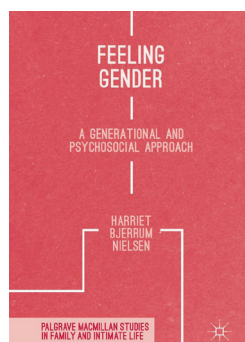


## BOOK REVIEW

***Feeling Gender: A Generational and Psychological Approach***

Author : Harriet Bjerrum Nielsen

Publisher: Palgrave Macmillan

Year of Publication: © 2017

ISBN: 978-1-349-95081-2

**Rudy**

Universitas Prima Indonesia, Medan

Email: rudolphlim@yahoo.com

As one of the phenomenal issues in the world, gender has always been an unfinished argument among experts, researchers, and academicians. With the growth of science and technology and the development of media in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there have been many changes in perceiving gender. Topic on gender which was not widely discussed in academic forum has become an important topic nowadays. Studies and researches on gender have been in great progress since 1990s when more and more experts such as Judith Butler, Donna Haraway, etc. began to publish their writing on gender and sexuality. People started learning more about this issue.

A common thing that people may understand is that there are biological and social factor which give a significant impact to gender categorizations (Fagot et al, 1997: 2). However, gender issues remain arguable topics from time to time. Era changes and one generation is replaced by another younger generations. From this condition, Harriet Bjerrum Nielsen, the professor at the Centre for Gender Research at the University of Oslo, Norway has shown her serious concern on how feelings of gender can change from one generation to another by observing the how men and women from some generations feel about their relationships toward their parents in order to reveal what gender really is to them. Therefore, this study incorporates a generational and psychological approach for analysis.

The book consists of ten chapters with several sub-chapters in it. This book review presents

brief overview of each chapter of the book. The first chapter is an introductory section showing what gender actually is and some terms – such as “gender identity” and “gendered subjectivity” need to be understood in talking about gender. Discussing about how people feel about gender, Nielsen starts describing about the connection between gender and time dimension which can reveal that generational transition has an impact toward how one perceives gender issues (Nielsen, 2017:2). For this reason, the existence of men and women from different generations can tell the difference of the feelings of gender. In general this chapter gives good introduction on gender and how it commonly works in human’s life. So, in general this chapter covers common and basic understanding about what and how gender and its changes is commonly described in society.

There are many approaches can be applied when analyzing a certain phenomenon. The gender issue discussed in this book involves the use of relevant approach. Therefore, the second chapter of this book elaborates the use of psychological and historical approach to identify the development of gender conceptualization among the respondents. This part also explores more specifically about feelings of gender. It also includes what feelings of gender actually mean and how they can be influenced by many kinds of conditions. The interaction between men and women reflect evidence that gender is constructed for socio-cultural purposes (Ridgeway, 2009: 145). Thus, gender has a strong connection to social

circumstances (Nielsen, 2017: 25). This chapter provides arguments to elaborate the purposes of the author conducted the research by making use of psychological approach to see different kinds of gender model development and the use of historical perspectives to understand current concept of gender in society.

The third chapter of the book presents the methods used by the author in obtaining primary data. By incorporating interviews (from 1991-2011) with men and women with different ages focusing about the childhood, youth, and the transition to adulthood, the author could identify the connection among the three generations – the old generation, the middle generation and the young generation. However, the scope was particularly in Norway which may also have some impacts on other parts of Europe. However, the author does not explain clearly the cultural background of the respondents chosen for the study. This part also talks about several approaches frequently used for this kind of study along with the plus and minus points. So, this study can also be perceived a comparative study since the author acquired the primary data through interviewing respondents from different generations to understand how they feel about gender.

The next chapter with the title “Changing Context” explores specifically where feelings of gender come from and how these feelings will alter due to various conditions, industrialization, modernization, urbanization, and so on. Though, in general, the goal of gender equality is not much related to men (Scambor and Scambor, 2008: 302), the presence of men has played an important role in shaping gender patterns. As a result, a lot of changes happened, particularly in women’s lives, such as marriage, education, work, and so on. Therefore, the author finds out how gender became primary concern in Norway. This part of the book also discusses how the perception of gender begins to change. The readers can get explanations on what kind of gender perception is actually perceived in mainstream culture and how the concept of gender may change in society.

People have been arguing how masculinity and femininity are related to gender. Conceptualizing gender is based many different kinds of perspectives, meaning, characteristics, and so on which are

also influence by social and cultural conditions from different periods and space (McDermott and Hatemi, 2011:90). In this fifth chapter under the title “Born around The First World War: Refining Gender Complementarity”, the author together with Monica Rudberg explore thoroughly about men’s role and women’s role in general from interviewing with the respondents from elder generations. Some significant discussions in this chapter, such as the difference between women and men in rural and urban areas; how daughters and sons shape their thoughts about outside world through their relationships with their parents in order to perceive the concepts of “masculine” and “feminine”; how daily work (men doing female work or vice versa) gives various types of feelings; and so on. The explanations from the respondents are useful for the author to conceptualize gender equality by comparing the conditions experienced by male and female responders from the three different generations.

