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Included, but still not equal. Gender segregation at quota regulated boards

Norway was the first country in the world to pass legislation specifying gender representation on company boards of directors. The Norwegian Parliament passed a new regulation in December 2003 that required at least 40 per cent of each gender on company boards. Before the reform, law opponents claimed that the new women directors would not be allowed to participate fully in board decision-making. Instead their role would only be window dressing. The article studies this allegation.

The law went into force in the beginning of 2008 and it led to major changes in the gender composition of corporate boards. In 2002, only about 4 per cent of board members were women, while in 2009, all boards had reached the goal of 40 per cent women. The law's successful implementation is due to its rather tough sanctions for noncompliance. After several warnings, legal authorities will dissolve firms not following the rules.

Earlier research shows that nearly all companies managed to find competent women to sit at their boards (Storvik 2010). A survey sent to all board directors after the reform showed that the new women directors were perceived as equally competent as the men who left the board as a consequence of the law. Most directors did not notice any changes at all in board work before and after the reform.

As mentioned, law opponents prior to the reform argued that the new women would not be allowed to fully participate in the boards work. This development resembles what in more scientific terms often is called gender re-segregation. Hughes (1958) uses the term re-segregation to account for a process where different ethnic groups who are integrated in work organizations become re-segregated in the same organizations. As later research has shown, re-segregation also is a powerful force separating men and women in working life (Reskin and Padavic 2002). Tienari (1999:1) even talks about the "inherently rigid and self-fulfilling process" of gender re-segregation in work organisations. As the quota law has integrated the earlier highly gender segregated boards, we shall investigate tendencies of gender re-segregation at the board level. We shall focus on vertical segregation and especially on the *informal* aspects of segregation. Does informal role segregation hinder women in participating fully in the boards' decision-makings and mainly make them window-dressing, we ask. Further, we will discuss possible reasons for re-segregation.

Formally, boards clearly are gender segregated; a very low percentage of chairs and CEOs are women and the percentages have barely increased after the reform. Figures from Statistics Norway show that in 2008 only 5 per cent of chairs were women and this also applied to 5 per cent of CEOs. In 2013 these figures had raised to respectively 11 and 6 per cent (http:// statbank.ssb.no/statistikkbanken). This illustrates that the number of women chairs has increased very slowly and the number is disproportionally very low if we take into consideration that that 40 percent of the directors now are women.

The questions outlined above will mainly be studied on basis of a survey sent to all board members of public limited companies in 2009. In the survey directors are asked to estimate their own individual influence in different ways. The response rate was 62 per cent.

Theoretical background and earlier empirical research

Gender research has later used the term segregation to account for the fact that men and women to a large degree often inhabit different sectors, occupations, workplaces, jobs and hierarchical levels. Gender segregation has mainly been studied as a phenomenon related to occupations, but jobs are segregated to an even higher degree (Burchell 1996). Gender segregation also occurs when men and women are placed in the same occupation (Benschop and Dooreward 1998, Tienari1999, Bolton and Muzio 2008). In addition, research also show that teams have a tendency towards gender segregation. Even though men and women are supposed to carry out the same kind of work inside teams, different cultural roles for men and women sometimes emerge (Wallace 1999, Metcalfe and Lindstrom 2003).

Horizontal gender segregation at company boards

Some studies of male and female directors report patterns of gender segregation in work division, interests and cultural roles. Kesner (1988), Petersen and Philpot (2007) and Carter et al (2010) have also shown that women directors more often are elected to the so called "soft" committees on boards, which also are the ones with the lowest prestige. The study does not tell us if this was because the women themselves preferred these committees or not. Bilimoria and Piderit (1994) come to the same result and they also control for qualifications.

Bradshaw and Wicks (2000) find that women on boards do not have feminist agendas, but similar to men see their main role as protecting shareholder value. However, studies also report that women on boards are more oriented to philanthropy than men who are more oriented to economic performance (Ibrahim and Angelidis 1994). Adams and Ferreira (2009) find that women board members are tougher monitors of firm performance than men. Heidenreich and Storvik (2010) find only one different prioritizing between men and women at the quota regulated Norwegian boards. They report that women to a higher degree accentuates that their roles as directors are to make sure that the company follows rules and regulations. Some studies also argue that women's boardroom presence can lead to more civilized behaviour and sensitivity to other perspectives (Billimoria 2000, Fondas and Sassalos 2000, Huse and Solberg 2006, Huse 2008). Heidenreich (2014) finds that the new female directors recruited to boards as a result of the quota law have been recruited through the same channels as men, mainly professional networks.

