they have entered a relationship, and some of them have postponed such relationships altogether. Supported by feminist ideology, it has become a positive self-definition not to be like the stupid girls who just sit around smiling at the boys. The distinction their mothers made between the 'fun girls' and the 'goody-goodies' is still there, but the valorization has shifted to a division between dependent and independent girls. Falling in love is dangerous not only for one's own individuality, but also for the need to be in control and make time to 'put one's girlfriends first' – another generation-specific term. It is probably the 'fluffy inside' which is vulnerable, in addition to the risk of getting the strong public self humiliated. At the same time, it is quite clear that the need to be in control has its counterpart in a longing to give in, whether through relaxing, aesthetic activities or love (see also Drotner, 1991, on this point). It was important to both work hard *and* relax, the girls said, but they were definitely best at the first. A somewhat paradoxical notion of 'controlled devotion' seems to be this generation's ideal of love (Rudberg, 1996).

The Daughters: Self-Realization through Higher Education and Creativity

The project of individualization is also a key to understanding these girls' attitudes to education and career. All of them wanted education and work, but their plans were fixed to different degrees. As mentioned at the beginning of the article, the distinction in our sample applies to those who have urban and those who have rural grandmothers.

The rural grandmothers' granddaughters had their plans for the future prepared. They were heading towards university to study subjects like political science, economy, history or technology and they had rather detailed ideas about what kinds of jobs and careers they wanted. Most of them had long-term plans including a year abroad and what to major and minor in at university. They wanted to become someone, they said, and they were confident that they would make it. For these girls career was not a negatively loaded concept. They could see higher education as a necessity for realizing one's skills and abilities, and high school was nothing but a step to get there. It was not connected to getting away from their families like it had been for their mothers – and it did not even occur to the girls that the project of self-realization could be achieved through a man. They could of course fantasize about love, but that was an entirely different project. Asked what she would do in the future if her husband would not go abroad with her when her career as a diplomat required it, one girl replied: 'Well, I guess our relationship would be over then,

because I can't give up everything for *that*!' One could say that higher education almost appeared as *a self-imposed duty*, and the same kind of conscientiousness also characterized their plans for travelling: several of them had travelled on their own and believed this was beneficial because it made you independent and opened your eyes to a lot of things. Some of them were planning a year abroad because, as they said, it would represent an important challenge to them, but they would be homesick too! Sometimes we almost got the impression that these young girls were almost losing that youthful moratorium – everything was a serious business from the start be it with regard to education, travel or love. They were not being sent out to work at 14 as their grandmothers were, but they were starting to work on their career at 16, and being very careful not to fall in love too early.

The granddaughters of the urban grandmothers did not seem to have such problems, quite the opposite. For them the word 'career' as well as the word 'housewife' were negatively loaded. Some of them vaguely pointed towards artistic careers. The girl whose planning did not go beyond the summer rock festival had the following thoughts about her further education: there were lots of things she could do – maybe study psychology, but no, that was too much work. Maybe she would go to Mozambique and work at a children's home in a disaster area – but what about her dog? Why not be an artist? She and a friend had just made some plaster masks to sell at the rock festival and it was quite good fun. Maybe she could stay unemployed for a while, after all she *was* rather a lazy person . . . At the same time she considered knowledge important in order to gain respect, for instance in political discussions, and she would never think of a life as a housewife (also, she hated kids). She found girls like the four goal-directed ones in our sample quite unbearable in their effort to be the most successful. Another of the urban granddaughters had no idea what she wanted to study, but believed that she had plenty of time. Her parents had suggested 100,000 occupations for her, she said, but she did not fancy any of them. The following year she might go to Italy to learn the language well. Her father had found a school for her through his business connections. The pattern that arose between the two groups of girls might be purely coincidental. It did, however, resemble what we saw in the previous generation: The girls whose mothers had university degrees and careers were less goal directed and ambitious than the ones who were keen to embark on a different way of life to their mothers.

From Emancipatory Politics to Life Politics?

When analysing the future orientation of the girls from the perspective of their generational stories one can ask whether the girls whose parents are the first generation with higher education are goal directed because the

project of social mobility still appears meaningful to them. In contrast, it seems as if this project has lost some of its cultural meaning for young girls who come from a family background where higher education has been the norm for several generations – especially if this educational history also applies to the women of the family. If it is a characteristic of modern society that growing up means being different from one's parents, and if one's parents have actually done very well in their education and career, then this can become a less attractive way to go. Especially in a culture which stresses individuality and originality, the question arises how to distinguish one's own uniqueness when the parents in several generations have done everything as well as it can be done? As one of the girls in our sample said, she has found out 'that it is not my style to get good marks' – at the same time as being convinced that she could get them if she worked for them (and, according to our classroom observations, she might be right). Another girl chose to be lazy in high school because she was so fed up with all the ambitious climbers in her class and she felt inclined to do the opposite.

One could say that this is nothing new – middle-class youth, and not least middle-class girls, have never been very goal directed at this age. They have had financial security, cultural capital and a psychological disposition to experience through a moratorium before they take on responsibility for their future. Nevertheless, it should be noted that this group of middle-class youth is growing up quickly because of the social mobility and general increase in the educational level of the parents. Furthermore, the young generation today live in a social and cultural context where the lack of goal directedness may not only be an expression of the period of the moratorium, but also mirrors some more fundamental traits of modern society: changed norms for what a successful life is, changes in what is required of general qualifications to live in this society, and changes in the labour market when it comes to what kinds of jobs are available and considered attractive. Maybe we are on the threshold of a new phase in the process of modernity where the project of social mobility – both with regard to moving upwards and in regard to fighting for equal rights – is losing its symbolic power? Such a hypothesis seems to concur with Anthony Giddens's (1991) observation that we are witnessing a transformation from emancipatory politics to life politics in society at large. The question is, however, if (and to what degree) this will affect the class and gender structures in society. Maybe they will just reproduce them in a new way?

