

Ulla Riis & Leif Lindberg (1996) *Värdering av kvinnors respektive mäns meriter vid tjänstetillsättning inom universitet och högskolor* [Assessment of Female and Male Qualifications in Appointments Within Higher Education]. (Ds 1996:14)

The early 1990s saw a heated debate in Sweden on equality in higher education. It was argued that female academics were being discriminated, especially in recruitment to positions as professors and senior lecturers, and that ample Swedish research evidence had shown this to be a fact. However, many also contradicted the claims regarding gender discrimination and argued that meritocratic principles were being upheld. We were intrigued by this controversy. In 1994, the Swedish government granted us resources for an empirical study with the aim to cast light upon the manner in which the qualifications of female applicants are valued in comparison with male applicants' qualifications in the recruitment to academic positions.

The study was set up as a replication of a Norwegian one (Fürst 1988) having demonstrated that women and men were treated linguistically different in the expert reports on which decisions were made on academic staff appointments. We surveyed the period 1982–1995, whereas Fürst covered the years 1977–1984. We expected the Swedish picture to be principally the same as the Norwegian one, though hopefully somewhat less unequal due to (1) the Swedish 1980 Law of Equality in Working Life and (2) a later period chosen for study.

To our surprise, the results contradicted the picture of discrimination. Women made up 22 percent of the applicants but 31 percent of the persons appointed. Fürst had reported that, if the different faculties of a university were studied separately (i.e. horizontally), the 'discrimination pattern' tended to disaggregate, and this was evident in our data too.

Our data were fairly extensive: All expert reports from four different faculties/schools from four different universities regarding every third year in the period 1982–1994 were collected – in all 311 cases. In 147 of these applications, both sexes were present, and in all but a handful of the remaining 164, men competed with men only. For 126 of the 147, there were documents allowing for text analysis. Among the 126 cases, some kind of disagreement on the qualifications of at least one female and one male applicant could be identified in 24 cases, and we conducted a qualitative analysis on them. We did not find any discriminating linguistic patterns of the kind reported in the Norwegian study. Quite contrary, each expert tended to be consistent in his or her use of language regardless of whose merits were valued. In more than half of the 24 cases, the person recruited was a woman.

However, our statistical analyses of the 311 cases unveiled that in only four cases out of ten women were among the applicants. We concluded that somewhere in the system of higher education women seem to be kept out, discouraged or discriminated, only *not* in the recruitment process. Furthermore, at the time it was also often maintained that women, when competing for academic positions, ended up in long lines. We showed that, in competitions with only male applicants, the lines would hold an average of three persons, whereas competitions with women and men would encompass an average of nearly eight persons. Thus, it was clear that the women in our study faced relatively heavy competition once they applied for an academic position. Despite our conclusion, the results on lines demonstrated that the original question concerning gender discrimination was more complex than at first it seemed to be.

Our 1996 study also encompassed a bibliography on some 60 titles, most Swedish and a few Norwegian and Danish ones, on equality in recruitment to academic posts. Furthermore, at the time, it was often argued that research had "repeatedly shown" that women were being discriminated against within academia. Our bibliographic inquiry refuted this. Rather, the few studies found showed that women had claimed well in competitions for academic positions. It could be expected, we thought, that the debate on gender and the academy in the early and mid-90s would prompt new

investigations and that new data would come to the fore in the years to follow. This, along with the complexity of the issue, paved the way for our second bibliography, embracing the years 1995–2002. The aim was to establish an overview of the state of the art of the research and to lay a foundation for further research on gender in academic careers.