

NORWAY AND THE PARADOX OF GENDER EQUALITY



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INTRODUCTION

Citizens' Rights Watch ("CRW") has always been supportive of all initiatives promoting gender equality, and continues to work in the benefit of closing gender gaps of all countries. To make further progress towards this goal, it is important that we define some basic concepts, which may at first seem polemical; and gender equality is one of those subjects which are surrounded by holes and unproven theories. Then again, when trying to define the whole gender issue, it may be wise to re-analyze some basic male and female differences again, so that we may dare to make our own conclusions, if any.

This article is inspired by the series/documentary made by Harald Eia and Terje Lervik, called "Paradox of Gender Equality" studying Norway and its natural labor distribution by gender.

DEMOCRACY INDEX OF NORWAY

On January 20th of 2015 an analysis and revision report was released by the Economist Intelligence Unit, with the name "A New index of Democracy". In the report Norway is positioned as the "most democratic country in the world" for the 5th time in a row, after obtaining a mark of 9,93 (out of 10,00) points, out of a list of other 165 countries.

There are five factors set as "main factors" that make up the Index of Democracy of each country; these five categories are: (i) Electoral Process (ELE), (ii) Functioning of Government (GOV), (iii) Political Participation (PAR), (iv) Political Culture (CUL) and (v) Civil Liberties (LIB). Norway was awarded a staggering 10,00 mark, being awarded the maximum score on all factors, except Functioning of Government (9,64).

According to experts of the BBC WORLD network, a very important aspect of Norway's score, is **gender equality**, which is backed by important public institutions of Norway, which results in a society which unravels within a culture of trust. This is an optimal situation for a country as "democratically firm" as Norway is.



Norway managed to consolidate its position as one of the countries with higher levels of gender equality in the world in 2012, according to a Global Gender Gap report published by the World Economic Forum (WEF).

The aforementioned report includes up to 135 countries, which represent over 93% of the global population. The institution evaluates countries based on their capacity to close the gender gap, based on four main areas: (i) Economic Participation and Opportunity; (ii) Educational attainment; (iii) Health and Survival; and (iv) Political Empowerment.

Despite of being one of the world leaders on the gender equality subject, it draws attention that the gender distribution in the labor market does not follow the logic of equality; a great percentage of women of working age are nurses, elementary school teachers, doctors (mainly pediatricians) and other jobs which involve human contact or care. The men of Norway, on the other hand, choose jobs in construction, engineering, mechanics and other jobs which may be construed as being less social.

This rather surprising situation inspired Norwegian filmmaker and comedian Harald Eia, to make a documentary film and series (Brainwash), in which he attempts to analyze why jobs are distributed as unequal as they seemed to be in Norway, despite of being one of the world leaders on the gender equality subject. By analyzing the reasons behind his country's existence of phrases such as "Men things" and "Women things", he tried to find reasoning behind the gender segregation of the job market in Norway.

GENDER SEGREGATION IN THE LABOR MARKET OF NORWAY

Gender Discrimination

The subject of gender discrimination itself in Norway was and still is close to non-existing. No discrimination affects the possibility of women accessing to jobs which are predominantly exercised or chosen by Men. Therefore, one can only ascertain that this is not the reason behind the distribution of jobs in the labor market of Norway, so, there had to be some other causes.

Imposed Roles or Social influence

Camilla Schreiner of the Center of Human sciences of the University of Oslo made an investigation in about 20 countries which concluded that women residing in countries,



where there was and is less gender equality, were more motivated to study and work in technical, industrial and more scientific jobs and ramifications.

In the whole of Schreiner's investigation, none of the questions and/or answers induced or led to conclude that genders interests were more close to each other in countries that were more modern, advanced or equitable.

At the Institute for the Study of Labor, investigators agree that there are no particular biological differences between brains of male and female study subjects and were therefore both brains are identical. The same investigators attribute the differences of genders in their job choices of Norway to society, and the way each gender is influenced since birth. Ever from the first perceptions of children, society makes and supports a notorious and probably wrong division of gender and their roles; girls play with dolls and in toy kitchens, whilst boys play with cars and build things.

When they are only babies they are predetermined and welcomed with the color pink or blue, and society assigns these colors and also roles automatically onto children. Later, and whilst the children grow up, the toy industry, pictures and advertising, and even traffic signs such as "Men at Work" influence women into feeling that they are somehow set aside; this later also seems to be self-imposed by women on a subconscious level.

Cultural Heritage

From a different perspective, Professor Richard Lippa whilst engaged by the BBC, designed an online survey about preferences in labor choices, which concluded that men prefer jobs which are technical or where there is some physical activity involved, whilst women preferred jobs where there is more human contact. Overall, professor's Lippa's investigation, which considered 200.000 male and female subjects, of people of 53 different countries of European, American, African and Asian ascendance, confirmed that culture plays a role more or less important in making for the existing gender differences, depending on each culture or circumstance.

So perhaps the next question to ask was: is this theory equally valid in Norway as it would be in Saudi Arabia? The answer would be, probably not. So it couldn't be proven that the theory actually worked for a specific case or a particular study case, which opened the necessity of importing yet another set of questions.