Further, it is a sign of vertical segregation that women disproportionally seldom are found as chairs at the boards (Petersen and Philpot 2007). This is as noted particularly true for the Norwegian quota regulated boards. It is of course possible that women do not want to be chairs or that they lack other qualifications typical for chairs. According to Kesner (1988) chairs do often have business backgrounds and long tenure, and in her study women less seldom had these characteristics. Earlier research shows that women at the quota regulated boards have similar occupational background to men, but have shorter tenure (Heidenreich and Storvik 2010) and that they more seldom have CEO experience (Ahern and Dittmar 2012).

Vertical gender segregation at company boards

Research also reports patterns of informal vertical segregation on boards. Westphal and Milton (2000) find that minority directors sometimes are marginalized in board decision making. This, however, only occur when they lack prior experience from a minority position and social capital. In line with the former mentioned study, Huse and Solberg (2006) found that women board members often experienced that men had talked to each other before the board meetings and that decisions were already taken in advance when they were introduced at the meeting. On the other hand, Elstad and Ladegaard (2010) find that women directors experience high levels of influence and information sharing and low levels of self-censorship. Nevertheless, the study also show that women directors perceive that they do receive more information, engage in more informal interaction and are more influential when the ratio of female board directors increases. Only six per cent of the women in this study are directors in public limited companies and this means that even fewer have attained their position as a result of the quota law. Elstad and Ladegaard’s study is in accordance with the findings of Konrad, Kramer and Erkut (2008), namely that when there are more than three women at a board they are more satisfied with their own performance than on boards were they are fewer. On the background of these studies, it is fruitful to the raise the question if some sort of informal re-segregation hinders women in minority to become full participants in the boards’ decision-making. Further, this also raises the question about the causes behind the potential re-segregation.

To summarize, the earlier research shows tendencies of both horizontal and vertical segregation. One tendency of horizontal segregation, namely placing men and women in different committees with different status attached to them, adds to a vertical segregation of men and women at the boards. We also see formal vertical segregation, in the form of women disproportionally seldom inhabit the role as chairs at the boards. Further, we also see signs of informal vertical segregation as some studies suggest that women when they are in a minority position exert less influence at the board.

Explanations for gender segregation at boards

Kanter (1977:211) has described thoroughly how women in organizations can meet social barriers which hinder smooth operation and the ability to get things done. She names these forces *visibility*, *contrast* and *assimilation.* Heightened visibility makes, among other things, women judged harder and creates more performance pressure. This can again, according to Li (1994) result in that minorities especially will try to avoid conflict and controversies. Further Kanter argues that women are treated as symbols; either as showpieces or as representatives of womanhood. Women are seen primarily as women as secondarily as professionals.

The second process, assimilation, happens when women are given special jobs or attributed stereotypical identities and forced into accepting them. The assimilation process is not to the general environment, but to roles culturally prescribed for women. Kanter describes four such stereotypes: mother, seductress, pet and iron maiden. The stereotypes make the women understandable, but also set them apart from mainstream interaction. Stereotypical prejudices might also have the consequence that the minority's arguments are less valued in decision-making (Miller and Brewer 1996).

The third process, contrast, refers to a situation where differences between men and women are exaggerated and individual difference is supressed. One consequence, Kanter (1977: 226) suggests, is that women are shut out of informal networks and isolated. The reason for this is because the male majority find it difficult to trust women. People trust people who are similar to themselves, Kanter argues. Potentially embarrassing and damaging information, such as how to get around formal rules and political plotting for mutual advantages, is often exchanged and discussed in informal settings. Hence, when women are shut out from these informal gatherings they also miss out on the politics behind the formal system.

According to Kanter (1977) these barrier are created when women (or men) are in a minority positions and therefore are what she calls tokens. At the quota regulated boards women are not in a minority position, but find themselves in what Kanter terms gender balanced groups and so these processes should not occur. However, Kanter's theory about ratios has been challenged. Ott (1989) shows that men often do not experience the minority position as troublesome. Moreover Gustavson (2008) partly disagrees with Kanter and argues that his study shows that it is not only the ratio which is important but also the context. As women typically remain a minority in the business elite context, they could experience social barriers regardless of their ratio on a board because of a general low esteem resulting from gender stereotyping.

According to Hughes (1958) discrimination is only one reason for re-segregation and there are also other more legitimate reasons. Such legitimate reasons can be individual preferences and choices, qualifications and other resources. In the context of the board it is likely that some board members might both have stronger interests and more to say than others because they control certain resources (McNulty and Pettigrew 1999).

