

An extract from

***HVEM SPANDERER?***  
***FORDOMMENE DU IKKE VISSTE DU HADDE***  
**(She's Got This – The Prejudices You  
Didn't Know You Had)**

Norwegian original © Isabelle Ringnes & Marie Louise Sunde  
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# FOREWORD

**‘The woman is a castrated man suffering from penis envy.’**

**SIGMUND FREUD (1856–1939)**

Equality has been on the agenda – to one degree or another – for over a hundred years, and many rather odd things have been and are being said about both women and men in the equality debate.

The first wave of feminism arrived in the mid-nineteenth century, with demands for basic legal rights for women, such as suffrage. During the second wave of feminism in the 1960s, 70s and 80s, access to working life and reproductive rights were the main themes. Many key individuals in the American feminist movement at this time were also central to the Civil Rights Movement, fighting for the rights of African Americans. The third wave began in the 90s and addressed more abstract issues relating to gender, gender roles and identity. In 1990 Judith Butler published her book *Gender Trouble*, in which she wrote about gender as a social construct – a role one learns. During the course of the 90s, feminism was also put onto the commercial agenda in the shape of TV series such as *Sex and the City*. The fight for gay rights took place in parallel. The third wave of feminism expanded the perspective on diversity to encompass more than just gender. We are now in the midst of the fourth wave of feminism. This time, working life is once again a key theme.

Traditionally, efforts to achieve equality have been synonymous with the struggle for women’s liberation. Much of the literature and communication relating to equality has been *by women for women*. This has been necessary in order to reach where we are today, but to progress further we must include all of society. One of the things that has stood out about the most recent wave of feminism is that men have gained a clearer voice.

At the beginning of 2018 when we began discussing with Gyldendal whether to write a book about equality and unconscious discrimination, it was important for us to write the book with the values of #She’sGotThis as its guiding light. We started #She’sGotThis in 2015 in order to raise awareness of unconscious gender-based discrimination and gender stereotypes. Right from the very start, we chose an open and inclusive approach – preferably with a twinkle in our eyes and without pointing fingers. One of our goals was to include men in the conversation. In writing this book, we have worked hard to understand the male perspective. Not just in terms of how men typically experience the discussion about equality, but also about how they themselves perceive unconscious discrimination.

Furthermore, we wanted to move the public debate about gender and equality away from enthusiastic hearsay to facts. There is plenty of good research on equality, but it is not always considered to be easily accessible to professional leaders and the public at large. We have chosen a popular scientific approach based on a selection of relevant

research, seasoned with personal stories that we hope will make the topic exciting for many readers. We have not written a textbook – the gender researchers are better qualified than us to do that.

In recent years, we have noticed a positive development in the way we approach equality, and we are now seeing a genuine willingness to change. Despite this desire, we are still some way from achieving actual equality.

We believe that unconscious discrimination and gender stereotypes are the most important reasons for the imbalance we continue to observe – the way in which we value men and women differently without realising it. This is a subject that until recently had received little attention. 2017 saw many shocking stories about conscious and unconscious abuse of power coming to the surface as part of the #MeToo movement. This wave has been an important reminder about the underlying culture that still characterises working life. Unconscious discrimination is all the shady things, all the things unsaid, all the jokes and comments. Everything that it is hard to put a finger on, hard to see, hard for anyone not experiencing it to understand and therefore hard to do anything about. All the things that are often picked apart, explained away, rationalised or trivialised.

An increasing number of analyses show that equality pays. We address this in the first part of the book. The next part is devoted to what we believe has stood in the way of progress. There are still some conscious and unconscious objections to equality that mean the issue is often downgraded and explained away. We write about this in part two. The objections stem from unconscious gender-based discrimination and gender stereotypes, which we tackle in part three.

Based on these gender stereotypes, we often create explanations for why there is an imbalance between the genders on the basis of myth. Part four is about causal relationships, and many of the myths we often encounter when talking about why there has not been more progress towards equality. As a consequence of myth-based explanatory models, we take action without really knowing what the problem is – and often without knowing whether our initiatives will actually work. In the final part, we look at what academia and industry currently think about solutions to the challenges of equality.