Chapter six of this book entitled “Born around the Second World War: Struggling with Gender Equality” written with Monica Rudberg focuses on the reactions of the male and female respondents from the middle generations towards their parents. The author is interested in identifying how these respondents’ feelings of gender differ from those of the previous generation. This is indeed fascinating because it shows how the concept of gender changes in society. For instance, the author explains that women from the middle generation experienced closer relationships with their mothers since fathers were mostly busy outside (Nielsen, 2017: 139). This can somehow contribute to how they feel about the role of gender. The research conducted in this study also point out that women in the middle generation often underlined the significance of getting education and careers. Therefore, this may be considered as an essential stage of women’s movements. As a result, this would pave a way to understand how men and women perceive gender equality.

Together with Monica Rudberg, the author presents the seventh chapter “Born in the Welfare Society: Individualising Gender” with more specific conditions of male and female respondents in the young generations. The focus of this chapter is still on parents and children relationships. It is

commonly assumed that both men and women have their own perceptions about time in terms of work (Kumari, 2001: 3605). Regarding that, it is significant to know what impact may happen to children when parents spend more time working outside. This part reveals that parents' work conditions can bring about some changes to the children when they describe their feelings. Additionally, this condition may affect the perception of gender among children, for example, boys and girls doing house chores (Nielsen, 2017: 178). Thus, it is fascinating to figure out how men and women think about household work and how gender division can be impacted by work. Another interesting part to find out is that how gender is connected to female and male physical appearances in young generation. Apart from this, the study also identifies how younger generations tend to perceive homosexuality.

After interviewing female and male respondents from three different generations, the author used the data to explore how people perceive gender equality. Chapter eight reveals that the concept of gender equality is perceived differently from one generation to another generation. For this reason, the author talks about feelings of gender can change due to circumstances, education, work, partners and the model of life people choose (Nielsen, 2017: 236). This section also identifies what personal preference (choice) means to people from the three different generations in order to see how the perception of gender changes. Even if some beginning chapters discuss a little about homosexuality because there are respondents with homosexual experience, the homosexual issue is still limited in this book. It would be more complete if the author could also find out how gender equality works within homosexual couples in order to relate how homosexuality is connected to gender equality.

Chapter nine shows the identification toward men and women from three generations show changes in life and family pattern and psychological perspectives on gender. This part discusses about psychological changes and feelings of gender by incorporating the use of psychoanalytic theories. Additionally, readers who have interests in knowing how to use several patterns in understanding gender may be interested

in this part. In this chapter, the author discusses several models, for example, How Oedipal model of Freud may impact the child's feelings toward his/her parents? How gender identity model can bring about an impact to children's feelings of gender? And how gender ambiguity model explains gender identity? By comparing one pattern to other patterns – men and women from one generation to other generations, the author can show which model fits which generation.

The results of comparing one generation to other generations actually reveal that changes due to several things such as emotions, and gender, and social and political conditions experienced by men and women may have a strong connection to how people perceive gender equality. As the final part of this book, chapter ten covers conclusions of the findings. Even though the author does not clearly states what aspects that she compares from the men and women in the three generations, readers may still get the points of what is compared and how the comparison show the concept of gender equality in this study. However, this study will create opportunities for other researchers to continue observing how men and women from other continents or countries feel about gender.

#### REFERENCES:

- Fagot, B.I., Leinbach, M.D., Hort, B.E. et al. (1997). "Qualities Underlying the Definitions of Gender" in *Sex Role* 37 (1): 1-18.
- Kumari, B. R. (2001). "Work and Gender: A European Perspective" in *Economic and Political Weekly* 36 (38): 3603-3605.
- McDermott, R. and P. K. Hatemi (2011). "Distinguishing Sex and Gender" in *Political Science and Politics* 44(1 ): 89-92
- Nielsen, H.B. (2017). *Feeling Gender: A Generational and Psychological Approach*. London: Palgrave Macmillan
- Ridgeway, C. L. (2009). "Framed before We Know It: How Gender Shapes Social Relations" in *Gender and Society* 23 (2): 145-160.
- Scambor, C. and E. Scambor. (2008). "Men and Gender Mainstreaming: Prospects and Pitfalls of a European Strategy" in *Journal of Men's Studies* 16 (3): 301-315.