

# 9

## Psychosocial Changes and Continuities in Gender

Looking at the three generations of women and men we have encountered in the preceding chapters, it becomes evident that huge changes in life and family patterns and in reflections on gender, as well as in the contours of a changed psychology of gender, have taken place. In this chapter I draw special attention to the changing psychological patterns, whereas in the final chapter I will integrate this into a broader frame of changing gender cultures, life forms and life choices, and will summarise how feelings of gender may have worked as emotional links in these processes of historical change.

I will first summarise, analyse and compare the relationships to parents and the perceptions of bodies and sexuality between the generations, and will see how this has contributed to changes in gender identities and gendered subjectivities. The relationship between parents and children has changed dramatically over the three generations, but there are also dimensions of the father–son, the mother–son, the father–daughter and the mother–daughter relationships that seem to be more sluggish than others. The same applies for women’s and men’s relation to bodies and sexuality. These relations crystallise into generational patterns in gender identities and gendered subjectivities. Over the three generations, we see

a move from single-gendered to multi-gendered and sometimes degendered identities and subjectivities. There are similarities between the oldest and youngest generations in relation to a securely felt gender identity and positive parental identification, whereas the middle generation stands out in this respect. However, the deviation in the middle generation, in interaction with huge changes in the societal context across all of these three generations, contributed to a very different psychological dynamic behind the apparent similarity in the oldest and youngest generations. I will look into these changes and continuities for each gender under the headings ‘The Changing Psychological World of the Men’ and ‘The Changing Psychological World of the Women’.

In the second part of the chapter I will return to the questions posed in Chap. 2 about the historical character of theories and will examine the observed changes in psychological gender from the perspective of different psychoanalytic theories that have evolved in the historical period of our three generations. The analytical level in this chapter will also be *the dominant patterns of feelings* within each gender and generation, which becomes the background of which individual variation emerges, are seen and interpreted. In order to remind the reader that I am describing changing patterns of generations rather than the individual variations, I will use ‘gender identity’ and ‘gendered subjectivity’ in the singular to designate a particular generational pattern. The focus on this general level also entails that my use of psychoanalytic concepts and theories on gender and development which address individual dynamics and unconscious fantasies will necessarily have to be somewhat speculative. Furthermore, as the data concerns the feelings of gender as they emerged in the interviews (cf. Chap. 3), it is also important to keep an eye on both the element of retrospective interpretation of feelings and the conditions at different points in life that may have had an impact on them.

## **The Changing Psychological World of the Men**

### **Fathers and Sons**

As we have seen, the main pattern of relationships between fathers and sons has changed from a filial, admiring relationship in the oldest

generation, to a bland, sometimes ironic but rarely directly conflictual relationship in the middle generation, and to a more mutual admiring relationship in the youngest generation.

It is not difficult to see in this a connection to the social status and the presence of the father in the son's life. The fathers of the oldest and the youngest generations were clearly more present in their sons' lives, but in the oldest generation this was combined with a more pronounced generational hierarchy between parents and children, and also with a more direct experience of the father's authority and hard physical work to provide for the family. An interesting effect of this change is the tendency of more centrifugal identifications (Laplanche and Pontalis 1973: 206) in the youngest generation, where the father resembles you instead of you resembling your father.

The bland relationship with the father in the middle generation is correspondingly related to the more distant father in the breadwinner/carer family, but may also have been amplified in this sample of socially mobile sons: the father is not only absent, he also represents an outdated masculinity. There are few signs of phallic phantasies—superman fantasies—connected to the absent father among men in this generation, but the idea of masculinity is diffuse and this may be connected to their childhood experiences of distant fathers. The sons of this generation criticise their fathers for being unavailable and for being what Holter and Aarseth (1993: 51) have termed 'emotionally handicapped'. Those who had more present fathers are not impressed by their fathers' emotional competence either, but here the critique is mixed with a positive identification with their masculine assets.

It is only in the oldest generation that the father emerges as a powerful figure who one may not be able to match. Competition and possibility for humiliation are connected much more clearly to the same-sex relationship for men in the oldest generation than in the two younger ones. Nancy Chodorow (2012) suggests a special 'Achilles complex' between fathers and sons—where the son feels humiliated by the father's power and privileges and therefore comes to fear passivity. Seen from this perspective, some of the critique we hear from the sons about fathers letting their wives work too hard might be interpreted as a projective identification related to their own fear of being let down by their fathers.

Yet, it is not a punitive father that emerges in the oldest generation, but an admirable one with positive social qualities, like having something, being something or doing something—he is, as several of our older informants described him, ‘the jack of all trades’, and this makes the sons proud. What Jessica Benjamin describes as the identificatory love for the father (1995: 57) shines through for these informants, whereas it is absent among the few who had more socially withdrawn fathers. In the middle generation the bland relationship with the father makes him unfit as either a strong or a threatening figure. This implies that the threat of the Achilles complex is more or less gone. However, the sons are also left to construct for themselves what it means to be a man, and some of them appear quite obsessed with this question in the interviews.

In the youngest generation the sons seem to incorporate the fathers’ strengths and qualities into their own identities. The relational basis of this incorporation seems to be more caring fathers; however, this dimension of care is not explicitly mentioned. Actually, most of the boys had wanted their fathers to be even more present, and they also see them as less emotionally competent than their mothers (see also Brannen 2015, who finds that men want their fathers to have been more present, no matter how much he actually *was* present). It appears that a caring parent, regardless of what sex, tends to become someone taken for granted, the invisible background of one’s own unreflected wellbeing. The fathers of the youngest generation are described more as doers than as talkers, but the many doings of father and son seem to have established a safe emotional attachment, and against this background the sons emphasise and identify with their fathers’ ‘masculine’ virtues, like being knowledgeable, competent and physically fit. The middle-class fathers in our sample may not be the jack of all trades as the old working-class fathers were, but they nevertheless embody some of the modern masculine qualities that the sons consider to be important. There is less emphasis on the father’s work, career, status and possessions than there was in the oldest generation; rather, it is the personalised masculine virtues he embodies for his son that seem to give the sons a secure subjective sense of being male. It is the playful, creative and physically courageous masculinity they identify with. This masculine identity is seldom constructed as complementary to femininity. In fact, this is only seen in a few of the stories of the working-

class boys, who, being located in the middle-class and girl-dominated sphere of academic high school, may have an unconscious wish to defend their fathers' status by denigrating feminine activities. The predominant pattern, however, is that the positive identification with their fathers' masculinity does not exclude identifications with more 'feminine' values and activities. It is a question to what extent they gender these qualities at all: what it means to be a man may include all sorts of qualities regardless of whether they have been culturally associated with masculinity or femininity earlier. It resembles what Lynne Layton describes thus: 'The capacity to enjoy being a man without repudiating identifications with women seems to lead to something new, something that is not dominant in the culture and that the term *androgyny* does not quite capture' (1998: 189). Masculine gender identity in this generation, especially among middle-class boys, is rather connected to the feeling of being unique and unpredictable than to a specific cultural content.

## Mothers and Sons

The patterns of mother–son relationships display a similar but inverted picture, changing from seeing the mother as a kind and self-sacrificing but also quite invisible person in the oldest generation, to an upgrading of her subjectivity and a much stronger attachment to her in the middle generation, and to a positive but also somewhat taken-for-granted figure in the youngest generation.