NOTES

1. The data were collected in Oslo 1990–1. It comprises ethnographical observations at two high schools – one with a very good academic reputation in

central Oslo, students coming mainly from middle-class families where parents have a higher education, and another more ordinary suburban school with students from lower middle-class, working-class and small self-employed families. Norwegian high school (*Videregående skole*) includes year 10–12 (16–18 years old) and is divided into different courses. Both schools in this study were schools teaching theoretical courses, preparing for higher education (*Allmennfaglig linje*). The vast majority of high schools in Norway are free, access depended at the time of the study partly on marks from junior high school, partly on the catchment area, giving priority to students living in the area nearest the school. Thus, the students in our study are normal city youth of present-day Oslo, with slight differences in their social backgrounds.

On the basis of classroom observations in five classes, about half the pupils in these classes (32 girls and 25 boys) were selected for life-historical interviews; 22 mothers and 15 grandmothers of the girls, and ten fathers and five grandfathers of the boy students were also interviewed. In this article only the eight female generational chains of daughters–mothers–grandmothers from the city school are investigated. The project was part of a Nordic comparative project 'The Everyday Life and Culture of Young Girls', and similar generational data have been collected for Sweden and Denmark by Hedvig Ekerwald and Kirsten Drotner respectively.

2. In Denmark and Sweden married women have joined the labour force in significant numbers since 1960, and from 1970 this has also been the case for women with young children. In Norway these things happened about ten years later, and this is reflected in the delayed development of childcare provision. As late as the mid-1980s only 25 percent of the one- to six-year-olds attended daycare centres, compared to 50 percent in Denmark and Sweden. Even today the childcare provision is markedly lower in Norway than in the other Scandinavian countries (Andenæs and Haavind, 1987; Andersson and Gunnarsson, 1990; Furre, 1992; Langsted and Sommer, 1988).
3. The average frequency of high school graduation was 3 percent in 1931–5, 15 percent in 1961–5 and 38 percent in 1990–2. For women alone it was 2 percent, 13 percent and 43 percent respectively. Comparatively, in our sample 36 percent of the grandmothers, 88 percent of the mothers and 100 percent of the daughters graduated from high school. Other indicators also point to the fact that our sample is somewhat more urbanized and 'modern' than the average. Four of the eight grandmothers were city girls (against a third of the population as a whole), five of the eight mothers were city girls (against half of the population) and, of course, all the daughters were city girls. The frequency of divorce is also somewhat higher than the average numbers for these generations (*Historisk statistikk*, 1994; *Statistisk årbok*, 1997).
4. A few examples can illustrate this interaction. (1) When the first generation of farmers in the city came as young couples from the same rural area they seemed to maintain the farmer culture longer, for instance as regards family culture and cultural capital. This was the case for the grocer family in the first generation, and the contractor family in the second. Single movers to the city seemed to assimilate the city culture faster. (2) The farmer's daughter in the first generation had an unusually strong orientation towards social mobility. By her own efforts she improved her own social position considerably and became a rich farmer's wife. She also managed to get all of her six children through higher education – a startling result compared to the educational statistics for rural youth of their generation. (3) This particular

woman' s strong urge to get up and out seemed to be connected to the fact that her father had travelled to Africa in his youth. His stories about his travels seemed to have implanted in his daughter a stronger urge to get away compared with other young women in her social and geographical circumstances.

5. The atmosphere of the old and stagnant is clearly also a construction of the present. We were, for instance, often a bit surprised when, following the interviews, we were shown youthful photographs of the rural grandmothers with modern haircuts and the latest fashions. It is, however, also a construction presented by the rural grandmothers themselves, participants, as they are, in today's modern world. They often stressed that what they were telling us was barely comprehensible to the younger generations. Due to this, it was difficult for us to get hold of what was actually 'modern' in their way of life. In contrast, the urban grandmothers often underlined how modern they already were as young girls and admonished us for making them sound too old-fashioned in the way we posed our questions.
6. Rural worker here means the parents had a small-holding enough for self-sufficiency and in addition the fathers had paid work as unskilled labourers.
7. The average marrying age for women in this generation was 27 years (Skrede, 1996) so she was in no way behind.
8. About £2.
9. Middle school was initially established in 1896 as four years of fee paying schooling, leading on from the first five years of elementary school. In 1920 the Norwegian parliament decided that only middle schools leading on from seven years of compulsory schooling would be subsidized by the state. In bigger cities the five years plus four years model continued at some private schools. With the 1935 school law a two-year theoretical or vocational course (*realskole* and *framhaldsskole*) – both non-compulsory – replaced middle school (Baune, 1995). Nine years of compulsory school were introduced from 1959.
10. *The Red Ruby*, a novel by the Norwegian writer Agnar Mykle was first published in 1956. Due to its explicit sexual descriptions the editors were demanded by the courts to withdraw it from sale in 1957. This verdict was overturned the following year.
11. EPA is the name of a chainstore selling cheap clothing and make-up – not exactly the cup of tea of the middle classes.

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