Board directors' role in decision-making

Different theoretical contributions have described the role of the board in different ways. Some suggest that non-executive directors are mainly decoration, or what we here have called window-dressing, and are barely involved in strategy (Mace 1971, Lorsh and MacIver 1989). Others argue that boards can play an important role in this respect. McNulty and Pettigreew (1999) belong to the last group who argue that non-executive directors can exert influence, and they have also described interaction mechanisms by which this is done. From a sociological perspective it is possible to argue that directors become socialized into the normative expectations and priorities of the corporate elite (Mills 1956, Useem 1984, Palmer and Barber 2001). Stevenson and Radin (2009) point out that not all directors on a board are equally influential. They refer to Hill (1995) who was the one who initially argued that many boards have an inner elite organised around the chair or the company's CEO. Stevenson and Radin show that directors' social ties to other directors on the board are important in this respect. Directors with ties to other directors exert more influence at the board. Factors such as prior CEO-experience, being a member of an important board committee, having ties to directors at other boards or being independent of the management in the company had less effects on directors' influence than social ties (Stevenson and Radin 2009:29). Løyning (2011) has studied social capital among men and women directors in public limited companies in Norway after the quota reform. He finds that women have equal or more social capital than men on most measures.

The reason why social capital is so important might be that many discussions and decisions in reality took place outside the boardroom. To assure a smooth running of the board, CEOs rely on "go-to people" to give them advice and chairs mediate between conflicting fractions (Stevenson and Radin 2009:38). Stevenson and Radin (2009:27) also finds that directors self-reported influence at the board coincide with the degree of influence ascribed to them by other board members. Their study is based on a very small sample of respondents (51) and the analysis does not include variables such as board roles, ownership interests, number of directorships, tenure or gender. Hence, it is too soon to draw strong conclusions from this study. Huse et al (2009:587) find that women and employee-elected directors rate their own esteem at the board lower than men rate these groups esteem.

Individual women's influence in board decision making will here be studied in two ways; ability to get support for suggestions and belongingness to the boards inner circle. The first dimension reveals both the directors status and perceived competence. Other studies have used similar measures of influence. Westphal and Milton (2000:376) asked directors “To what extent do you influence strategic decision making?”, Stevenson and Radin (2009:27) asked directors to “rate each person’s influence in business decisions in general” and Elstad and Ladegard (2010:11) used three statements to measure influence (“My propositions are approved when decisions are made”,” I experience that my opinions are taken seriously by the board”, “It is easy to obtain support for my views and propositions”). The second dimension, belongingness to inner circle, is not used in the other studies. It reveals directors social status and closeness to the most influential persons at the board. The first dimension will often overlap with the second one, but not always as we shall see.

Background

While Norway is one of the countries with the highest rates of working women and the highest percentages of women in politics, the representation of women in positions of power in work organisations is still one of the lowest in the Western world. This has been labelled the Norwegian paradox (Kvande 1998: 1) and it still persists. In 2002 one year prior to the law, about 4 per cent top managers in the most influential companies were women (Skjeie and Teigen 2003: 57) while parallel statistics for United States show 14 per cent, United Kingdom 17 per cent and Germany 8 per cent female top managers at the time (International Labour Office 2004: 21). The new quota regulation appears, at least partly, as a reaction to the low stable level of female managers. While it appeared nearly impossible for the government, via the law, to increase the number of female managers in the private sector, it was possible to increase female representation on company boards (Teigen 2008).

The government made the new quota regulation as an amendment to the Companies Act. It requires that both genders make up at least 40 per cent of the directors at the board, approximately (for details see www.lovdata.no/dokument/NL/lov/1997-06-13-45, §6-11 a.).

The quota regulation applies to all publicly owned companies and to public limited companies in the private sector. Thereby, the quota regulation targets central parts of the Norwegian economy. A public limited company is a company in which none of the owners are personally liable for the company's debts. This type of company usually has many shareholders and rather strict rules regarding the composition of the board and the amount of share capital. The law requires a company to be registered as a public limited company to be listed on the Oslo Stock Exchange. These companies are the elite of the Norwegian economy. There are approximately 450 public limited companies in Norway. The government has not yet proposed a quota regulation for privately owned limited liability companies. Most of these companies are very small family enterprises with few owners and the owners are themselves members of the boards. Less strict legal rules applies to this type of company. In Norway there are 164 000 private limited companies. In 2005, Norwegian public limited companies averaged 136 million EUR in sales, while private limited companies averaged 2 million EUR in sales (Heidenreich 2009: 222).

