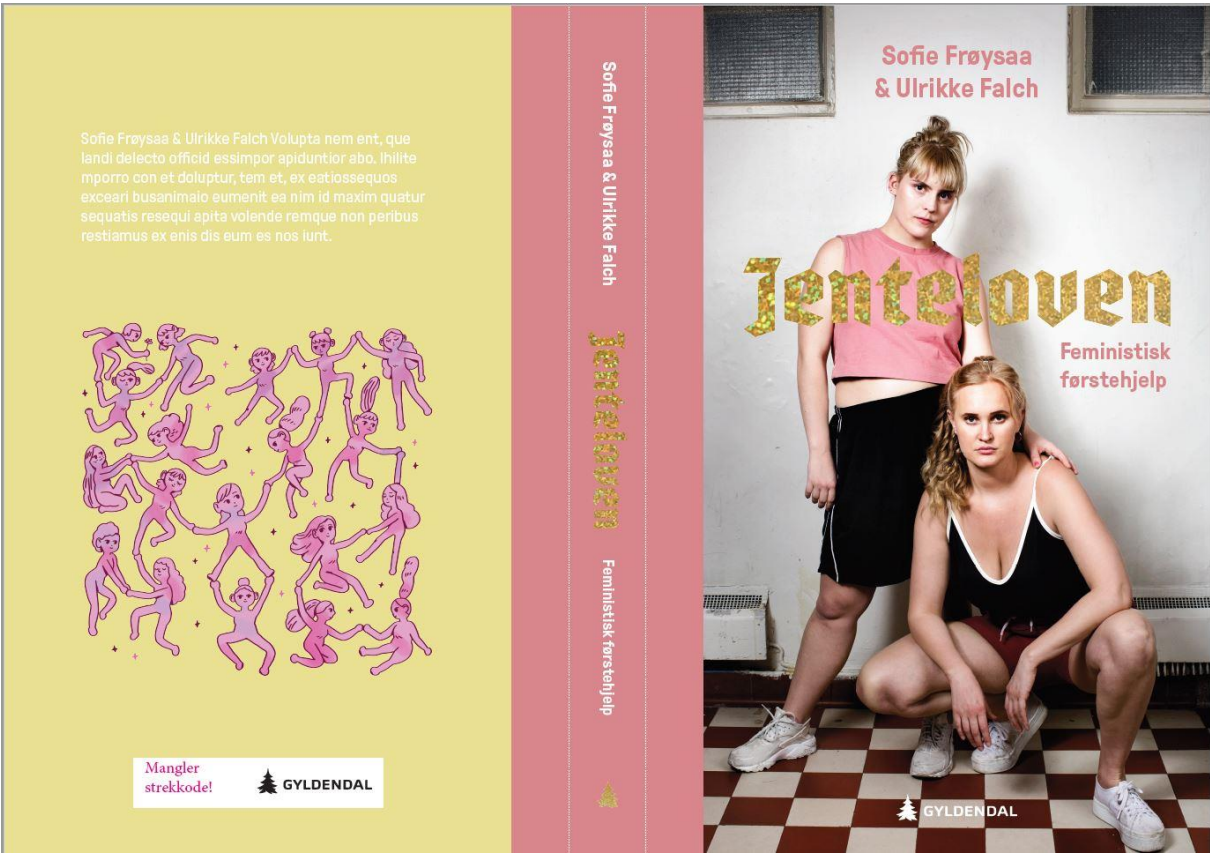


Sample translation

Girls Rule: A Feminist First Aid Guide

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Translated from the Norwegian by David M. Smith



#squadgoals

To you, the reader of this book:

Chances are you're a girl—and that's a fact worth celebrating! We wrote this book because we're girls too, and as girls, we salute you. But we also wrote it because we're sick and tired of all the rotten situations and discrimination we face simply because of our gender. We created this survival guide to give you support, advice, tips—or just to help you feel a little less alone if you find yourself in a shitty situation.