Through our work with the book and our conversations with many people, it has become clear to us that women and men often have different perceptions of reality based on differing personal experiences. Women experience a far greater degree of negative discrimination than men do. Men tend not to take note of these patterns, because they are rarely affected themselves. We have sought to build bridges between these perceptions of reality. Only once we have a common frame of reference will we be able to achieve change and create a culture that supports all people regardless of gender (and other differences). It is necessary for us as a society to be able to make use of all the talent we have.

It is impossible to cover everything in such a broad subject as this in one book. We have chosen to highlight what we believe is important in order to understand why we do what we do, and what we can do about this. Not least, we want to focus on the prejudices and behavioural patterns you may not realise you have. Hopefully, we will succeed in giving you some food for thought that will not only make you more aware, but will also encourage you to speak up in situations where unconscious discrimination

occurs. We have personally drawn much inspiration from a quote by Emma Watson that she used in her major speech on equality at the UN in 2014: *All that is needed for the forces of evil to triumph is for enough good men and women to do nothing*. The quote is a paraphrasing often ascribed to Edmund Burke, but in its original form it can be traced back to John Stuart Mill in the nineteenth century.

This book is in no way a conclusion or final summary. On the contrary, we hope it will act as a catalyst for us to progress via insight and awareness towards change and action.

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# UNDERESTIMATION

## **‘She was surprisingly good – a really good leader, actually’**

When we interviewed Rolv Erik Ryssdal, CEO of Schibsted’s international classified advertising company, he referred to a study in which it emerges that the mothers of young children underestimate their daughters’ crawling skills, while they overestimate their sons’. This is despite the fact that babies’ crawling skills are more or less the same, regardless of gender. He believes the study is a good example of how deeply entrenched gender discrimination is within us, and how even during infancy we assume that boys are more physically talented and advanced. This gave him a shock. ‘If we parents who are raising children think like that, then it’s only natural that many take those attitudes with them throughout life.’

Ryssdal’s claim that we underestimate girls and women is substantiated by further research.

In a famous study, Corinne Moss-Racusin sent job applications for the role of assistant to 100 college professors across the USA. The applications were identical except for the names. One half were signed with a boy’s name (John) and the other half with a girl’s name (Jennifer). The study, which has since become known as the *John and Jennifer study*, demonstrated that professors were more likely to hire the man. In addition, the study showed that applicants with male names were considered more competent, and the male applicants were offered higher salaries and more career advice. It wasn’t only the men who undervalued women. In the study, the women also preferred the male candidate, and evaluated *Jennifer* just as critically as the men did.

In another study carried out in 2014 by Ernesta Reuben with several American universities, it was shown that employers systematically underestimated women’s mathematical competencies compared with men. Once again, this applied to both men and women amongst the employers. The result was that the employers often hired less suitable men ahead of better suited women for mathematical work.

There are many similar studies showing that we underestimate women’s professional knowledge, especially in stereotypically masculine fields where men have traditionally dominated, and often still do. When a man and a woman have identical skills, we think the man is smarter. It appears that this assumption is contagious, spreading to both men and women’s assessment of their own skills. In 2015, the consultancy firm Development Dimensions International (DDI) carried out a comprehensive analysis of more than 13,000 leaders across 2,031 organisations. The analysis showed, amongst other things, that there were no real differences between the male and female leaders surveyed in terms of leadership qualities or the ability to take on challenges. On the other hand, the analysis showed that it was far more likely that male leaders would give themselves a high ranking. In other words, there was a high degree of probability that men considered themselves to be better leaders than their female



colleagues. Ernesta Reuben and her colleagues documented the same phenomenon in academic settings in a study in 2012. Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic argued in an article published in the *Harvard Business Review* in 2013 that the difference between how women and men assess themselves is an important reason why men more frequently land top jobs. We often confuse excessive self-confidence with competence. He supports this assertion with several convincing studies.