The quota regulation applies to what is elsewhere termed ‘the supervisory board’. In contrast to companies in central Europe, Norwegian companies have only one board, a so-called one-tier system (Hagen 2010:67). This means that there exists only a supervisory board, consisting of owners’ representatives and in many cases employee-elected representatives. Norwegian companies do not have an executive board of managers; the company instead delegates the task of management to one person, a general manager (CEO). The board of directors appoints the general manager. The general manager is responsible for the day-to-day management of the company’s activities. However, the board still has the final responsibility for the management of the company, and the general manager must follow the guidelines and orders issued by the board of directors. The board of directors shall ensure that the business activities are soundly organised. It must keep itself informed of the company's financial position and is obliged to ensure that its activities, accounts and asset management are subject to adequate control.

When the Norwegian government introduced the quota rule, it was unique; no other country had implemented similar regulations. Since its introduction, a diffusion process seems to be taking place. All over Europe, the Norwegian corporate boards' quota rule has sparked debates about the persistent male dominance in economic decision-making and about the possibility and feasibility of adopting similar quota arrangements (see e.g., *The Economist* 13 March 2010). The Spanish government has committed to achieve board representation of at least 40 per cent for each gender by the year of 2015. Iceland has recently followed suit and will require companies with more than 50 employees to have board representation of at least 40 per cent for each gender from 2013. France has also decided that 40 per cent of board members should women for certain types of companies by the year of 2017 (Ahern and Dittmar 2012:142). Similar policies are also either being implemented or being intensely debated in many countries, including the Netherlands, Sweden, Belgium, Germany, England and Canada.

Data and method

Overall, there are 2393 directorships in public limited companies (plc-companies) in 2008 in the official registry (the Brønnøysund Register Centre). These directorships are divided among 1938 persons. This study captures the whole directorship population with some minor exceptions. Directors with addresses in foreign countries, totally 291, were removed from the list as were directors without private addresses, all 44. Further, removed from the list were also memberships in companies dissolved, transformed or taken over by other companies, in all 232 directorships. This process reduced the number of directorships in the study group to 1959. [1] In all 38 % of the excluded directors were women. It is unlikely that this reduction has introduced a systematic bias of any sort in the dataset.

Many directors in public limited companies are members of several such boards. To avoid contacting the same person more than one time, the list was rearranged such that no name occurred more than once. This led to a considerable reduction of the list to 1411 directorships. As men and women have the same number of plc-directorships (Løining 2011) men's number of directorship were not more reduced than women's by this strategy.

All board members received a questionnaire by email or by post, if it was not possible to find their email addresses. Board members serving on multiple boards were asked to respond only concerning the company with most employees. A representative's experiences might vary between different boards, and it was considered most important to capture experiences from the most influential companies.

A small number of respondents contacted had been replaced since the start of 2008 and were no longer board members, but we asked them to answer the questionnaire regarding the last board they served. This applies to about ten per cent of the respondents. In all, 880 people replied, for an overall response rate of 62 per cent. However, since not all respondents have answered all questions and since some errors occurred also in the coding of answers, N varies somewhat in the different analyses.

[1] The plan was to contact all respondents through email. Therefore, all firms which had not listed the board members' email addresses were contacted. Many firms were very reluctant to supply email addresses; therefore, the strategy had to be dropped. The contact with the firms, however, provided useful information about which firms were about to change registration form, or were in the process of being dissolved or taken over by other companies, or about board members who could not speak Norwegian.

The respondents are in central ways representative of the population of directors in public limited companies. Female directors make up 40 per cent of the respondents in this study as they do in the quota-regulated population, according to Statistics Norway.[2] This also means that male and female directors have the same reply-rate. Compared to men, women in the study are younger (Appendix, A1) and this is also in accordance with the director population (Statistics Norway 2008).[3]

The majority of respondents in this study, 555, are directors in companies listed on the Oslo stock exchange, while 317 are directors in public limited companies not listed. This ratio is what one should expect given that half of all public limited companies are listed and that these companies generally have more directors on each board than do the not listed companies, according to an earlier study (see Lervik et al. 2005: 18).

Among the respondents, 25 per cent state that they or someone in their family own shares of some noticeable worth in the company were they are directors. In Econ's study carried out in 2003 before the law went into force, 35 per cent stated that they were owners. There might be several reasons for the discrepancy. One reason might be that owners are under- represented in our study and another reason might be that the question formulation is somewhat different in the two studies. A third explanation, and maybe the most likely one, is that the lower number of owners is a reform effect (see later discussion on ownership). Several of the analyses control for the effect of ownership.

In all 20 per cent of the directors in this study are chairs. Figures from Statistic Norway for 2009 show that this in accordance with the population. Here 17 per cent of

[2] StatBank Norway, table 07249, board members roles in public limited companies based on gender, sector, type of role and number of employees, accessed 25 November 2010

[3] http://ssb.no/emner/10/01/ner/art-2008-01-14-01.html

directors are chairs. Only 7 per cent of the chairs in our study are women. This is the exact same as in the population, according to Statistic Norway.[4]

If we look at the business sectors the respondents represent, we find that they reflect the population fairly well. An earlier study (Econ 20003: 16) shows that most directorships for plc-companies appear in financial intermediation and real estate sector, while in our study this sector only comes second (Heidenreich and Storvik 2010). In the main analysis, we will control for the effect of sector.