If it is not about something social or cultural, is it possible that the difference between women and men is innate? Is there a biological basis for this also? Scientifically this assumption could not be proven; Professor Lippa suggested that this gender difference goes as back as the early stages of a conscious human being, and even at the child's moment of conception.

Innate Interests

Professor Trond Diseth, child psychiatrist, concluded that children as old as only 9 months can tell the difference between toys meant for boys and toys meant for girls; boys would be more interested in cars, balls, and actions figures, whilst girls would be more drawn to toys like dolls, and other pink colored toys.

Diseth says that children are born with a clear biological aptitude of gender and gender characteristic sexual behavior, which is innate, but he also says that during their growth and developments, the environment, the culture, and the values and expectations that surround them may influence both their biological aptitude, and their sexual behavior.

The studies of Diseth compile actual facts of the last decade, dismissing the idea of the predisposition of innate gender differences area as obsolete and "last century" as a lot of investigators may state. Then again, there is no clear evidence in favor of this concept, much less, getting closer to explaining the gender issue of the labor market of Norway.

Genetics

Simon Baron-Cohen, an English Psychiatry teacher, has made an analysis with newborns as subjects of study, and to whom he attends to at the Trinity University in Cambridge. In the Baron - Cohen's studies, newborns only one day old, were presented with two objects: one mechanical and a picture of a face (unknown person to them) for a given amount of time, or for the time span the baby could actually fit his or her attention to such object; and of course, limited view as newborns also have. The results of the test showed that male boys were more interested in the mechanical object, and that girls gave more attention to the face. Obviously, there was no influence of either culture, or any other sort of influences of any kind onto the study subjects.

Of this follows a conclusion of Baron-Cohen: Men and Women produce different quantities of hormones, particularly testosterone during their early formation as fetuses, and testosterone production which is twice as much by baby boys if compared to baby girls; this hormone is of great influence in the development of the human brain. Levels of testosterone were measured in both male and female fetuses, and it was found that the higher the level of testosterone of the fetus before it was born, the slower was his development in language during his first two years; also the higher testosterone fetuses usually made less eye contact until they were 1 or 2 years old. So Baron-Cohen concluded that a high-level of testosterone production during the development of the fetus resulted in a slight delay in the social and language development of the child.



Therefore the differences of preferences and choices of the babies would be influenced by testosterone also. Also, female fetuses which produced higher testosterone levels would make it more possible that they choose wrongly called "boy toys", and that they would be more inclined and fonder of mechanical toys.

The Study of Baron-Cohen continued until the children were about 8 years old, proving that the fetus which had produced higher level of testosterone were less capable of empathy, and to assert in recognizing feelings of their peers, but they were more interested to learn systems and the manner things which surrounded them worked. The production of hormones has a strict relation with chromosomes X and Y.

Evolution and Freedom

Also one more aspect may be studied on the matter. Professor Anne Campbell, evolutionary psychologist of Durham, explains that according to Darwin's theory, and human evolution being a selective process, the same would count towards the nature and human evolution itself, which ultimately influences women psychologically to pregnancy and breast feeding, and also to being more empathic and to avoid risky situations; also not to exclude themselves from the pack. These instincts, according to Campbell, have survived evolution, and are still existent and very present in the human beings of today. This would be why women are more attracted to a particular work area.

The more free a society is, the more freedom there would be to choose whatever we liked, and wanted to do in the future, without letting society, tradition and culture affect a free choice. This is different from countries where there is a more notorious gender gap, and where women may choose jobs which are traditionally more chosen by men, to enforce a non-existing gender equality, despite of them liking these jobs or not;

CONCLUSIONS

First, the debate to understand if gender equality is really influenced from a biological perspective will remain existent, as there is no definitive proof either favoring or opposing the theory. One could ascertain that the social environment indeed influences gender roles, and that being man or a woman is a conception and mere definition made by society through culture and tradition, but it would perhaps be naive not to include biology in the equation. We are clearly different from an aesthetic standpoint; also emotionally, mentally



and psychologically genders are different and this will influence each gender's behavior and understanding of the world which surrounds them.

The final conclusion may be that perhaps understanding the exact reasons behind the actual differences between genders falls into being non-important. Also, the goal of gender equality does not rely on equal distribution of jobs and activities, which seems to be unachievable, with both biological, psychological and social arguments; it is about having the freedom to have the choice to opt for whatever one pleases, without society being critical of one's decisions, and with the same possibility as everyone to achieve one's goals, without there being any kind of cultural pressures, or hindering due to gender, and this also extends to race, ethnicity, age, social status, religion, or sexual inclination.

Therefore, one cannot rely on the gender distributions on a countries labor market to know whether there actually is gender equality or not; but on the opportunities of each gender to choose to be whatever they want, in an social environment which is supportive, open and does not influence such choices and decisions. A society mature enough to understand that genders are distinct, and that such difference do not influence on each human being having equal opportunity, in position scale as well as in remuneration, regardless of gender, and a society that does not favor any gender for any particular reason, tradition or cultural inheritance.

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