Although women do not view themselves as being as high ranking as leaders compared with their male counterparts, we know that they often are. In an article in the *Harvard Business Review* from 2012, Jack Zenger and Joseph Folkman referred to a major analysis they conducted on leadership styles. This analysis established that women are ranked as better leaders by their colleagues at all levels compared with men, and that their score increases the higher up the management structure they are. In the study, women were ranked as being significantly better in 12 out of 16 of the most important leadership characteristics, such as initiative taking, inspiration, integrity and results orientation. These characteristics were defined following many years of studies carried out at Harvard University.

When studies show that women are 'better' leaders than men, one possible explanation for this is that the eye of the needle has become narrower for women than men. Research shows us that we demand more of women, in addition to often underestimating them. This means that those who reach the top are likely to have struggled more and worked harder, more effectively and more purposefully to become talented leaders. Women who actually secure top jobs are, therefore, on average smarter.

Norwegian studies do not find any major differences between male and female leaders either. Anne Grethe Solberg, a researcher at the Work Research Institute in Oslo and a career developer with her own firm (Gender Balance), submitted her PhD thesis *A gender perspective on innovation management* in 2012. She divided leaders into those who are masculine, feminine and androgynous, with both women and men being able to represent all three of these gender role identities. Solberg highlighted Kristin Skogen Lund as an example of an androgynous leader. In this study of 917 senior and middle managers in Norwegian business and industry, she found that androgynous leaders were the best at leading innovation, regardless of whether they were women or men. She also found that there were major internal differences between the female leaders and between the male leaders than there were between the two genders. In an interview that featured in *FriFagbevegelse* in 2017, she said: 'Female and male top bosses are alike rather than being opposites. The best leaders are neither especially masculine nor especially feminine – they are androgynous. They have the ability to move discussions forward, but they also have lots of empathy. They are both masculine and feminine, transcending biological sex.'

Kristin Skogen Lund is familiar with the underestimation of women. In particular, she is aware of how society's consistent underestimation can infect you as an individual. She was raised in a family where she experienced encouragement and was told she was bright. Nevertheless, she considered herself under qualified, and assumed that everyone else was cleverer than her. This feeling didn't change until she was thirty years old. She thinks it is the sum of all the signals in society that makes it easy for many women to feel this uncertainty. In practice, the tendency to underestimate women has two consequences. The first, as Skogen Lund describes, is that women often suspect that they themselves are not that smart. This is known as 'imposter syndrome' – you think you are fooling someone, and are afraid of being revealed as inadequate.

The second consequence is that society suspects that women are not smart enough, or chooses to focus on characteristics that undermine women's performances to a greater extent than men's. In the winter of 2018, the then-head of Innovation Norway,

Anita Krohn Traaseth, was criticised publicly for her leadership style by the Chairman of the organisation. Prior to these statements, the Chairman had been informed by the nominating committee that he would not be reselected. Krohn Traaseth had just delivered good results and received positive appraisals from her employees. The Chairman's words appeared in the media on a Sunday night and the debate steamed ahead. A well-known journalist described Krohn Traaseth in a column as 'a driven, talented user of social media and a keen profile builder'. He reduced – perhaps unconsciously – her twenty years of experience and her successes as a leader to her being a good social media user. In the same article, the writer also described the departing male Chairman as 'a highly respected and talented business leader'.

Another anecdotal example of how we underestimate women is found in an experience described by Martin R. Schneider on Twitter in March 2017. The tweet quickly went viral and gained a lot of attention. Schneider was the editor of the American website Front Row Central, which reviews films. His junior female colleague was criticised by their boss for spending a lot of time on projects, especially in customer communications. Schneider thought he was quicker because he had more experience. One day, he suddenly found that a customer was being unusually difficult. 'He [was] just being IMPOSSIBLE. Rude, dismissive, ignoring my questions,' Schneider wrote on Twitter. It transpired that Schneider and the female colleague had mistakenly switched email signatures. Schneider continued to use her signature for two weeks. He described these weeks as hell – everything he suggested was questioned. Things took much longer. When he once again began using his own signature, the customers' behaviour improved straight away.