We know all too well how it feels to be treated differently just because we are girls. We've lost count of all the times people have taken the liberty of telling us how we should act as girls. As a teenager, Ulrikke heard constantly that she was too big, too strong, too much. Sofie was told that she was too proper, too thin, too cautious. Both of us ended up feeling like we weren't the way we were supposed to be, and we wished we could just become invisible. Instead, we became extra visible in each our own ways: Ulrikke got thinner and thinner as a result of a serious eating disorder. Sofie became more and more withdrawn and eventually bedridden due to depression.

It might seem like we're not the only ones who sometimes find it damn hard to be human, particularly if you're a girl. According to Ungdata (NOVA 2014), almost one in four Norwegian girls aged 15 to 16 suffers from symptoms of depression, and one in three says she is dissatisfied with herself. The use of antidepressants among young girls has risen by 85 percent since 2010 (Bergersen 2018). Simply put, we are unable to live up to the standards imposed on us.

Why are there such strict rules for how not only girls, but boys are supposed to act? (To say nothing of when you decide you don't belong in either category at all. That's when all hell breaks loose.) Why do gender roles create such strictures for how to behave? Think about this:

- Why is it that boys are allowed to raise hell and be physical—"You know how boys are"?
- Why is it that girls can cry in the hallway at school—"You know how girls are"—but if a boy cries, he's called gay, weak?
- Why is it that when a boy falls down on the soccer field at recess, he's told to "take it like a man," but if a girl falls, she's immediately asked if she's okay?
- Why are boys ridiculed if they don't act like "one of the boys"?

- Why is it considered positive to call someone a “tomboy,” but no one ever uses “girly man” as a compliment?

We know what it’s like to feel an extra burden on account of our gender. Ulrikke did all she could to gain boys’ attention, while Sofie did everything she could to *escape* their attention. However, both of us soon discovered that boys often thought themselves perfectly within their rights to interrupt us, comment upon our appearance or behavior, or violate our boundaries. And we know we’re not the only ones. A report from the Norwegian Ombudsman for Children (2018) shows that sexual harassment is on the rise among youths, due in part to a lack of information and guidance (Nordaas, 2018). Are we to tolerate sexism and harassment because “boys are just like that”? Get real. No one is just *like that*. This behavior is learned. And it is accepted. Sexual harassment, differential treatment: these aren’t things that just happen in the workplace once you get to a certain age (#metoo, anyone?).

Don’t get us wrong: we are privileged. By no means are we suggesting that we Westerners haven’t got it a lot better than many others around the world when it comes to gender equality. In Kuwait, for instance, women had to wait until 2005 to get the right to vote. Internationally, there is still a long way to go. But societal change never occurs by itself—it comes about because *we* draw attention to imbalances and injustice. What it means to be a girl in this world is changing—because *we* demand it. Equality is a never-ending project. It’s not like feminism has one specific goal and then we’re done. It’s not like we get to Level 100 and just say: *Well, that’s it. We beat the game.* And we must never forget the battles our foremothers fought. It is their efforts that have gotten us where we are today.

So regardless of whether you’re a girl or a boy or both or neither: If you’ve picked up this book, we welcome you to our squad for life. *Girls Rule* is about combating sexism and gender discrimination—not only to change the world, little by little, but also to help us tackle the demands and expectations we face on a daily basis.

We wrote this book because we could have used something like it when we were teenagers ourselves. It is based on our own experiences being a girl in Norway today: what it is like to be a girl at school, to have a girl’s body, to be a girl who wants to have sex—or doesn’t. We’ve been there, and we hope that our tactics, strategies, tips and tricks can help you feel a little less like you’re all on your own. Also, we’ve both written down our own stories about times when we were at our absolute lowest points. So you can read our book in two different ways: read our stories first, or use it as a reference guide whenever tough situations arise.

We chose the title *Girls Rule* not only because girls do rule, but also because we have created our own set of rules, which you will find at the very end. And we intend to follow them the rest of our lives. The only way forward is to take our own situation into our own hands. We're a hell of a lot stronger if we stick together. We're creating a squad of battle-ready girls—and we intend to change the world together.

You in?

