

## Norway's Gender Equality

One would assume gender equality or inequality has been an ongoing issue globally since the beginning of man kind. Just using logic, if a woman in a distant time period felt like she wanted to do the job that was normally assigned to a man, that could be justified as gender inequality. Today, the issue has been magnified with a woman running for president of the United States and with the results, many have pointed to gender inequality being the issue. Whether you believe that or not, it is entirely up to you, the individual. The fact that very popular celebrity male won the presidency over a very qualified female candidate raises the question of, are Americans, in general, alright with having a female operate the greatest and strongest country on the planet. As mentioned in the handout for this assignment, in 2010 the Global Gender Gap Report ranked Iceland and Norway as the top two countries in terms of gender equality with the United States coming in at a measly 28<sup>th</sup> on the list. Obviously, there are huge disparities in the way the United States value women versus the way the Nordic countries value women. Preferably, I would have liked to know what separates Iceland, first on the list, from the US, but the size of their population forces me to look elsewhere, so I settled for Norway, a country with a relatively large population.

One of the key factors that has allowed Norway to advance in gender equality is the social investment. According to Midtoben and Teigen, “the concept of social investment has focused on how welfare states can promote social inclusion and female employment, while also focusing on other major issues related to economic crises, decreasing birth-rates, and ageing populations.” This concept is completely foreign to the US because we don't have the same overarching social democracy Norway has. Simply put, it just seems as if Norway and the rest of the Nordic countries just put a huge star next to gender equality tab and the United States does not.

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But according to the article, it may not be as clear cut as it seems. The reason for increasing equality among the genders is not just for the sake of equality and justice, rather, gender equality is used as a stepping stone that benefits the greater good in society in Norway. By putting more women in the workforce, it helps with the issue of an aging worker population but the primary goal is the economy (Midtoben and Teigen p. 270). So as it may seem that Norway puts a star next to gender quality, the main focus is much bigger and gender equality takes a backseat to socialist capital. It makes sense, the more workers in the workforce, the more workers the government has to tax, which leads to a lot of the social services Norway provides. But, because gender equality is an outcome of a greater goal means it is a step on the right direction and is obviously viewed as a positive.

Similarly, employment rate has a lot to do with the overall wellness of Norway's society. according to Midtoben and Teigen, "the employment rate s 69% for the total population... In sum, employment rates in Norway are generally high, and women's employment is particularly high. However, this must be seen in light of the large share of women in part-time work, which means that, although most women work, their actual participation in the labor market is modest." I'm not trying to discredit Norway's efforts of gender equality, whether they are really focused upon or not, by any means. It seems like the overall view of Norway is skewed and it appears as if Norway is wearing the mask of gender equality while putting its interests elsewhere. However, does that really matter as long as they are improving the lives of their female population through social benefits. I'm not sure, I'm also not a woman and I don't live in Norway. It looks to be working with the charts having ranked Norway number 1 in economic participation and opportunity, near the top of the list in terms of educational attainment and political empowerment (Global Gender Gap Report).

What about men with regards to gender equability in a country that ranks high on the Global Gender Gap Report. Because Norway does have higher rates of female employment than most other countries, one could assume that there would be quite a few women in the workforce bracket that have kids. “Although the women’s labor force participation rates have significantly increased in most industrialized countries, men’s contributions to the household have not increased enough to compensate for this change” (Thebaud p. 330). Men in these countries have not been on board with or have not shown any more initiative in the household where the women are the primary earners and according to Thebaud and previous researchers, “breadwinning is an important component of hegemonic masculinity across industrialized nations.” Thebaud et. al also states, even when the male income and female income within the same household are similar or the same, both the men and the women alike tend to look at the male income as the primary source of income and the women’s income as just extra, and even when the women in the household earn more than men, the spouses still tend to view his work as more valuable. Again, I’m not saying that the system is flawed but I think on a broader level, yeah men and women are working at similar rates in Norway, but on a case by case or individual view, it suggests that both men and women have a more traditional view of male and female gender roles.

Now the obvious difference in gender equality between the United States and Norway lies in family support. We talked about it in class how a lot of the European countries give parents paid leave and at work day cares for families where both parents go to work. According to Crompton and Lyonette, Norway has cash for care policies for traditional families in which one member is the primary breadwinner and the other stays at home to take care of the kids and they are given financial assistance. In direct contrast with the United States, Norway does not

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devalue care givers, whether they be parents or in the workplace. Here in the United States, as learned in class, we devalue it and consider it low skilled and take it for granted. This to me, is one of the positive resources of the Nordic countries government. It is a truly egalitarian approach to care work. The family policies have not been directed simply at mothers, but at mothers and fathers. The Nordic states support dual earning families and have made efforts in encouraging men to undertake a greater share in domestic work, particularly in respect of child care (Crompton and Lyonette p. 381).

As a whole, the United States has along way to go to get to the level in terms of gender equality, but I do think that the mindset is no different there than it is here. Norway has a government that has implemented some great policies and regulations that help balance out gender in the workforce and giving to families financially proving that they value care work. To me it comes down to taxes and who gets to run the system. It would simply be to hard to pass a broad law mandating companies to give families money for decisions that they make in America. I'm all for it, but I don't own a company were my primary goal is to make and save as much money as I can. When laws like that are passed here, that's what I believe what forces major corporations out to look for cheaper labor elsewhere. I'm conflicted because in one article it shows how Norway is doing such a great job with gender equality, but in another it shows how gender equality is not a priority but an outcome. Absolutely, we can look at Norway as an example of how to implement some of the policies into our own government. The scaling would be an issue because the United States has an extremely large and diverse population compared to Norway. I truly want gender equality, but personally I don't think anyone has figured out the formula. This may be unrelated, but I would like to point out the homogenous culture and people that each of the countries has at the top of the list have. Is it realistic for a culturally and racially

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diverse country like ours to adopt ideas from a country that is so different? We are vastly different than in other culture in ways that only we would know.

Work Cited

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