Underestimation can sometimes have major personal consequences. One example is when Norway got its first female admiral. On 1 February 2008, Louise Dedichen was appointed by the Council of State as a Rear-Admiral and Head of the Norwegian Defence University College, thus becoming the highest ranking female ever in the military in Norway.

'Women are really very welcome in the Armed Forces. And my story was pretty much that I had a great time. You feel incredibly included until you reach a competitive situation. Then there's trouble if a woman draws the longest straw. I've had my share of things that hit me right between the eyes,' says Dedichen.

When she was appointed as a Rear-Admiral and Head of the Norwegian Defence University College, there were eleven applicants for the role, of which two were women. Following a comprehensive assessment, the Council of State selected Dedichen ahead of the candidate nominated by the Defence Staff. Dedichen remembers waking up to the following welcome in an editorial of *Norsk Tidsskrift for Sjøvesen*, a journal published by Sjømilitære Samfund, a naval charity: 'We note that the country has its first female admiral. We hope she is qualified.'

The male officer nominated by the Defence Staff felt overlooked. He sued the Armed Forces for breaching the Gender Equality Act. He believed he was a more qualified candidate, and that Dedichen had only been chosen because she was a woman. This was the beginning of a lengthy legal process.

On 29 April 2014, the Supreme Court ruled on the matter – concluding that Louise Dedichen had been given the job because she was the best qualified, rather than because she was a woman. The Military Officers Union (BFO) noted that they were disappointed by the Supreme Court verdict.

Dedichen spent her first eight years as Norway's first female admiral and head of education in the Armed Forces defending her role, her fitness and her authority as an admiral because she was a woman. Dedichen points out that it takes a lot of strength to

make it through an endurance test like that: ‘You have to acknowledge that the case is going to be associated with you for the rest of your career, because there will always be those in the Armed Forces who believe the Supreme Court ruling is wrong. When you face resistance, you should take criticism as proof that we are pushing something forwards. Territory is under threat. But I can’t conceal that I sometimes get fed up with it. I’m not superhuman.’

In 2018, the Norwegian Defence University College boasted that the number of applicants for undergraduate programmes had doubled since 2016, and that the number of female applicants had risen to 26 per cent.

Not everyone experiences so much resistance that they have to go to the Supreme Court to prove their suitability. But in many male-dominated environments, women are constantly reminded that they do not *really* belong. The effect of daily reminders like this is often underestimated by men – not necessarily through ill will, but because they have not experienced it themselves, which means they don’t give it much thought.

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# SEXUALISED HUMOUR AND CONDITIONING

### **'You must be the most prudish girl in the world if you don't know that boys have to watch porn'**

Loveleen Rihel Brenna once gave a presentation to a major police conference with more than 700 people in the audience. She talked about marginalised boys and how they often use sexualised phrases to suppress others and render them passive. By way of example, she told a story from a presentation she had given to a group of fourteen and fifteen year olds in the tenth grade at a lower secondary school. Sitting in the front row were a gang of boys. One of the boys used his hands to describe her figure while whispering three figures, getting himself a good round of laughter in the process. He had been estimating her body measurements. Brenna told the story to exemplify how women are objectified.

At the end of her lecture, she asked whether there were any questions. A man got up and said: 'Look, I've been sitting here watching you for quite a while. What exactly *are* your measurements?' That policeman chose to make a joke like that after Brenna had used the boys in tenth grade as an example of the impact of sexualised humour. Some of the audience laughed, while others were quite clearly embarrassed. 'I was reduced from being the speaker to an object. How should you respond to that? Should you be polite since you're an invited speaker? Should you react with anger? It will affect your reputation regardless. It's a delicate balance – not being visibly upset but also not saying it was OK.'

Helene Uri described how she was once invited to a formal doctoral dinner after one of her female friends had successfully defended her thesis. 'In the room were academics, family and friends. We were standing in a small circle before dinner, having a drink. Then a relative of the doctoral candidate asked what I did, and who I was in this context. I replied that I was a colleague. Shortly afterwards, the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities – my ultimate superior – came and put an arm around me. He reeled off: 'Well, you can see the criteria we use for hiring people at this university.' It was a joke, and it was meant as a compliment. And we all laughed. But afterwards you come to think about what's really happened – and it's pretty problematic.'