Respondents were told that participation in the study was voluntary and that full anonymity was guaranteed. The survey's introduction states the aim of the study is to look at recruitment to board positions, and attitudes toward and experience from board work. One would expect that the directors most likely to respond would be those who find the survey's topic interesting. Even though the quota reform is not mentioned in the survey's introduction many respondents probably perceived a connection. Therefore, board members who were very positive or very negative towards the reform were probably especially eager to answer the questionnaire. Consequently, board members with such attitudes might be somewhat overrepresented in the study.

Variables

The first dependent variable concerns the ability of the board member to get support for her or his proposals. To measure this dimension we asked the following question: "Do the other

[4] StatBank Norway, table 07249, board members roles in public limited companies based on gender, sector, type of role and number of employees, accessed 25 November 2010

directors support you suggestions at board meetings?” The respondents were given five response alternatives: (1) very often, (2) often, (3) relatively often, (4) relatively rare, and (5) rarely, never. In the questionnaire it is stated that “very often” means at every board meeting. The variable was recoded so “very often” was given the value 5, etc.

The second dependent variable was the director’s experience of belonging to an inner circle at the board. This was measured by asking the respondents to report whether they saw themselves as a member of an inner circle of the board. The board members had four alternative answers to choose from: (1) yes, (2) to some extent, (3) no and (4) “do not experience any inner circle”. We selected those respondents that perceived that there in fact is an inner circle (alternatives 1, 2 and 3), and based upon their replies we constructed a dichotomous variable with the following values 1 (yes and to some extent) and 0 (no).

In the statistical models we have included several control variables which are assumed to have an independent effect upon the two dependent variables and which in addition may have a gender dimension.[5]

(1) We control for the directors’ roles within the board because earlier research has found that this is one important factor influencing what is going on in the board and because women more seldom are chairs. Hill (1995) finds that chairs have more influence than other directors, and results from Huse et al (2009) indicate that employee-elected directors probably are less influential than others. Against this background we have constructed four dummy variables which represent different board roles: (a) chair, (b) vice chair, (c) ordinary shareholder-elected director, and (d) employee-elected director.

[5] Because of the relatively large number of independent and control variables in the models there is a danger of collinearity. We have tested for collinearity using the “collin” option in the SAS program. The test shows no indication of significant collinearity.

(2) We also believe that ownership interests in the company can have a significant effect upon how the directors are positioned in the inner hierarchy of the board. Moreover, we know that women more seldom than men are owners (Spilling 2002). To follow up this idea we have constructed three dummy variables: (a) The board member himself/herself or someone in his/her closest family has owner interests in the company, (b) the director represents an owner or institutional investor, (c) the board member is neither an owner him-/herself or a representative for any owners.

(3) The directors' main occupation might affect their position within the board. Prior CEOs are supposed to have the expertise and knowledge necessary for acquiring influence (Stevenson and Radin 2008:23), and we know that there are very few women who are CEOs. We constructed three dichotomous (1/0) variables representing the directors' main occupation; (a) Owner or partner at own workplace, (b) manager at own workplace, and (c) board directorships as main income activity.

(4) and (5) Earlier research has shown that directors with multiple board memberships are more influential than directors with single board memberships, and that women more often have only single board memberships (Grønmo and Løining 2003:126). We have therefore included number of directorships held in ASA boards and AS boards respectively as control variables. Both variables are constructed as continuous variables with five values from zero to four or more directorships.

(6) It is probable that people who make suggestions opposing common assumptions at the board get less support for their suggestions. Moreover it is possible that women less frequently present divergent views in the board. As mentioned, Li (1994) found in her study that minorities more often wanted to avoid controversies. To control for this possibility we asked the following question: "How often do you promote divergent opinions in the board?"

The respondents were given five response alternatives: (a) very often, (b) often, (c) fairly often, (d) fairly rarely, (e) rarely or never. The variable is used as a continuous variable.

(7) Mace 19771, Lorsh and MacIver (1989) argue that external directors have less influence than directors who are part of the firm's management. Fondas and Sassalos (2000) show that it is more common for women to be external directors. To look at this aspect we have constructed a variable measuring if board directors are employed in the company as managers. The variable has two values (1) indicate that the director is top manager or middle manager in the company, or is manager in a company owned by the first company (2) the director do not have such a manager position.