One not entirely atypical day in French class

Ulrikke at 15

We're watching a movie in my 9th grade French class today. I'm sitting next to Jens. I've known for a while he's interested in me. I'm not interested, but I like the attention. In elementary school I was the aggressive girl everyone was scared of, but once I got to middle school, I saw how boys started to notice my body. Jens is always saying I've got such nice hips, great ass. During the movie he starts stroking my leg. We've never kissed, but we talk a lot, and I think of him as a good friend. I'd like to keep it that way, but I have to sustain his attention somehow, give ever so little so he doesn't lose interest.

I'm wearing short shorts over nylons. His hands are nearing my crotch. Jens seems determined and starts to grope me. It hurts. I brush his hand away. He waits a second, then starts up again. This time, roughly. He tears my nylons. He keeps it up even though I'm trying to push his hand away the whole time. It's like my rejection just makes it all the more exciting for him. As if I'm secretly encouraging him. I'm not.

When class is over, I go to the bathroom to take off the torn nylons and throw them in the garbage. I'm ashamed. After all, I didn't say no. It's snowing, and I walk home from school in just my shorts.

Ulrikke today

This is of course not a serious instance of sexual harassment; both Jens and I were much too young to grasp the concept of active consent. Nevertheless, this was the first time I'd ever experienced shame over having let someone exploit me. I felt guilty over the fact that someone had used force on me. Why didn't he stop? Was I not clear enough? When all was said and done, was it my fault? For the first time, I understood that I had to remember my own boundaries and clearly speak up if someone crossed them.

Six people you're sure to come across at school— and our best tips for handling them

The guy who clearly believes that girls aren't as funny/smart as boys, but hides behind the role of "class clown". He's an expert at wriggling out of a tight spot, since his standard reply is always, "Oh come on, take it easy, that was just a joke."

Strategy

Option A

Answer humor with humor: "Hey, I think the 50's called, they want their opinions back. Oh wait, so you were only kidding? Bet you there's an old folks' home that'll book you as their resident 'comedian'".

Option B

Exposure: "Isn't it great to disassociate yourself by using humor as your defense mechanism? Isn't it wonderful, never standing for anything? Good luck with that."

The guy who's always mansplaining in class. You realize he's learned all his standard phrases from his dad at the dinner table. Often uses "That time of the month, eh?" as his best comeback if you challenge him.

Strategy

Option A

Respond with some metasplaining: "Did I ask you to come in with your mansplaining? Nope. Oh, so you don't know what mansplaining is? There's this thing called Google, ever hear of it?"

Option B

Exposure: "Get that from your dad? Good for your dad, having strong opinions and all, but just so you know: society's changed ever so slightly since he was a little boy."

The girl who ducks out when you need her because she wants to boys to like her. Example: the “class clown” makes a joke at your expense, and you know your girlfriend is also fed up with the act. But she laughs at his joke instead of sticking up for you.

Strategy

Option A

Show her you expect better from her. Ask: “Why do you say one thing but do something else? And why do you want him to like you so much when he’s the last person who deserves it? Why underestimate yourself?”

Option B

The empathy test: Ask whether she’d think it was okay if the shoe was on the other foot.

The boy or girl who stands aside when someone else is being bullied or mistreated because, they say, “Well, he/she never did anything wrong to me, so...”

Strategy

Option A

Show the person that you expect better from them. “I thought you were against that sort of behavior—or maybe you’ve had a change of heart?”

Option B

The empathy test: “Must be nice only thinking of yourself. Do you think you’re more important than (the person being bullied)?”

In the margin: Three reasons to tell people you expect better from them, to place that confidence in them:

- 1) You show them that you don’t underestimate them.
- 2) It takes a lot for someone to show themselves unworthy of your confidence. They’d have to be a straight-up asshole if they were just like, “Well, I can see why bullying can be a good thing, you know”—and mean it.

- 3) When you make them aware that their action—or lack thereof—actually means something, the chances are greater they'll remember this next time.

The guy next to you who repeats your ideas when there's a group discussion in class, pretending it was he who thought of them, taking all the credit without the least bit of shame.

Strategy

Option A

Give him a taste of his own medicine. For experienced learners: when the teacher goes over assignments in class, read (word for word) the answers he wrote and pretend they were your words. Then you'll see how eager he is to point out those were his answers. Funny how that works, huh?