The connection to the interpersonal world of family arrangements is less straightforward than in the case of the father–son relationships, which may indicate that more intrapsychic interpretative work is going into the sons' relationships with their mothers. In the oldest generation, the relationship with the mother is strikingly understated and mainly comes up in connection with her working too hard and the good food she served. When asked directly, they admit that she was the one they sought out for comfort, but this is not an unsolicited memory. The victimisation of the mother may be a way to repudiate her power and project their own feelings of weakness and dependency. As Corbett

(2009: 47) argues, masculinity is here constructed outside of shared recognition and bears the stain of the unmarked position. However, the men also want to defend their mothers as 'other' and take care of her as strong men should. According to Benjamin (1995: 102), such attitudes of paternal protectiveness may also indicate latent maternal identifications. The weak mother in need of male protection is in particular seen in the accounts of the men who grew up in working-class and rural families. The mother is acknowledged more as a separate person in the interview with the one middle-class male informant we have in this generation.

In the middle generation the mother is more visible. She is described as someone who had deserved to get more out of life, but she is seen as a kind, capable and caring person. She is not described with the joy and pride that is seen in the older and younger generation when sons talk about their fathers, but rather as 'the mother blanket' (Holter and Aarseth 1993: 93). However, there is much less disidentification with feminine weakness in this generation of sons: the mother is not only a kind and warm person, she also does important things in the eyes of her sons in terms of her emotional competence and availability. The mother is primarily a love object, but in a limited sense is also a 'like subject' (Benjamin 1995). We may in this respect see traces of what Ken Corbett identifies as an internalised mother-son dialogue, which 'offers solace in the face of normative cruelty, and holds out the hope these boys need to imagine themselves otherwise' (2009: 114). Yet, the sons' sense of being different from her may have protected them from feeling overwhelmed by her services, as is more often the situation for the daughters. The sons of this generation identify as men, but since it is not clear what this implies or whether it is seen as something to strive for, this aspect of their gendered selves becomes less positive. The absent fathers also seem to give the masculine identities of their sons a defensive character: how do you defend yourself as a man if you do not know what it means to be one? For this reason it may be more vital for the men in the middle generation than for the men in the youngest generation to keep a watchful eye on the holding up of gender difference, something that complicates their efforts to incorporate and integrate the feminine qualities they value. The impression we get from some of the 'new' men in this generation is that they use their

openness towards the emotional field to develop and secure their own individual autonomy rather than to recognise women as like subjects. Those who combined a positive relationship with both parents direct their increased affinity for the emotional sphere into becoming hands-on fathers to their own children. Compared with the oldest generation, the appreciation and capacities for the relational field have increased for almost all men in the middle generation and, in combination with new societal possibilities to become more caring fathers, this was an important resource for changing the feelings of gender in the following generation.

The mothers of both the oldest and the youngest generations worked hard, the mothers of the oldest generation most often doing physical work and the mothers of youngest generation in full-time and mostly middle-class jobs. It is not that their sons did not see their mothers' hard work, but the older men tend to explain it as an irregularity, something that should have been otherwise.<sup>1</sup> As for the youngest generation, their mothers' work and careers appear as equally disengaging to them as their fathers' do. In both generations it is the *services* that the mother provides that become her main function in her son's eyes. Still, the partnership between children and parents in the youngest generation gives the mother a somewhat more equal standing and visibility when compared with the oldest generation: she is seen as a strict and responsible person rather than a kind victim, and the sons do not describe her skills only in terms of feminine qualities from which they separate themselves. The mothers embody both masculine and feminine traits and their sons may identify with both. In this way, the mother, even if she is also a somewhat muted figure in the youngest generation, is still recognised more as a 'like subject'.

---

<sup>1</sup> Chodorow (2012: 48) describes the psychological position of 'weeping for the mother', which she finds in female patients from classical patriarchal families where the daughter has an active professional and personal life that contrasts with the lives of the mother, who is trapped in a classical patriarchal marriage. It seems that such weeping for the mother may also be found among men from working-class families; however, it is then more connected to the mother's hard work than to her entrapment.

## Bodies and Sexuality in Adolescence

For most of the men we interviewed, body and sexuality emerge as very important components in their feeling of masculinity. Their engagement with bodily size and strength in comparison to other men is striking in all three generations (see also Corbett 2009). There is, however, also a change in the cultural and psychological meanings of this preoccupation. For the oldest generation, the strong male body is the working body and is thus a clear positive identification with their admired fathers, and maybe an attempt to fend off the Achilles complex as a grown and strong man. Other kinds of bodily preoccupations are felt as weak and feminine and not acceptable for a man. It is reasonable to think that there are some homophobic elements at play here, something we also heard from two of the older men (Knut and Arne), who unsolicited and with disgust connected men's bodily adornment with homosexuality.

For the middle generation, a strong body is related to physical fitness in sport rather than to work, but more importantly, their own bodies become more clearly connected to male sexuality: masculinity is not secured by work, but by having a penis that is the right size compared to those of other men. This emphasis on the sexual meaning of masculinity may be seen in connection with their more insecure masculine selves in the self–other relations: you do not prove your masculinity by becoming a strong and admirable man like your father, but by possessing a male body. The middle generation have to create masculinity all on their own during adolescence, and the loss of the possibility of becoming a man through the generational line amplifies gender polarity.

In the youngest generation penis size is also important, but other parts of the body may also add to the feeling of being a successful man: bodybuilding, skin, hair and clothing. To be preoccupied with looks is no longer seen as an exclusively feminine business. Still, there is a palpable risk of losing one's subject position and becoming the object through this preoccupation with one's own body. Bodybuilding is OK, but only within certain limits—and is best if it can be connected to the culturally safe male position of getting strong enough to protect or dominate others.



Sexuality in the oldest generation is felt as exclusively male, just as the preoccupation with the body is felt as female. The men in this generation tend to split sexuality and tenderness. Only men are seen as having sexual drives, and for some of them this leads to pretty rough seductive manners towards 'cheap girls'. For others, especially those with a sentimentalised relationship with their mothers, sexuality becomes associated with guilt because it may hurt and harm the kind and innocent woman. Women who initiate sexual contacts are dismissed as prostitutes or even monsters by both categories of men. Ideal femininity is a moral thing, connected to the inner qualities of a woman rather than to sexual appearances and activity.

In the middle generation the feelings of guilt and the protection of innocent and vulnerable women have disappeared. This does not necessarily mean that all the men of this generation behave as sexually unrestricted and irresponsible people, but some do, and now not only towards 'cheap girls'. Seen from the perspective of the men, all girls may be more or less sexually accessible and it is up to the men to test out the limits. Since masculinity is now almost only based on sexuality, this also forms their image of the attractive woman: she should look good and be sexy. She is not the prostitute of their fathers' generation, but neither is she a relative of their own kind and caring mothers. Yet, their identification with their mothers as 'like subjects' may still have made them more perceptive to the increased subject status of women in their own generation. In combination with the more liberal sexual norms in the 1960s and 1970s, this may also have conveyed an understanding of women as more active and responsible for their own acts, and thus have contributed to allaying the feelings of guilt for male sexuality that we saw in the older generation. But since masculinity is so strongly connected to sexuality, it is important to be in charge. Sexually forward or aggressive women are still felt as wrong, but now maybe more threatening to their fragile masculinities than morally condemned.