(8) In addition level of education, as the most prominent indication of what Becker (1964) terms human capital, is likely to have an effect on directors' influence (Lynall et al. 2003), and earlier research has shown that women directors have higher education levels (Storvik 2012). We have constructed a continuous variable which represents the educational level of the respondents. The variable has five values: (a) Primary school/ lower secondary school/vocational upper secondary school, (b) general upper secondary school, (c) higher education three years or less, (d) higher education four or five years, and (e) higher education six years or more.

(9) Age may also have an effect of course. It is probable that older directors have more experience and better networks and therefore more influence. Female directors are younger than male directors (Statistics Norway http://ssb.no/emner/10/01/ner/art-2008-01-14-01). The age variable is constructed as four dummy variables: (a) Younger than 40 years, (b) 40-50 years, (c) 51-60 years, and (d) over 60 years.

(10) It is possible that tenure at the board has impact on directors' influence. Women directors are likely to have shorter tenure as influence at the board as there were very few women at the board before the quota law went into force. We therefore also control for tenure

at the board in question with a variable with four values: (a) Tenure less than 1 year, (b) tenure 1-3 years, (c) tenure 4-6 years, and (d) tenure seven years or more.

(11) In addition it is possible that women have less of social capital in the form of network resources, making them less influent at the board. Stevenson and Radin (2008) find that ties to other members at the board give directors influence. We cannot measure ties to other directors as precise as Stevenson and Radin do. However, we shall use one less fine grained measure in our analyses, namely initiated contact with other directors with the aim of influencing board-decisions. We constructed a variable with six values: (a) very often (before every board meeting), (b) often, (c) fairly often, (d) relatively rarely, (e) rarely, and (f) never. The variable is used a continuous variable where (a) is given he value (6), (b) is given the value (5), and so on.

(12) Lastly, we have included a variable measuring how often the board meets. The variable has four values and is used as a continuous variable.

Findings

As indications of directors' influence on board decision making we shall look at the two dimensions already described. Firstly, we shall see if women to a lesser degree experience approval of their suggestions in board discussions than men. Secondly, we shall see if women more seldom than men experience that they belong to an inner circle at the board. While the first dimension reflects both directors' status and competence, the second reflect status and closeness to central persons inside the board.

In order to examine whether women receive less support for their opinions or proposals than men we have carried out two regression analyses (OLS-regression). Model 1 in column one in table 1 presents only the bivariate relationship between experiencing approval of one's opinions and gender. Model 2 in column two includes gender and also all the control variables. As model 1 demonstrates, men significantly more often experience approval of their opinions and proposals than women. This tendency also holds when we control for other variables such as official role at the board, ownership interests, number of board memberships, position at main workplace, number of years of education, tenure at the board, and age. The difference between men and women is, however, small. From the estimate in the first column we can see that men approximately score 0.31 higher than women on a scale where from 1 to 5 where 5 indicates a high degree of support for one's own suggestions. When we in the second column control for all the other independent variables, this difference is reduced to 0,16.

(Table 1 in here)

The analysis further shows a positive significant relation between getting suggestions supported and (1) being a chair, (2) having a high number of plc-directorships, (3) having management or (4) board directorships as their main occupation or source of income. (5) Further, there is a positive relationship between initiating contact with other directors between board meetings and experience support for suggestions. (6) There is, however, a negative relation between getting support and being an employee-elected board member. In other words, both employee representatives and women directors experience that their suggestions get less support.

One reason why women might experience less support for their suggestions could be that they often propose more radical and conflicting views than men. Indeed, one reason for introducing the quota law was that one assumed that women would have different perspectives from men (Bolsø 2011). Table 1 shows, however, that presenting divergent opinions does not affect the board members' feeling of being listened to.

Table 2 exhibits to what extent gender, controlled for other variables, influences the perception of being included in an inner circle at the board. In the analyses presented in this table we have used logistic regression. Column 1 in Table 2 shows that more men than women claim that they belong to the inner circle at the board. This tendency also holds when we include the control variables listed in the previous analysis (column 2), but the tendency is reduced. From the estimates in the first column in table 2, we can calculate that the likelihood for women to see themselves as members of an inner circle is 54% compared to 73% for men. From the second column, we can see that when we control for the other independent variables the difference between men and women is reduced. For a woman who are an ordinary shareholder-elected director with short tenure, no ownership interests, few directorships, who are not a manager, are under 40 years, attend few meeting, do not make contact with other directors between meetings and do not propose divergent opinions, the likelihood that she feels she belongs to the inner circle is 12 %. For a ditto man the likelihood is 19 %.