Option B

Bring him to task by saying, "Hey, is there an echo in here? Finding it hard to form your own sentences? So that's why you're repeating everything I say and acting like it was your idea."

The guy who sits there and talks shit about you in such a low voice that only you can hear it, but acts surprised or denies it when you react.

Strategy

Option A

Make a small scene and say, "What was that again!? Did you really just say that?" Repeat what he said. "Oh, so I didn't literally just hear you say that? So you're telling me you can't control the flow of sludge coming out of your own mouth? Or is it you regret saying it now that you know how idiotic it sounds?"

Option B

Ignore him—that is, pretend like you can't hear what he's saying. The worst response is no response. If this doesn't shut him up: write down all his wise-ass comments on a piece of paper and create a point system. For every third thing he rattles off, hand him the paper with the heading: "Congrats! These quotes were so good that I just had to write them down—hope

you're proud of them now that you see them again." Worst case, he'll get a little booklet to prove just how cool he is.

When boys think that their penises are so interesting that they absolutely must take a picture of it and send it to you—unsolicited

In a survey conducted on match.com (yes, we know, a very scientific source) 47 percent of the men said that they had sent dick pics (Hainer 2018). Maybe some people like getting dick pics, but it should never be okay unless you've explicitly asked for it.

Journalist Madeleine Holden was getting so many dick pics that she started the blog critiquemydickpic.tumblr.com, where she gave her honest feedback on the pictures. She wasn't critiquing the equipment itself, but the quality of the photograph: the background, lighting, cropping and so on.

Natural lighting from the right side—lovely. The washstand you're using as the platform for the penis: not so much. Looks like it could use a good wash with Dawn.

Gotten unsolicited dick pics? Here are our best replies:

- How wonderful! Just what I wanted! I feel so special. I'm the only one who got this, right?
- OMG, does this mean we're a couple? I can't wait to tell my mom. I just know she'll want to have you over for dinner ASAP.
- Uh...sorry, what was that? A picture of a stillborn baby rabbit?
- LOL
- What the hell is that? Your thumb? Are you okay???
- Nice. Now, let's see you cutting that banana into small slices.
- Just went to your profile and found your mom, forwarded the photo. She said she'll talk to you later. Hugz
- Time to clean out your room, you think?
- This isn't the right number, sorry, I'm not a licensed physician. I'd get that checked if I were you.

Skin hell

Sofie at 14

I'm in the bathroom at 6:30 in the morning. Even though I don't have to be at school for another two hours, it feels like I'm short on time. My skin is in extra bad shape today, and it'll be that much harder to put on my makeup. I know I shouldn't squeeze the zits that hurt, but I can't resist. Every morning it's the same laborious process: foundation, concealer, powder, concealer, powder. It's never good enough. I feel so gross. Acne on my chest is no problem—I can cover that up—but it's not like I can cover my whole fucking face.

I've tried everything. A million different creams, products and even antibiotics. The more I look at myself in the mirror the worse I feel. It's as if they're growing and spreading by the second. This stupid makeup isn't cooperating and I start to cry. Just great. Now I have to start all over! I want to throw my makeup bag against the wall, smash the mirror and scream at the top of my lungs. I want to go back to bed and stay there all day. As if my face weren't red enough already, crying makes it worse. Damn it! The last thing I want is to walk into the classroom, under the glare of those fluorescent lights.

Sofie today

It saddens me when I think of how my skin problems held me back in my teenage years. It was like a real handicap: I dropped out of everything: swimming, lying out in the sun, going after boys (I didn't want anyone getting too close), sleeping over with friends—I couldn't stand the thought of doing my morning and evening routines at someone else's place, in someone else's bathroom, not knowing whether I had enough time. I thought everyone was staring at my face all the time. The absolute worst was if anyone touched it. Not even Mom was allowed to stroke my cheek when she said good night.

It makes me even sadder to think that none of this really mattered to anyone. I was the same old Sofie, with or without acne. I know I've never treated anyone differently if they had pimples or any other affliction. So why would anyone else do that to me? I wish I hadn't been so hard on myself. I didn't deserve it.