The gendering of sexual initiative is much less prominent in the youngest generation. The men in the youngest generation tend to like women who are active and who initiate encounters, but not to the extent that it makes them feel treated like objects. They prefer sexuality as part of an intimate relationship, but also experience it as two different dimensions

of the sexual act. They do not see homosexual relationships as either condemnable or, in some cases, as necessarily unthinkable for themselves. Yet, all the young men in our sample say and they personally prefer heterosexual relationships and connect this preference to an appreciation of bodily difference: when it comes to love and sex, they want women to be attractive *as* women. However, this sexual role is only a part of their feelings about femininity: they want women who are strong, clever and independent—and sexually attractive.

### Changing Patterns in Gender Identities and Gendered Subjectivities in the Men

We see changes both in the men's gender identities and gendered subjectivities, and different kinds of tensions between and within them. For the oldest and the youngest generations, gender identities are felt as secure in the sense that the question of what it means to be a man is not problematised. This is less clear in the middle generation. However, the *content* of the gender identities and their interchange with gendered subjectivities are very different in the oldest and the youngest generations. For the old men, almost everything is implicitly gendered—work, strength, money, food, care, behaviour, body and sexuality—so much so, in fact, that it is difficult for them to *see* gender at all. This single-gendered identity fits well with the single-gendered subjectivity that makes them thrive in the men's world and attracted to the culturally defined masculine activities in a gender-complementary order. The price for this single-gendered identity is that they have to split off culturally defined feminine qualities in themselves and project them onto the women. The main axis of conflict in men in this generation is found *within* their gendered subjectivity, not between gender identity and gendered subjectivity, and not in relation to the sociocultural context either.

In the middle generation, the content of masculine identity becomes both narrowed down to include mainly sports and sexuality, and widened by incorporating some feminine qualities through the men's stronger identification with their mothers. The insecurity of what it means to be a man leads to a troublesome double identification where they keep cir-

cling around the question of whether their valuation of care and intimacy makes them feminine. There is a tension between sameness and difference within their gender identity, but also a tension between gender identity and their less updated gendered subjectivity: they were the receivers of their mothers' service as boys and did not learn to be in the caring position themselves. Thus, as adult men they struggle with pursuing the feminine values they embrace and their emotional need for establishing a gender difference, which is no longer guaranteed by a complimentary gender order. However, the sociocultural demand for a new father-role represents a chance to integrate and maybe gradually degender some of their own 'female' identifications. This may also open up for more multi-gendered subjectivities.

Like their grandfathers, the youngest generation do not feel it as problematic to be men, and they relate positively to culturally defined masculine aspects of their fathers like playfulness, courage and knowledge. In contrast to their grandfathers, however, they do not negate their attachments to their mothers and culturally defined feminine qualities like intimacy, care and preoccupation with looks and appearances are not seen as a threat to this subjective sense of maleness. They tend to degender many of these qualities and instead emphasise their own unique way to combine them. This echoes Lynne Layton's claim (with reference to Jane Flax) that 'some kind of core identity seem to be a necessary prerequisite for the capacity to play freely with alternating identities', while simultaneously indicating the historical conditions for this claim (Layton 1998: 185). Like the middle generation, the young men also emphasise gender difference, but now primarily in relation to their personal experience of sexual attraction. In other areas, gender difference is perceived as less important. Their experience of care as not an exclusively feminine activity, but also as a quality of their fathers seems to have established more multi-gendered subjectivities that allow them to enjoy a broader range of activities across the gender divide. For this generation, the tension is to a lesser degree present within or between gender identity and gendered subjectivity. However, new tensions may arise in connection with the sociocultural context, for instance, conditions on the labour market that make it increasingly difficult to combine work and care, even they feel it is a natural thing for them to do.

## The Changing Psychological World of the Women

### Mothers and Daughters

The relationships between mothers and daughters are almost never characterised with the same pride or enthusiasm we have seen between fathers and sons in the oldest and the youngest generations. The mother–daughter relationship seems to be experienced as most emotional when it is conflictual, whereas it is taken more for granted when the relationship is positive. The changes across the three generations in the relationships between mothers and daughters indicate a move away from relationships being generally positive and admiring to being quite conflicted in the middle generation. In the youngest generation, we see a pattern of friendly and respectful relationships, where the daughter sees her mother as smart and proficient, and to a large extent as a model for her own life when it comes to combining work and family.

As with the changes in the father–son relationship, it is easy to see the connection to the changing family forms. In the eldest generation the mother's proficiency occupies an important place in the household economy, and this allows for the daughter's positive identification if the mother is not too strict or perfectionist. Yet, especially in the rural and working-class families, the mother also represents the ordinary everyday life; she is frugal and sensible, not a figure of admiration and wonder like the father. The ambivalence in the identification with the mother also reflects the gender hierarchy of the family: the mother may be capable and strict, but still comes in second in terms of authority to the father. This lends both positive and negative dimensions to the daughters' identification with her (see also Bengtsson 2001; von der Lippe 1988, who find that the power relation between the parents is important for girls' identification with their mothers). The ambivalence in their maternal identifications is seen in a frequent split in their relationships with other people: nice aunts are admired more than mothers, and selfish sisters allow for a more direct critique and a projection of their negative identification. The tendency towards bitterness in the old women and their

characteristic wavering between uttering critical hints and quickly taking those hints back may connect to their ambivalent identifications, in addition to being demanded by a strong cultural norm that prohibits talking badly about other people.

In the middle generation the daughters find themselves restricted by a mother whose main job is to take care of them, and the ways in which the women talk about this indicate unclear borders between themselves and their mothers. They feel monitored by the mother's omnipresence and sucked into her problems and frustrations in a way that the sons of this generation do not. The weak mother becomes the suffocating mother and the daughters are more psychologically vulnerable to this because they cannot use gender as a criterion for separation. Even when their mothers encourage them to follow higher education or not to marry too early and become financially dependent on a man, the mothers are seen as intrusive. As Lynne Layton notes in connection with patients with housewife mothers, the message 'don't be like me' is rarely a successful injunction (Layton 2004: 36). The many stories about brothers in this generation who were granted privileges may of course be a projection of the daughters' anger towards their mothers; however, from the sons' description of the attendance they received from their kind mothers, it may also very well have been a fact of the intersubjective world, leaving a narcissistic wound in the daughters of this generation (Layton 1998: 56), as well as a greater sensitivity towards injustice. The ambivalence towards the mother that we saw in the oldest generation has grown stronger in the middle generation. The daughters here do not even see the mother's work as important anymore, but as something that reduces her to a servant of the family. This seems to have tipped the balance towards a more negative identification that has been very difficult for the daughters to handle and also for the mothers to hold. The women who are the angriest with their mothers suffer from feelings of guilt because they can also see that the mother's situation was difficult and because of the unclear borders between them. Yet it is only when their fathers are unusually authoritarian or violent that the daughters side with their mothers and we see the pattern that Chodorow (2012) calls 'weeping for the mother' (see note 1). If becoming a woman means giving up one's own agency, it is a repulsive process, but there are few other alternatives to becoming a woman and a

subject in this generation. The 'policy for the daughters' of the emerging welfare state that encouraged girls to do well in the educational system (see Chap. 4) amplified this psychological tension. Since many of the women in our sample did pursue higher education, we see some of the same relational trouble connected to class journeys between daughters and mothers as between sons and fathers—only that it becomes much more emotional for the daughters, and also implies a stronger identification with their fathers than the sons have with their mothers. Thus, the psychological consequences of the class journey often imply a cross-gendered identification for women that is not the case for men. This may be the reason for the much stronger 'degendering' of personal qualities among women than among men in this generation. Femininity is disparaged and projected onto their mothers. But crediting men with all the good things and women with all the bad things leaves them with a negative identification with their shameful mothers, something that again will lead to problems with self-esteem (Chodorow 1999: 83).