Humour, as we noted in the last chapter, is an effective method of suppression. Sexualised humour is even more effective, especially in circumstances where the originator is older and higher up the hierarchy. The more male-dominated an environment is, the more personally women may take the jokes. The reason why sexualised jokes are such effective tools of suppression is the reality exposed by #MeToo: an overwhelming number of women have experienced situations in which men in positions of power have behaved in the way that is joked about. And until the #MeToo campaign broke out, it was clear that many men had not thought about the extent of it.

**MARIE:** As a young Foundation doctor, I got to attend my first major surgical conference to present my research. Most of the others present were chief surgeons and men. At the dinner, I was seated beside an extremely prominent surgeon from a major European hospital, who gradually got closer and closer, his hands all over the place under the table, and who told me he had already made plans for what we would do the next evening. He rounded off the evening by saying: 'I can open all doors for you, but I can also close them.' I was completely unprepared for the situation and left the dinner as quickly as possible, while also trying to be nice and not step on anyone's toes. It had already been made pretty clear by many people that I was there on their terms, and that I didn't really fit in as a result of my youth, inexperience and being a woman. On the way upstairs I met another prominent surgeon who said he had seen the incident and wanted to make sure I got to my room safely. I was relieved and happily allowed myself to be accompanied, but when we reached my door he wouldn't let me go in alone. We ended up standing outside my hotel room talking for ages because I was afraid he would come in. Eventually, I had to physically push him away. I was 24 years old, I was completely unprepared, and I had no idea how to handle the situation. I was afraid of ruining my career options by offending important people, and I was anxious about rumours that might spread. Not least that I was frightened about the whole situation. It was a brutal introduction to working life in a male-dominated industry.

The next day, when some of 'our' chief surgeons were joking about how popular I had been the night before, and saying that following my 'efforts' the previous day I had open job offers from all the major European hospitals, I didn't appreciate the humour or attention. These senior doctors probably didn't know what had happened, they probably just meant them as funny, harmless jokes. They probably didn't reflect much on the age difference and power imbalance, and many were almost certainly – just like most men – completely unaware of the extent of this type of behaviour. Since then, I have allied myself with my (male) PhD supervisors in situations like that. They have become advocates for equality and clear opponents of sexualised jargon.

Sexualised humour unfolds in a myriad of ways – everything from comments about you as the speaker being present 'so that the boys have something pretty to look at' to cheap jokes about how you have spent the night with a colleague if you're seen at breakfast together on a work trip. The jokes are probably made just as often by women as men.

They're meant as jokes, and some people will find them funny. But definitely not everyone. And perhaps not when the jokes are repeated so often that you have eventually been linked to every single colleague. As perhaps as the only woman, you may be concerned about untrue rumours spreading and doubt being sown as to whether you are really suited to the profession. Perhaps that fear is justified, perhaps it isn't. It may be that those who make the comments intend to signal that you do not belong – perhaps there is no such basis to what they say. Either way, there is a lack of understanding of the fact that behaviour like this can be stressful for individuals. It increases the alienation.

Rear-Admiral Louise Dedichen told us about an early episode in her naval career. She was on watch on board ship and one of the few women amongst many men. On her daily rounds, she was accompanied by two younger officers. When she reached the engine room, she saw that they had put up a poster of a naked model. The model was called Louise. Dedichen simply went and resolutely tore it down, looked at her colleagues and said 'there we go, everything is in order here,' before continuing on her way. Her heart was racing and she didn't want to discuss it with the other guys.

She had previously experienced another unpleasant episode on board a frigate. She was one of nine women together with 120 men, and described the environment as 'rough'. The young women had cabins right by the mess, where the boys would watch porn at top volume. 'I was so pissed off,' Dedichen said. She raised it with the captain and said that this was unacceptable and that the girls needed to be protected from this kind of behaviour. He responded saying that 'you must be the most prudish girl in the world if you don't know that boys have to watch porn'.