Body positivity

A recent pushback against society's excessive focus on appearance has been body positivity. The idea behind it is the acceptance of all body types and the celebration of difference. But this can also be a little confusing: How are we to combat body-image pressure by focusing even more on the body?

We believe that the victory consists in talking about what we have **INSIDE** the body. Thus, in *Girls Rule*, we present a new movement: organ positivity. Instead of comparing the images we find in the mirror, we'll compare the images that show up on our x-rays: the functions inside the body which make it possible to move around, learn, see, and hear.

Imagine, if you will, a conversation on a Norwegian schoolyard in the year 2038:

Girl 1: "My, how I love my amygdale."

Girl 2: "My prefrontal cortex is on fleek today."

Girl 3: "Your brain is totally goals."

Girl 4: "Thanks! By the way, I saw you running, and damn girl, those lungs [emoji with hearts for eyes]!"

If you're reading this, you can read. If you're listening to the audiobook, you can hear. So way to go, body! Keep up the good work.

Excerpt from Ulrikke's personal story:

When I run, I don't really run. I just walk sort of fast. I can't get my heart rate up or I'll faint. When I'm jogging in the city, I use every chance I get to study myself in the shop windows. I'm constantly judging my own body. Comparing myself to everyone I pass. When I'm knitting a scarf in alpaca yarn while reading a book about research into bodily contact, it is only to keep my eyes from looking at the clock. Still, I look at it every three minutes. I wait until 2:25 on the dot to start making a snack for myself. That'll take five minutes and I can eat at 2:30. If I take a little more time to make oatmeal, I'll eat at 3:00 at the latest. It gives me a feeling of mastery to see how long I can go without food. I sort my shoes in the hallway. I don't go out to see friends. I eat my school lunch in the handicap toilet. The second I come home from school, I turn on the heater full blast, put on pajama pants and wool socks and wrap myself up in a bathrobe before hiding myself under the covers. Then I fall asleep; my body is completely sapped of energy. Two hours later, I'm woken up for dinner. Sometimes it takes me two hours to eat. As the others finish, they get up from the table. I'm left sitting with Dad; if he gets up and leaves the room, I might hide or throw away the food.

One day, it's as if my body is turning inside out; the physical pain from the panic attack at dinner is so overwhelming that it turns outward. I throw my plate so hard at the wall that it smashes into a million bits. I crawl into a corner in a fetal position. I scream as loud as I can. Just finishing meals: it almost takes the fucking life out of me.

Excerpt from Sofie's personal story

Every morning I have a fixed routine. I start by vacuuming the floor. I take out all my clothes to vacuum inside the closet, then put them all back neatly. I wash all surfaces and wipe the dust off everything on the shelves: the candles, books, plants, makeup, picture frames. Sometimes I have to take them to the bathroom to wash them perfectly clean. The dust accumulates so fast. I don't know why I'm always cleaning—I know no one is coming to visit, but I want things to be as nice and clean as possible. Everything *has* to be clean.

I always keep the curtains drawn. Mom insists that I open the window at least once a day, but we live on a building site, and the noise is awful. I want absolute quiet. I have a heart-shaped lamp that turns my room red. I don't like having too much light, since the dust shows up better that way. One day, two boys from my grade walk by my window and one of them yells, at the top of his fucking lungs, "Hah! Check out the whore lamp in there! Wanna bet what's going on in there?" Oh yeah, so much action in here. I can't stand the face of him. He's the type who insists on lying down at the front of the class photo because, you know, he's such a wild and crazy guy. Sooo crazy, in fact, he has to wear his hat backwards. Appropriate dress for someone whose head isn't screwed on straight. He'll be sure to introduce himself as a "typical alpha" if (when) he joins the cast of Paradise Hotel. (I'll get Mom to buy a yellow lamp so as to even out the red.) It's disgusting, the very thought that someone would look at my room that way, as though I've got someone up here. Can't people just mind their own business, and let me mind mine? Just leave me alone so I can clean in peace. I *must*.