In the youngest generation the mother's agency and subjectivity make her a more suitable object of positive identification. The mother emerges as an independent subject because she has other things to do than merely taking care of the daughter and has a position in the world that may even induce pride in the daughter, almost like between fathers and sons—but never quite. The mother represents the bigger world to her daughter in this generation, and gender does not seem to play an important role in this. Too much focus on gender, like ideas of sister-solidarity and female networks, seems to threaten a sense of subjectivity and individuality among the daughters, but their relationships with their mothers do not. Identification with the mothers' qualities is much less gendered for the daughters than identification with the fathers' qualities was for the sons of this generation. This predominantly positive and gender-neutralised identification with the mother has an everyday and sensible character and appears to be based on basically safe attachments. The borders between mothers and daughters may also have become clearer due to the more equal relationship between parents and children where aggression from part of the child has lost its taboo. However, the psychological balance between autonomy and closeness will vary in different families and this explains why there is no direct connection between a mother's work outside the family and a daughter's development of psychological

autonomy (see von der Lippe 1988). If the mother becomes *too* absorbed in her own world, she is experienced as neglectful by the daughter and this may cause a narcissistic wound of not feeling seen or loved, which in turn may inhibit the feeling of autonomy. Conversely, as we also saw in the case of the sons, the mother's care may also be something that is taken for granted, a 'mother blanket', that goes unnoticed or rather noticed only when it is absent. Even though they are a minority, there are more women than men in this generation who report conflictual relations with their parents and in particular their mothers, and this may indicate that the borders between mothers and daughters are still more potentially vulnerable than the borders between mothers and sons.

## Fathers and Daughters

The relationship with the father is idealised among most of the women in all three generations and combines tenderness for the father and, in cases where it is possible, also admiration for his knowledge or position. This tenderness and admiration is strongest in the oldest and the youngest generations. The most pronounced element of idealisation is seen in the oldest generation of working-class and farmer daughters, where the father represents something that the daughters themselves cannot become, but in which they may take vicariously part through him. Belonging to the sphere of the mother's jurisdiction may also help keep the father as a good object in this generation. The father represents money, generosity, relaxedness and connection to a bigger world. But, at the same time, he may also be seen as vulnerable and in need of the daughter's help and support. As Lucey et al. (2016) argue in a paper on working-class fathers and daughters, daughters may unconsciously identify with the fathers' provider role and try to take some burdens off their shoulders. For the middle-class girls in this generation the father is a more distant figure, but is still often surrounded by the excitement of being the stranger in the family.

In the middle generation the psychologically complicated relationship with the mother gives the father a stronger psychological position as liberator for the daughter, representing a calm space outside of what is

perceived as the mother's control and chaos. The psychological need for the father combined with his relative distance from the family may be the reason that the relationship with him in this generation does not have the same warmth as in the older and the younger generations. He is remembered as calm, rational and often strict, sometimes as someone who also suffered from the mother's regime and moodiness, but not as exciting as in the older generation. He seems to be needed more as an object of identification than as an object of love, and he is not remembered as someone who confirmed their sense of femininity. It is rather as 'a boy in the making' that they can hope to get his attention. This may lead to a narcissistic humiliation in the daughter where she feels her femininity as absent or devalued (see also Harris 2008). The only woman in this generation who says she felt pretty as a young girl is also the only one who remembers that her father gave her compliments on her looks. The general cultural tension between the generations in the 1960s probably also contributed to less idealisation of the father. He is the best there is in the family to identify with for the girl, but this does not mean that he is an ideal.

In the youngest generation, the tenderness towards the father is back. Fathers are seen as emotional and sweet, or more fun and playful than the sensible and serious mothers. Maybe their fathers, the men of the middle generation who wanted to become more emotionally present fathers, actually succeeded better in this in the eyes of their loving daughters than in the eyes of their tired wives? The identificatory love for the father is obvious and may, in combination with secure attachments to mothers and a culture that encourages female agency and desire, have helped the daughters to become psychological 'subjects of desire' (Benjamin 1995). However, for the middle-class girls this position is not as gendered as for the working-class girls, for whom the father more often confirms their sense of femininity. With more secure borders to the mother, the father is less needed as a liberator or a sign of separation. The father's role as the one who represents the bigger world to the daughters has become less prominent since the mother can also fill that role now, and even more so in cases where the mother has more education than the father. Girls with academic fathers admire and identify proudly with their fathers' competence, and degender these qualities in themselves (much as the middle generation did), whereas girls whose fathers have less education defend



them. Also here we are reminded of Lucey et al.'s (2016) analysis that daughters of working-class fathers often sense the father's vulnerability and feel guilt or even turn away from taking higher education in order both to stay close to him and not to surpass him as their mothers might have done. This compassion with fragile masculinity was also seen in the oldest generation, whereas the middle generation of women were in need of constructing their fathers as strong. Could it be that the identificatory love for the father gives a different dynamic in women's and men's craving for gender difference? Whereas men want to preserve gender difference because it is important to their own sense of masculinity, women want to protect the men's feeling of masculinity because they sense their fragility. However, the longitudinal data with the youngest generation also indicates that the protection of the father has more realistic proportions as the daughters become adult women and see him more clearly as the person he is, not as a fantasised object, whether idealised or sentimentalised.

## **Bodies and Sexuality in Adolescence**

The feelings connected to the reproductive body are a same-sex generational thing for the women in all three generations. The way in which they deal with this reveals something about how they relate to their mothers. Because we did not interview them about their pregnancies and motherhood, it is mainly their reaction to menstruation that we have information about. In the oldest generation it is seen as a female curse, something mothers and daughters are equally subjected to. But since it is not talked about, this does not lead to any closeness between mothers and daughters—it is the silent and unwelcome sign of womanhood. In the middle generation the menstruating female body is also felt as a negative thing, but is taken more as a fact of life and even something that may contribute to some intimacy between girls. This may be surprising when seen in connection with the negative relationships to their mothers; however, it may also tell us about the basic care that these devalued mothers actually provided for their daughters, in addition to the decreasing taboo that came with more information about sexual reproduction. It is actually the youngest generation that reacts the most strongly against menstruation,

which is also the case where they have feminist mothers who celebrate their menarche. In this generation, where the relationship between mothers and daughters is more about strengthening individuality rather than gender, the reproductive aspects of bodies seem to represent a hidden and uncontrollable femaleness that comes from nowhere (see also Chodorow 2012: 151). It also connects to the increased significance of the body as identity in this generation, where the main challenge is to stay in control of it. This gives the body an ambiguous meaning with regard to gender in this generation of women. The adornment of the body represents a more positive feminine identification for the young women in all generations, but this is never connected to identification with the mother—quite the opposite. For the oldest generation it is a pure joy to do with a luxury that serves as a contrast to the frugal work ethic of their mothers. For the middle generation the adornment becomes more desperate because it is often based on low self-esteem as woman, and put in the service of heterosexual relations. A good enough body is in this generation a body that is good enough in the eyes of others. For the youngest generation the pleasure of dressing up in feminine ways is back for many of the girls, but often also with a pressure for perfection that may destroy the joy. Ambivalence towards cultural femininity is seen in their relationships with their bodies, which are felt equally as a source of pleasure, an endless demand and, if overdone, a threat to their own sense of subjectivity.