(Table 2 in here)

In addition the analysis show a statistically positive relationship between belonging to the inner circle and (1) being a chair, (2) having ownership interests in the company, (3) representing an institutional investor, and (4) having management as one's main occupation. Further a positive relationship also existed between initiating informal contact with other board members before meetings, and promoting divergent opinions. A negative relationship appeared between perception of being included in an inner circle and being an employee-elected director and increasing age. Research show that it is among the directors under 40 years that we find the highest percent of owners or someone in close family with a owner (Heidenreich 2014:125). This explain why directors in this group are more influential than the older directors.

As the two tables demonstrate, it differs between the two analyses which factors have an effect upon the variables representing status within the board. This variation reflects the particular character of each of the two status dimensions. While for instance ownership interests in the company is significantly related to feeling of belongingness to an inner circle, this factor does not seem to effect whether the respondents experience that their proposals are accepted. The explanation might be that ownership does not necessarily make a person very competent, but it does make a person important to the company and therefore also central to the board. Further, that chairs experience support for their suggestions and see themselves as part of an inner circle might reflect that they are both seen as highly competent and as central persons, while the opposite to some degree appear to be the case with employee-elected members.

Lastly, one should also consider if women's less experience of influence could be a result of a stigma created by the quota law. Heilman et al (1997) show that women who enter positions as results of quota regulations can get undeserved stigmas as incompetent. This can of course also lead to weekend their influence at the board. However, if we look at women who entered the boards before the law started to work (4 years tenure or more) with the group who entered later we find no difference in influence (table only shown on request).

Discussion and conclusion

Women to a lesser degree report that they influence board decision-making than men. The difference is not surprising, as male directors exhibit more of the characteristics which are shown to facilitate influence. What is surprising is that the gender difference still holds when we control for many of these conditions. After controlling for many factors predicted to be of importance the difference is small, but still significant.

One possible reason for women's lower reported influence could be that they are more modest than men when they evaluate their own contribution and status. However, one should remember that this is a highly selected group of women, and that research on women and men managers usually do not find differences in traits or management style (Alvesson and Billing 1997:168). In addition and more importantly, the measures used in this study show nearly all the differences in influence between groups of directors that one could predict from earlier research and sound reason. The analysis show that chairs, owners, managers, directors with many board memberships, directors who have board work as their main income, directors who are shareholder-elected and make contact between meetings are more influent than the others. These findings point in the direction that the measure used is valid. Hence, it is also likely that the gender effect show real differences in influence between men and women. This implies that informal *re-segregation* of a vertical sort has taken place at the boards.

Earlier research has shown that men and women at the ASA-boards are very similar in what they see as important board tasks (Heidenreich and Storvik 2010). Nevertheless, it is possible that women and men are found in different types of board committees and that women are underrepresented in the most influential committees at the board, as earlier research has found (Kesner 1988, Petersen and Philpot 2007, Carter et al 2010). Still, having controlled for all these other variables there is no obvious reason why they should not be found in these committees. So, while lack of important committee membership might mitigate the effect, it is not the final reason.

A possible explanation for women's lower experience of influence could be caused by lack of perceived competence. Ahern and Dittmar (2012) show that the new director women more seldom have CEO experience and argue that this makes them less competent. Nevertheless, research also shows that new women have formal qualifications very similar to the men, but a clearly higher level of education (Storvik 2012). Further, this research also shows that the remaining directors after the reform see the new women directors as equally competent as the men who left.

According to Stevenson and Radin (2009) social capital is crucial for a director's influence at the board. We know from Lønings study (2011) that men and women at the PLC boards have the same amount of social capital, measured by formal positions at different boards. Further, we have also controlled for directors' inclinations to initiate informal contact with other directors between meetings. This indicates that social capital can not explain the gender difference in influence.

Another question one could ask is if the gender effect is actually a quota effect. This would imply that women who were recruited after the quota law have lower influence, but not women recruited before the quota law started to work. As we have seen, do we not find such a difference.

After having ruled out all other explanations, one has to consider explanations suggesting different types of gender discrimination. Heightened visibility, gender stereotypes and isolation are common theoretical explanations why women have less influence. One possibility is that women are stereotyped and that this means that their suggestions are lower valued. Further it is possible that isolation exclude women from inner circles at the board. According to Kanter (1977) these kinds of mechanisms only operate when women are in minority positions and not on gender balanced boards such as the quota boards. However, while women no longer are in a minority positions inside the boards they are still a minority in the business life context. As Gustavson (2008) argues this can also be a position creating disadvantages. It is possible that the number of women also must increase in a wider context to ensure women the same status as men on boards.

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Tables

Table 1: Experience of support for own suggestions at board meetings (OLS-regression). Estimates and standard deviations in brackets.

