**EDI 2012**

**Abstract:**

**The wider effects of affirmative action strategies in Norway: the case of politics, academia and corporate boards of directors**

*Keywords: Affirmative action, quotas, inequality regimes, corporate boards, politics, academia.*

**Stream 3: The politics of Diversity**

Cathrine Seierstad

Brunel Business School

Cathrine.seierstad@brunel.ac.uk

**The wider effects of affirmative action strategies in Norway: the case of politics, academia and corporate boards of directors**

Gendered organizational practices have been recognized as important factors for the persistent trend of occupational sex segregation globally (e.g., Acker, 1990, 2006a, 2006b; Collinson, Knight & Collinson, 1990; Kanter, 1977). Most organisations now have equality policies and Governments have introduced various policies, including affirmative action (AA), to reduce (with the aim of ultimately eradicate) the preferential selection of men over women for influential positions. Although the use of AA has been set up as a potential way to challenge inequality, it is argued that these strategies often fail (Acker 2006). In fact, even organizations with egalitarian goals might develop inequality regimes over time (Acker 2006).

Norway is ranked among the most equal countries in the world (UNDP, 2007-2008; WEF, 2010) and has a variety of strategies promoting gender equality, both in terms of the social democratic welfare approach and AA. In fact, different forms of AA have since the 1970s regulated recruitment in areas such as politics, education, and boards in the public sector (Teigen 2000). From 2006, gender representation regulations were also put in place for private sector public limited companies boards. Nevertheless, the percentage of women in senior positions in areas such as the private sector and academia is still low and vertical sex segregation seems surprisingly persistent.

This paper seeks to explore the wider effects of using AA within three Norwegian occupational groups; politics, academia and corporate boards. The three occupational groups have differences in relation to gender representation, nature of occupation, as well as use of AA. While in politics, gender quotas of a voluntarily nature has been an important strategy for most political parties for approximately thirty years, a compulsory gender representation law with a requirement of a minimum of 40 per cent of each sex was implemented on the board of directors for public limited companies in 2006 with a two year implementation period. In academia, soft strategies are in use, but the use of quotas of a voluntarily or compulsory nature do not exist. Consequently, the share of women in the three occupational groups varies considerably. The share of women on boards has increased from approximately 8 per cent in 2003 to 40 per cent in 2011 (Seierstad and Opsahl 2011), the share of women in politics is approximately 38 per cent in parliament and 44 per cent in government (June 2009), while in academia, the share of professors are only approximately 16 per cent (2007).

This paper takes the position that it is important to go beyond the share of women and men in order to understand the wider effects and implications of using AA, both radical and liberal strategies. The aim of this paper is to, by building on Acker’s (2006) components of inequality regimes explore how the nature of the organization, the share of women in senior positions, and the use of AA can affect women’s position and experiences in three important, yet significantly different occupational settings. This paper will a) use range of macro and meso data, national and international to illustrate the Norwegian labour market and the three occupational groups, and b) it will draw on 66 qualitative interviews, with women politicians, academics and directors in order to explore the experiences of Norwegian women in senior positions in relation to equality and gendered organizational practices within the respective groups**.**

It might be tempting to see a unilinear relationship between the degrees of affirmative action and women’s roles in organizations. However, the findings will demonstrate that while AA are important, they operate alongside three different but still gendered organizational contexts. The paper explores how these differences affect and influence women’s experiences of gendered practices within the respective occupational groups.

**References**

Acker, J. (1990). Hierarchies, jobs, bodies: a theory of gendered organizations. Gender and Society, 4(2), 139-158.

Acker, J. (1994) The gender regimes of Swedish banks. [Scandinavian Journal of Management](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/journal/09565221)  
[10(2](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science?_ob=PublicationURL&_tockey=%23TOC%236018%231994%23999899997%23320730%23FLP%23&_cdi=6018&_pubType=J&view=c&_auth=y&_acct=C000010240&_version=1&_urlVersion=0&_userid=125872&md5=53ac6a6ad4739f59e1d45f434bff775a)), 117-130

Acker, J. (2006a). Class questions: feminist answers. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc.

Acker, J. (2006b). Inequality regimes: gender, class, and race in organizations. Gender and Society, 20(4), 441-464.

Anker, R. (1997). Theories of occupational segregation by sex: an overview, International Labour Review, 136(3), 315-339.

Collinson, D., Knights, D., & Collinson, M. (1990). Managing to discriminate. London, UK: Routledge

Kanter, R. M. (1977). Men and women of the corporation. New York City, NY: Basic Books.

Seierstad, C. and Opsahl, T. (2011). "For the few not the many? The effects of affirmative action on presence, prominence, and social capital of female directors in Norway." Scandinavian Journal of Management **27** (1).

Teigen, M. (2000). The affirmative action controversy. NORA Nordic Journal of Women’s Studies, 8(2), 63-77.

UNDP (2007-2008). Human Development Report 2007/8. New York.

WEF (2010). The Global Gender Gap Report. R. Hausmann, L. D. Tyson and S. Zahidi, World Economic Forum.