The perception and norms of sexuality represent the biggest change when we compare the three generations of women. In the oldest generation sexuality is hardly mentioned—it is projected onto the men, but the women's ownership of it is indirectly revealed in their attraction to the wild boys and the good dancers who they also understand are dangerous and not boyfriend material. The fear of pregnancy before commitment to marriage is an effective barrier to the enjoyment of sex for many in this generation. In the middle generation sexuality is still seen mainly as a male drive, but as boys gain importance as liberators from parents, the girls also engage in sexualising their own bodies to attract the boys. The loss of generational identification leaves the daughters as well as the sons in a void with regard to what it means to become a man or a woman when they come of age. Whereas the sons could identify masculinity with sexuality, the daughters take a vicarious path and try to become the special

choice of a man. As Simone de Beauvoir wrote in *The Second Sex* (1949), the boy can place exhibitionism and narcissism in his penis and save the rest of his body for other uses, whereas the girl must present her whole body as an object to attain the same narcissistic satisfaction. Sexuality, however, is not only a way to assure femininity, but is also a way to assure autonomy from the parents. In this way sexuality also attains a mark of instrumentality.

In the youngest generation sexual desire has lost much of its gendered meaning, but the fear of being stigmatised for being too active has not disappeared. At 18, the middle-class girls tend to experience heterosexual love as more dangerous than sex, since an emotional commitment can make them vulnerable to dependency and asymmetric gender relations. The problem the young women struggle with is to combine love and sexuality with being an autonomous subject. The fear of being a 'fallen subject' by letting oneself be pressured into sex seems to be bigger than the prospect of being a 'fallen woman'. Class dimensions are activated here, as middle-class girls tend to project their own fear of falling as subjects onto working-class girls, whereas the working-class girls try to defend themselves against this by growing out of irresponsible sexual behaviour at an early age. In addition, the dimension of physical desire is not so clear and this raises the question of whether explicit sexual desire is still seen as a male affair, in spite of increasing gendered and individualised norms and practices.

## **Changing Patterns in Gender Identities and Gendered Subjectivities in the Women**

The gender identity of the oldest generation of women seems to be more complex than that of the men of the same generation. The women identify with both their mothers and their fathers—the mother's competence in the household and the father's knowledge, generosity and connection to a bigger world—but the sociocultural situation does not leave any space for the development of their paternal identifications. This identification is, however, not split off and disowned; it gives them a sense of inequality in their lives and a longing for something else. Their gendered

subjectivity appears to be more traditionally feminine in being adaptive to other's needs and not strong on autonomy. In spite of their longing for a bigger world, many of them retreat from using the few possibilities they actually had to pursue it. In this way their gendered subjectivity fits well with the complimentary gender order, but there are tensions in their gender identity, which are connected to their experience of inequality. The main axis of tension in the women of this generation is found between their double gender identity, their single-gendered subjectivity and their restricted sociocultural possibilities.

The middle generation disowns traditional femininity and identify with culturally defined masculine values in terms of rationality, independence, education and work, but embraces these as degendered qualities. At the same time, their increasing individual exposure in the public sphere as young women combined with their disidentification with their mothers add to their low self-esteem as women. This is seen both with regard to their bodies, the desperate need to be popular with boys and the paradoxical willingness as young women to prioritise the heterosexual relationship in pursuing the independence they want. The problem for this generation is their still quite traditional single-gendered subjectivity: they seek autonomy in the heterosexual relationships and they are dependent on being validated in intimate relations. The tension in this generation of women arises between their partly degendered gender identity and their still quite traditional gender subjectivity. The sociocultural situation gave increasingly support to their degendered identity and this led gradually to more autonomy and a late arrival of a more multi-gendered subjectivity as adults and as new feminists—often with divorce as the price.

In the youngest generation we see the same kind of secure gender identity in both men and women: to be a woman is not problematised, except for when it means unequal treatment. They identify with their mothers' feminine and masculine sides, and also to some degree with their fathers'. At 18 some of them felt femininity as a threat to their sense of subjectivity, but this is less prominent at 30 and 40, where they seem to find joy in being competent at work, having a family and playing with sexual difference as a sensual and aesthetic dimension. The problem may be that this gender identity is so wide that it sometimes wears them out. Their subjectivity is increasingly multi-gendered, but autonomy must still be guarded

with more attention than we see among the men, who take their own individuality and uniqueness for granted. Layton (2004) writes about a tendency among young white high-achieving middle-class women in the USA to move away from a traditional relationship-based femininity towards a defensive autonomy where committing to relationships is seen as dangerous, or where love and work are unintegrated tracks in their lives. In our sample this reaction is visible when the young women are 18, but as adults, love and work appear to have become more integrated for most of them. Layton explains the defensive autonomy she sees in her clinical practice as an adaption to a work environment that is still strongly male. So it might be the possibility to combine a career with family in the Nordic welfare states that gives another basis for integration, in combination with the degendered maternal identifications of this generation of young women. However, the frequency of burnouts they talk about in the interviews at 30 may indicate that not all tensions are gone. The main tension in this generation of women is not between gender identity and gendered subjectivity, but what it is socioculturally possible to pursue.

## **Evolving Psychoanalytic Theories of Gender and Heterosexuality**

How do these marked generational changes in gender identities and gendered subjectivities fit into the evolving psychoanalytic theories of gender and heterosexuality? In this section I will return to the question I posed in Chap. 2 about the temporal dimension of psychological theories. Three influential psychoanalytic theories of gender and heterosexual development were formulated in the periods of childhood and youth of each of the three generations of my study: the Oedipal model of Freud, the gender identity model based on Margareth Mahler's theory of separation and individuation, and the gender ambiguity model based on more recent feminist relational and postmodern theory. I will give a short presentation of each of these and will then bring in the psychological positions of the three generations.