Later on, she was on a summer posting in New York on a different vessel. Their boat had been unable to secure a quayside berth. Dedichen was assigned watch duty on 4th July, America's Independence Day, while her male colleagues headed into the city to party. Dedichen had gone to bed before they returned. For safety reasons, the locking of cabins was not permitted. Suddenly she heard a racket in the passageway. Just afterwards, an officer burst into her cabin – roaring drunk. She was terrified and jumped when the man tore open the thin curtains by her bed. Only a matter of seconds later, the watch officer came in and threw the man back out into the passage. When she awoke the next morning, she found the drunken officer's business card in her cabin. On it was written 'Louise, I love you'. Dedichen remembers the episode as being disgusting. The officer wanted to apologise the next day, and hung a bouquet of long-stemmed roses on her door. She felt both nauseous and frightened. She was 23 years old and one of the few women on a boat crewed by men. 'I didn't know what to do. Had it been today, I would have reported him.'

These stories, and stories from #MeToo, have revealed that there are many women who have experienced how short the path from sexualised humour to sexualised behaviour can be. On the basis of such experience, it is impossible to know who is 'just running off at the mouth' and who you need to shove out of your room in the middle of the night. It is an important reason why many women don't appreciate sexualised humour and consider seemingly 'innocent' jokes to be rather serious. It is also crucial to emphasise that an imbalance makes the situation worse. This is particularly so in the case of power imbalances and large age differences, but also in the case of significant gender imbalances – such as when you are the only woman and therefore become the constant target of this type of humour.

This often results in a normalisation of this type of behaviour. In environments where condescending or sexualised jargon relating to women is deemed normal, you eventually stop noticing it.

**MARIE:** At the morning meeting after a major newspaper story in which I had spoken about equality, one of the senior doctors passed by and said: 'Now you've asked us to grab your tits every time you walk by.' A few weeks later, I arrived at the morning meeting after working a night shift and I was about to report on the patients from the afternoon and overnight to the rest of the department. Just before I started, a senior doctor came up to me, patted me on the cheek, and said loudly: 'You're so sweet when you've just got up.' Both of these episodes were probably meant as caricatured sexual harassment that was a 'funny' response to my commitment to equality and #MeToo.

I found it uncomfortable and embarrassing. I didn't know how to respond, so once again I said nothing. Some of the senior doctors often make those kinds of comments, and the more I talk about equality, the more comments there are. Some of the comments aren't so bad – again, it's their total sum that creates the imbalance and discomfort. So, I didn't think much of it at the time. Later on, when I described the comments I had received to acquaintances outside the industry, I was surprised by the strength of response to the stories.

When something that crosses a line no longer generates a reaction, it is because the boundaries of what is recognised as normal behaviour have moved. This is what is known as conditioning.

In our interviews with senior female leaders, many experiences and stories emerged that the subjects hadn't reflected upon until the questions made them aware of this.

Anita Krohn Traaseth says that when #MeToo became prevalent on social media, she was astonished by its extent. She discussed the outcry with her husband and thought she had been spared this kind of behaviour, even though she had been one of a very few women in the IT industry. Her husband reminded her of several minor episodes she had previously shared with him. The fact that she had to be reminded of the incidents resulted in her actively participating in the creation of the IT industry's equivalent to #MeToo, #SystemDown, together with Isabelle and several other leading women in the Norwegian technology sector.

When repeated behaviour is not challenged and is eventually accepted as humour, or in the worst case becomes something you are obliged to accept in certain settings, you no longer notice the episodes. We have a tendency to develop blind spots when in flocks. This can also be situational. In some situations, we may be blind to one type of behaviour due to conditioning, and it can become difficult to see the taxonomy of the behaviour. This becomes particularly effective in combination with jargon that trivialises, ridicules and sexualises. In other situations, we may be much better at identifying the same type of behaviour. For example: those who deliver crude sexualised jokes to younger female colleagues would probably be taken aback if their own daughter was on the receiving end of equivalent comments in a family setting.

The more aware you are, the easier it becomes to notice a type of behaviour that is not 'inherent' to all situations.