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Observing Gender Equity: Sweden vs. U.S.

Gender equity is the process of being fair to women and men within a broad spectrum of living and welfare standards like education, employment, and healthcare, for the purpose of eliminating the prevalence of gender discrimination. In other words, equity strives to create equality. Although no country has yet to achieve absolute gender equality, Sweden is the closest prime example of a country that has consistently accommodated their laws to promote the right to attain balance in the areas of economics, politics, education, and health, and when compared to the United States, it is evident the U.S.’s gender gap is greater than that of the Nordic country. However, by analyzing the social, economic, and political aspects of gender equity among both countries, society can further determine and assess what components the “ideal” legal system should implement to provide equal opportunity among all genders.  
 Sweden defines gender equality as one of its “cornerstones” of Swedish society, and in order to ensure justice as well as fairness among sexes, several laws and policies have been adopted. These doors of opportunities in the form of activities and programs intend to eradicate the disadvantages that prevent women and men from being equal, especially in the area of education. Gender equality is strongly emphasized in the creation of the Education Act—the foundation of all education in Sweden which states that all pupils, from pre-school to university, are to be included in an environment that stimulates development and learning regardless of gender. In fact, education is so strongly stressed that already from the age of 1, children are entitled to childcare if their parents work, study or are unemployed. Children between ages 6 and 13 are also offered before and after school care to help support the needs of both parents and their families. Additionally, school is mandatory for all children between age 7 and 16. The Swedish School Plan also derives from the Education Act. The plan promises an individualistic education for all pupils in which they are encouraged to cooperate with their teachers in choosing a proper and enjoyable education plan that best fulfills their specific needs.   
 While gender equality in terms of education in Sweden is mainly steered by the Education Act, the United States is guided by affirmative action programs which created multiple education acts enforced by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights (OCR). More specifically, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 aims to protect people from any form of discrimination and corruption based on sex in education programs as well as activities that receive Federal financial assistance. Title IX basically states that “[n]o person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in…under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.” However, this means that Title IX *only* applies to institutions that receive federal financial assistance from the Department of Education. Specifically, this includes both state and local educational agencies which is about 16,500 local school districts, 7,000 postsecondary institutions (including charter schools) and vocational rehabilitation agencies.   
 When there is a major difference of power in the workplace, this can easily produce an environment that permits or even catalyzes harassment and discrimination between men and women, though evidently, prejudice occurs more towards women. In terms of employment, Sweden also surpasses the United States, as it has reconstructed the workforce and its bylaws in order to ensure gender equality is enforced in all aspects of the workplace. As a result, the Discrimination Act was passed in 2009 in which two sections of the act specifically focus on these issues. One of the sections emphasizes the general requirement that all employers “must actively pursue specific goals to promote equality between men and women” and the other section prohibits any form of discrimination and obligates all employers to take initiative of investigating and reporting harassment. However, pay differences within the workplace is, unfortunately, still an issue under construction. According to Sweden’s official page, currently on average, women’s monthly salaries are just under 87 per cent of men’s 95 per cent.   
 On the other hand, the United States passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Title VII of the act highlights the prohibition of employers from discriminating against employees on the basis of sex, race, etc. This law is applicable to private and public colleges and employment agencies or organizations. Though, it only applies to employers with 15 or more employees. Like Sweden, the U.S. struggles with equal pay, however, the quality in pay has improved according to the International Labour Organization, as compared to women’s pay in 1979. In 1979, they earned about 62 percent as much as men and in 2010, American women earned 81 percent of what men make. Additionally, women’s involvement in the U.S. labor force was 60 percent in 2000, but in 2010, this number declined to 46.7 percent. It is also not expected to increase by 2018.  
 Gender equity, from a social, economic, and political perspective, continues to be a global and ethical issue, as it is even reflected in everyday situations occurring in two different countries. Fortunately, laws are currently being modified or improved in order to raise awareness, maintain the protection of, and develop the enforcement needed to preserve these fundamental basic human rights. As a result, equality is generally now regarded as not only a worldwide objective, but a moral necessity among societies.

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