## The Oedipal Model: Love or Identification

The Oedipal model was finalised in the 1920s. For Freud, psychological gender differences are not present until the Oedipal crisis, where the discovery of the anatomical differences between the sexes, in combination with an increased genital libido, makes the child direct a more erotic interest towards the parents. The boy's fear of castration pushes him to give up his erotic desire for his mother and identify with his father instead, whereas the girl, discovering that she has already been 'castrated', will blame her mother and redirect her love to her father and transform her wish for a penis into a wish for having a baby by the father. Thus, gender is created psychologically by splitting identification (wanting to be like) and desire (wanting to have) (Freud 1925; Lucey et al. 2016). In the heterosexual family this is a truly gendered drama where the child at first directs love and identification at both parents (the negative and positive Oedipus complex), but in most cases ends up with accepting biological and cultural gender complementarity where one can have feelings of love for those of the opposite gender, and feelings of identification those of the same gender (Freud 1925). The Oedipal complex creates both gender and generational polarities and installs a relatively fixed gendered personality structure in the child. The boy sublimates his erotic feelings into a sentimentalised image of his kind but weak mother, thereby splitting sexuality and feelings of tenderness in himself, and directs his energy towards the men's world, where questions of size, strength and success become immensely important. The girl, after she has 'become aware of the wound to her narcissism, she develops, like a scar, a sense of inferiority ... she begins to share the contempt felt by men for a sex which is the lesser in so important a respect' (Freud 1925: 253–254). The girl reacts with negative or ambivalent feelings towards her mother who refused to give her a penis and turned down her erotic love, and also often reacts with jealousy towards other children of whom she feels the mother is fonder. She finds comfort in idealising her father, and this idealisation is a substitute both for her forbidden erotic feelings and for what she was herself denied to be. In order to keep the father as a good object, she must also restrict her own activity within areas that belong to men

or pursue it with feelings of guilt. Thus, 'normal femininity', according to Freud, becomes characterised by passivity, narcissism and masochism. In this way women's agency is displaced and becomes part of their eroticised relation to men (Dimen 2002: 50). Dimen describes this as a split in terms of how desire is culturally constituted: whereas men's desire is constituted as an active and adult wish ('I want'), women's desire is constituted as a passive need ('I want to be wanted'), or she is seen as being without desire at all, just as clingy and needy as an infant. In this way the fact that both wish and need are part of the longing for desire for both women and men is concealed.

### **The Gender Identity Model: Autonomy versus Intimacy**

The second model challenges the Freudian idea that psychological gender differences are non-existent before the Oedipal phase and offers another interpretation of the Oedipal drama. A central reference here is Nancy Chodorow's book *The Reproduction of Mothering*, which came out in 1978 and where she argues that differences in masculine and feminine personalities are better explained by early object-relations than by the Oedipus complex.<sup>2</sup> What is achieved in the Oedipus complex must be seen as building on what happened in the pre-Oedipal period, not least during the process that Margareth Mahler has named 'separation-individuation', which starts in the second year of life. This process coincides with the age when the child learns its nominal gender and thus early gendered representations of the body and the self become intertwined with psychological tensions between freedom and safety, autonomy and intimacy. The argument has two elements. The first is that if the mother is the primary object, the separation is more ambivalent for the girl because

---

<sup>2</sup> Dinnerstein (1976) and Benjamin (1988) are, in somewhat different versions, other examples of the second model. Nancy Chodorow's and Jessica Benjamin's views on gender and development have many parallel features. In the 1990s they both abandoned the idea of two separate lines of development and put more emphasis on gender as a personal construction (see Benjamin 1995; Chodorow 1994, 1999, 2012). When I use Chodorow's (1978) book as an example of the second model and Benjamin's (1995) book as an example of the third model, it is only these specific books I have in mind, not what the authors' views were earlier or later.

she and her mother are of the same gender, and is more abrupt for the boy as he is of a different gender. Femininity will be constructed in the generational dimension: the girl is little, the mother is big, but they are of the same kind. This gives the girl's gender identity a safe ground, and her subjectivity becomes more clearly relational in its character and with good capabilities for intimacy and empathy. However, the development of autonomy and establishing psychological borders between herself and others may become restrained. For the boy, on the other hand, separation takes place in the dimension of gender, which implies a more dramatic relational cut-off from his primary identificatory object. This may give him a better capacity for autonomy, but constrains his relational capacity. Chodorow summarises the gender identity development in a way that emphasises the advantages for the girl and the problems for the boy: 'growing girls come to define and experience themselves as continuous with others; their experience of self contains more flexibility or permeable ego boundaries. Boys come to define themselves as more separate and distinct, with greater sense of rigid ego boundaries and differentiation. The basic feminine sense of self is connected to the world, the basic masculine sense of self is separate' (Chodorow 1978: 169).

The other element of the gender identity model is the sociological framing of the separation-individuation process in the post-Second World War family arrangement (white, middle-class) family, where the mother is the primary carer for the child and the father is a more distant figure. For the boy, the establishing of a masculine identity becomes more precarious when he does not have a model at hand to show him what masculinity implies. He does not know exactly what a man is; he only knows that a man is *not* a woman. Thus, masculine identity becomes abstract and negatively defined, and based on a repudiation of femininity. He will fear and denigrate everything connected with the feminine—closeness, weakness, care—and deny its existence in himself. Care may be received as long as it takes the form of service and does not turn him into a baby. For the girl the problem is rather that the closeness she has with her mother also makes her vulnerable to the mother's psychological conflicts, which again stem from the mother's own restricted agency. This means that the already ambivalent relation between mothers and daughters—where the girl both wants to stay close and have freedom—



may become more strained and conflict-ridden. In this setting, for both boys and girls, the father comes to represent autonomy and freedom, a link to a bigger and exciting world. Thus, in relation to the psychological capacities for intimacy and autonomy, the two genders seem to start at opposite ends and this one-sidedness may build weak spots into their gender identities: for women intimacy may be grounded in anxiety of conflicts and low self-esteem, while for men autonomy may be a kind of omnipotence where his own dependency is disowned and projected onto unworthy “others”. In both cases, other persons are not recognised as subjects in their own right.

### **The Gender Ambiguity Model: Sameness and Difference**

The third model is Jessica Benjamin’s re-interpretation of the preceding two models in her book *Like Subjects—Love Objects*, which was published in 1995. She argues that psychoanalytic theory should decentre its theory of development by conceiving of development as continuously and ongoing reconfigurations of earlier positions. Benjamin questions both the idea of more or less fixed personalities (cf. the concept of identification instead of identity), as well as the androcentrism of Freud’s model and the gynocentrism of Chodorow’s 1978-model, which make either men or women the more privileged subjects in development. Benjamin’s main point is that the binary opposition between desire and identification—between difference and sameness—are not sustained in the developmental process. Especially in the early stage of separation–individuation she finds that the father of both girls and boys becomes an important object of identificatory love, which cannot be attributed solely to his role as a liberator from maternal power. The father (or some other significant person who is not the mother) represents the child’s first experience of ‘difference’ compared to the ‘sameness’ of the mother; he becomes ‘the knight in shining armour’, as Margareth Mahler describes him. However, the mother remains an important figure of identification, power and attachment for both boys and girls. She may also be the agent of separation when she enters increasingly differentiated interactions and mutual recognition