Intercept	3,31 (0,04)**	2,62 (0,22)**
Gender: Man=1	0,31 (0,06)**	0,16 (0,07)*
Board role (group of reference is other shareholder-elected director): - Chair - Vice-chair - Employee-elected director		 0,49 (0,07)** 0,09 (0,09) -0,45 (0,09)**
Employed as manager in the company or as manager in a company owned by the firm where the respondent is director.		0,15 (0,08)
Having or representing owner interests in the company (compared with no owner interests in the company): - Director or his/her family has owner interests in the company - Representing an institutional investor		 -0,04 (0,07) -0,12 (0,07)
No. of years as member of the board - 1-3 years - 4-6 years - 7 or more years		 -0,16 (0,09) -0,04 (0,10) -0,13 (0,11)
No. of directorships in ASA-companies.		0,08 (0,03)*
No. of directorships in AS companies		0,01 (0,02)
No. of board meetings		0,002 (0,03)
Educational level		0,03 (0,02)
Age (comp. to under 40 years) 40-50 years 51-60 years Over 60 years		 0,13 (0,08) 0,13 (0,09) 0,02 (0,10)
Owner or partner in own workplace		0,06 (0,07)
Manager in own workplace		0,13 (0,06)*
Board work is main income		0,25 (0,09)**
Informal contact with other board members		0,07 (0,02)**
Promote divergent opinions		0,04 (0,03)
R2	0,03	0,23
Number of directors	838	833

** Significant at the 1 per cent level;* Significant at the 5 percent level. Source: the survey on recruitment to ASA-boards.

Table 2: Perception of belonging to an inner circle within the board. (Logistic regression). Estimates and standard deviation in brackets.

Intercept	0,14 (0,13)	-1,95 (0,93)***
Gender: Man=1	0,84 (0,17)***	0,47 (0,26)*
Board role (group of reference is other shareholder-elected director): - Chair - Vice-chair - Employee-elected director		 0,97 (0,35)*** 0,51 (0,40) -1,10 (0,36)***
Employed as manager in the company or as manager in a company owned by the firm where the respondent is director.		0,13 (0,34)
Having or representing owner interests in the board (compared with no owner interests in the company): - Director or his/her family has owner interests in the company - Representing an institutional investor		 0,56 (0,27)** 0,89 (0,30)***
No. years as member of the board - 1-3 years - 4-6 years - 7 or more years		 -0,37 (0,37) -0,16 (0,40) -0,05 (0,46)
No. of directorships in ASA companies		0,20 (0,14)
No. of directorships in AS companies		0,01 (0,08)
No. of board meeting in a year		- 0,07 (0,13)
Educational level:		-0,16 (0,10)
Age (compared with the group under 40 years) 40-50 years 51-60 years Over 60 years		 -0,42 (0,33) -0,69 (0,36)* -0,90 (0,42)**
Owner or partner in own workplace		0,12 (0,28)
Manager in own workplace		0,51 (0,26)**
Board memberships is main income		0,09 (0,37)
Informal contact with other directors		0,41 (0,09)***
Promote divergent opinions		0,61 (0,15)***
-2 L and L	767,909	618,197
Number of directors	591	587

*** Significant at the 1 per cent level;** significant at the 5 percent level; *significant at the 10 per cent level. Source: The survey of recruitment to ASA- boards.

Appendix 1: *Description of the variables.*

	Men		Women	
	Average	Std. Deviation	Average	Std. deviation
Receive support for own opinions	3,64	0,82	3,32	0,76
Tenure as board member	2,6	0,90	2,2	0,67
No of board meetings	2,8	0,78	2,8	0,76
Educational level	3,7	1,14	4,0	1,01
No of board memberships in ASA companies	2,2	0,72	2,2	0,89
No of board memberships in AS companies	3,5	1,64	2,5	1,48
Informal contact with other board members	3,30	1,17	2,89	1,06
Promote divergent opinions	2,66	0,78	2,46	0,71

Per cent	Men	Women
See themselves as a member of an inner circle in the board		
- Yes	35	13
- To some extent	16	24
- No	19	32
- Do not experience any inner circle	29	31
Gender	58	42
Manager in the company in which board they are members. Per cent yes	16	7
Position within the board		
- Chair	32	3
- Deputy chair	9	8
- Ordinary director elected by the shareholders	40	77
- Director elected by the employees	19	11
Owner interest in in the company		
- I or someone in my closest family have owner interests in the company	35	11
- I represent an owner or institutional investor	21	12
- I neither have nor represent any owners	44	77
Owner or partner at own workplace. Per cent yes	39	21
Manager at own workplaces. Per cent yes	43	55
Board directorships as main income activity. Per cent yes	15	11