with the child, but the person outside this dyad has a unique role in the development of agency and desire: 'Identification with a second other as a "like subject" makes the child imaginatively able to represent the desire for the outside world ... the new feature associated with this phase, its legacy to adult erotic life, is identificatory love ... [and it] remains associated with certain aspects of idealisation and excitement throughout life' (Benjamin 1995: 57–58). For girls, the identificatory love with the father is an important psychological basis for becoming able to be a subject of desire and to gain a sense of autonomy over her own body and self. For boys, it may also have narcissistic and homoerotic overtones that confirm the achievement of masculinity. In this phase where love objects can be like subjects, the child does not need to choose between the mother and the father or follow conventional rules of gender differentiation. Benjamin suggests that children use crossover identifications to formulate important parts of their selves, as well as to elaborate fantasies about sexual relations; for instance, the father can be an object of homoerotic love for the girls (Benjamin 1995: 126, 129). This 'over-inclusive' phase of gender identification is refigured by the gender complementarity of the Oedipal phase, where identificatory love is split up into love and identification, and the fantasy of object love comes to compensate for the narcissistic loss of the identification with the opposite-sex parent and the love of the same-sex parent. Envy, feelings of loss and resentment may lead to both repudiation and idealisation of the other sex now (p. 66). However, this is not necessarily the final outcome of gender identity development. Benjamin adds the possibility of post-Oedipal complementarity that may integrate the Oedipal complementarity with the identificatory love from the pre-Oedipal phase. Whereas the Oedipal form of gender complementarity is a simple opposition based on splitting, the post-Oedipal form is instead constituted by sustaining the tension between sameness and difference in a way that can make the oscillation between them pleasurable instead of dangerous. Benjamin suggests that this becomes possible if the Oedipal gender split is transcended by a symbolisation that opens up for more mature reflections on gender. This symbolisation may be facilitated in a historical period of constant reconfigurations of gender (confer the point of Adkins 2004b discussed in; see also Chap. 1). The 'familiar' in the other can then be found by returning to the earlier phases where the child experienced identificatory

love with both parents and to the transitional space of play with different nominal gender positions. Here development includes the ability to return without losing the knowledge of difference (Benjamin 1995: 74–75). Post-Oedipal complementarity may in this way regain some of the multiplicity and mutuality denied by the Oedipal form, but that exist within the line of gender development. Thus, according to Benjamin, it is not necessary to search for subversions of the gender dichotomy outside of the gender system. A more flexible identificatory capacity may be part of the story and loosens up gender as a fixed form as it ‘reworks its forms, disrupting its binary logic by breaking down and recombining opposites rather than by discovering something wholly different, unrepresented or unrepresentable’. Thus, the meaning of gender may be changed from within, not by radically deconstructing the whole idea of difference.

## Generational Psychological Positions

According to Raymond Williams, any useful cultural analysis begins with identifying patterns and their relationships with other patterns, ‘which may sometimes reveal unexpected identities and correspondences in hitherto separately considered activities’ (Williams 2011: 67). When comparing the changing patterns of feeling of gender in the three generations of women and men with psychoanalytic theories of gender and heterosexual development in mind, an interesting and ‘unexpected correspondence’ between generations and theories emerges: the oldest generation seems to be best explained by the Freudian Oedipal model, with its emphasis on psychological gender complementarity in the patriarchal family and the importance of the split between feelings of identification and feelings of desire (Freud 1925). The middle generation has a better match with the gender identity model, where processes of individuation–separation in connection with asymmetric parenting lead to gender differences in the development of intimacy and autonomy (Chodorow 1978). The youngest generation fits best into the gender ambiguity model, which questions the idea of two traces of development and sees difference and sameness as a continuous tension in psychic life of gender as well as in

the modern family (Benjamin 1995).<sup>3</sup> The three psychological models were formulated during or in the aftermath of the childhoods of the three generations, and even if the fits are not seamless, the relatively better match between the models and the childhoods from the same period is notable.<sup>4</sup> This indicates that it is not only the theories that have changed as a result of critical work, but also the gendered psychologies they set out to describe. My claim is not that the Oedipal constellation was not present for the younger generations or that issues of separation–individuation were not relevant for the oldest. Not everyone in these generations fits into the same psychological models. As we have seen, there are important differences depending on social class, and definitely also on the many particular ways in which mothers and fathers transmit gender to their children. Therefore, there are always a variety of outcomes. But as has been consistently argued in this book, individual variation does not prevent social patterning across these variations. What emerges is an *affinity* between the generational patterns of gendered psychologies and the different theories of gender psychology. This suggests that the different psychological constellations and tensions described in these theories have had different impacts in different historical contexts. It also suggests that the reason these theories developed as they did was that they caught the contours of a changed generational pattern of the times in which they were formulated: new structures of feelings related to gender. Seen through a theoretical lens, the generational feelings of gender could be described as follows.

---

<sup>3</sup> As I was finishing this book, I came across a new article by Nancy Chodorow (2015), where she also argues for the existence of generational narratives in psychoanalytic feminist thinking about masculinity. She describes them in connection with second-wave feminism as pre-second-wave, and second-wave and post-second-wave theories, and names their masculinity models according to the classical narratives of ‘Oedipus’, ‘Glory of Hera’ and ‘Wrath of Achilles’. The point I am making in this chapter is that these shifts in theories not only reflect the theoretical and political thinking of academic generations, but also indicate that processes of gender socialisation empirically may have changed in these generations of women and men.

<sup>4</sup> A further point could be that the theories also come from different places: Freud’s from Central Europe; Chodorow’s and Benjamin’s from the USA. The elements of misfit seen between the Norwegian generations in my sample and the theories might be related to this. However, psychoanalytic theory has always also been part of a cross-national community, which complicates the question of origin.

As boys, the men in the oldest generation came to identify with their fathers and direct their love towards their mothers. Masculinity is constructed outside shared recognition with their mothers (Corbett 2009). The phallic idealisation, as well as the fear of humiliation we see among them, carries traces of both the pre-Oedipal and the Oedipal father, but the organisation of male sexuality as a 'want' appears to be more clearly Oedipal (Freud 1925). The split between sexuality and tenderness may be seen both in the sentimentalised image of the mother, the asexualised figures of the women they marry, the denial of their own dependency and weakness, and maybe also a fear of homosexuality. The women in this generation project sexual drives onto men and idealise their fathers as the good object. This idealisation carries traces both of identificatory love and forbidden erotic desire, yet it does not give them access to the position of becoming a subject of desire. Their own sexuality is only indirectly visible and some of them directly disown it—it is only among some of the middle-class women that we may see some traces of the 'want to be wanted' (Dimen 2002). The ambivalence towards their mother may have an Oedipal imprint, the deception of having to return to her world. To be too active (like the egoistic sisters) outside the female sphere appears to be both forbidden and guilt-ridden. The problems inherent in this 'normal femininity' of the Oedipal model, the scar it leaves on self-esteem and the masochistic acceptance of not being allowed to be a subject of desire could explain the tendency towards bitterness that is never allowed to really disclose itself.

For the middle generation, gender complementarity has become less stable and psychological gender issues seem to circle questions of sameness and difference in relations and identities. The main problem for the men of the middle generation seems to be safeguarding an insecure masculinity, which makes them obsessed with gender difference. What fits less well compared with the gender identity model is that there are few traces of a father as a symbol of freedom and autonomy. Nor do the men in our sample separate themselves abruptly from their mothers at the intersubjective level, and there are also much less disidentification with femininity than the gender identity model suggests. However, in the intrapsychic world, femininity seems to be more threatening. This leaves this generation of men with a tension between an intersubjective embrace

of feminine values and an inner fear of them as being able to destroy an insecure masculinity. When it comes to sexuality, it has a more defensive character than of an Oedipal 'want'. Whereas the Oedipal organisation of male sexuality in its mature forms also includes a moral dimension of protecting women, the sexual organisation in the middle generation sometimes appears to be less mature because it lacks Oedipal integration. Instead of the protecting man and the innocent child-woman, we get a culture of boys hunting women as prey. If we turn to the women of this generation, the unclear borders and relational conflicts between mothers and daughters are conspicuous, but we do not see much of the mutual intimacy and closeness that is also an important point in the gender identity model. However, the traditional gendered subjectivity, more capable of intimacy than autonomy, the close relationships with female friends, the acceptance of the reproductive female body and the intensity in the conflicts with the mother may all reveal that the women still have deep emotional same-sex attachments. The father emerges clearly as the liberator of the daughter from the mother's control, but the emotionally more muted relationship between fathers and daughters, compared to the stronger idealisation in the older and the more warm relationship in the younger generation, reflects the model's claim that the relationship with the father never becomes as intense as the relation to the mother. Also, the mark of instrumentality in the heterosexual relation and in sexuality may indicate that the father (as well as male lovers) is a supplementary choice emotionally. The women in this generation seem to have far fewer problems in degendering the qualities they identify with in their fathers than the men have with the qualities they identify with in their mothers. An obvious explanation for this may be the cultural gender hierarchy; however, it might also be connected to a more secure basic gender identity that stems from the mother–daughter bond. The women interpret these new psychological qualities as a more modern way to be a woman, as different from their mother's way, but not as something masculine. They may feel more or less attractive as women when they are young girls, but they do not question whether they are women or not.

In the youngest generation the identificatory love, especially for the father, is evidently present in both women and men, without jeopardising their attachment to their mothers. The father is not important as a

liberator—this is a role that the mother now manages well—but he represents the exciting ‘difference’ compared to the more taken-for-granted ‘sameness’ of the mother, as Benjamin (1995) suggests in the model of gender ambiguity. For the men the identification is with the father’s positive masculine qualities, whereas the warm relationship described by the women may indicate that the father for them rather is important by giving a possible, but not always gained, access to the position of being ‘a subject of desire’ (Benjamin 1995). The mother tends to be more taken for granted, yet both sons and daughters also see her as an independent subject and identify with both her ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ qualities. Thus, we see contours of the more over-inclusive patterns where both mothers and fathers can be ‘love objects’ and ‘like subjects’. The cross-gender identifications are used to formulate important parts of the self-presentation as well as to elaborate on sexual relations (Benjamin 1995: 126; Corbett 2009: 213), which suggests the possibility of a male generational bond beyond defensiveness as a source of enjoyment of play, competition, excitement, desire and mutual recognition between men. This matches our youngest generation and may constitute the psychological background to opening up to homoerotic impulses: love and identification with parents of either sex are no longer so clearly separated. We do not see the same playfulness in the female generational bond, however. In the model of gender ambiguity, the post-Oedipal gender complementarity also preserves a certain emphasis on Oedipal difference, both in women and men of this generation, especially in connection with bodies and sexuality. In the youngest generation gender has become more multiple—‘different moments of the self’, as Dimen describes it (2002: 57). As we have already seen, this does not necessarily or magically remove traditional gender practices, yet these practices seem to be based less on a feeling of gender in the youngest generation compared to the two older generations. Maybe it is convenient that the woman do more of the housework and care for the children, but it is neither because housework is particular feminine nor because it is unmasculine.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> The different class composition of the generations in our sample may also be part of the picture. The two first models—which have been criticised for being reserved for middle-class/bourgeois families—seem in our case also to cover working-class and rural families, as long as they share the same family pattern of male provider and female carer. However, the more fluent and over-inclusive

There may be more tensions in the psychological position of gender ambiguity than are identified through this rather optimistic theoretical lens, and the intertwining of multi-gendered subjectivities and other societal structures has no definite outcome. It might lead in the direction of making inequalities appear as equalities, as Hanne Haavind (1984a, b) has argued (see Chap. 1), and might generate new frustrations in a generation that thought gender had lost significance in most areas of life. The point here is not to judge the different constellations of gender as more or less successful or recommendable, but to draw attention to how different generational feelings of gender express processes of social transformation. In contrast to either narratives of liberalism or theories that make a story of decay out of the move from a strong Oedipal character to the narcissist character of modern society (see Kohut 1977; Lasch 1979), my intention has rather been to stress the historical specificity of psychological tensions and potentialities in each generation as a dynamic formation that is shaped by the past and the present of one generation, and changed further in future generations. In this sense, the story has no beginning or end and will always be open to new ways of organising life and new feelings of gender.

## The Bedrocks of Gender?

In spite of the changing contours of gendered psychologies, there are also more sluggish elements that emerge when we compare the three generations. One is that *mothers are always taken more for granted than fathers*. Mothers seldom stand out as the idealised and exciting individuals like fathers often do. The relationship with mothers may often induce positive feelings of attachment and security, and mothers can embody both ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ qualities that their sons and daughters identify with—but this rarely produces the same enthusiasm, whether in the form of pride and admiration or in the form of warmth and tenderness, as it does with the fathers. Across the generations we have been looking at here, the father remains the knight in shining armour (Mahler

---

model of gender identities may have a strong connection to the middle class, where both the degendering of work and care, and the valuation of uniqueness and individualisation are indeed most prominent.



et al. 1975; Chodorow and Contratto 1992; Benjamin 1995), whereas relationships with the mother are characterised by more ambivalent feelings, especially for women. Another sluggish element is that *disidentifying with your same-sex parent seems to produce more psychological tension* in the form of insecure gender identity than disidentifying with the opposite-sex parent. It is not important whether the same-sex parent embodies the culturally prescribed gender norms or not. A good relationship can include both 'masculine' and 'feminine' qualities in the same-sex parent. A positive identification with the same-sex parent (which, of course, does not exclude a positive identification with the other parent too) means that gender identity is felt as basically secure or unproblematic regardless of what it consists of. This indicates that emotional identification with other people is not exactly the same as identification with cultural meaning. A third sluggish element across these three generations is that *the gender polarity appears to be more psychologically important to uphold for the men than for the women*. Women seem to get their feeling of gender more in the generational relation, even if the identification is negative. For the women, gender polarities are instead connected to problems of inequality (see Chodorow 1999: 28) or eroticised and used as an indirect way to gain agency and subjectivity.

I will have to leave this as observations. It may have to do with the structure of the heterosexual nuclear family, even in times where fathers have become more present and mothers more individualised. Adrienne Harris indicates that Benjamin's idea of the identificatory love of the father could be seen as a compromise between a feminist theory of gender-neutral parenting and a psychoanalytical model—and I would extend that to a cultural model—that counterpoises active and passive, reason and madness, regression and activity' (2008: 47). We may also here have reached one of the bedrocks of Western culture—the one Simone de Beauvoir (1949) analysed in the figure of 'woman as the second sex'. In spite of many and important changes in gender relations, the position of being a subject still sits better with deep-seated cultural images of masculinity than of femininity.

**Open Access** This chapter is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, duplication, adaptation, distribution, and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, a link is provided to the Creative Commons license, and any changes made are indicated.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in the credit line; if such material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and the respective action is not permitted by statutory regulation, users will need to obtain permission from the license holder to duplicate, adapt or reproduce the material.

