

## **Abstract**

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This paper examines why there is a continual struggle for women in Sweden to reach gender equality within academic professions even after ten years of governmental policies promoting gender equality. The question asked is: *Given the recent reforms promoting gender equality and changing context of the work environment, how do women's coping strategies affect her possibility of achieving higher positions within academia?* Using statistical data analysis I can show a pattern where women academics tend not to return to their place of work after a period of long-term sick leave. Through empirical analysis of a focus group interview of female academics own experiences of doing career in a male dominated area is evaluated. I conclude that changed working conditions for women, with an increasing amount of de-professionalizing tasks, have lead to a situation where an increasing number of women lower their work commitment as a coping strategy or exit the profession temporarily or permanently through a period of sick leave. Both these factors, produced by the work place, prevent women from reaching top positions within Swedish universities. Thus, while women's possibilities for making a career in academia formally has been strengthen new obstacles preventing advancement within the organization have appeared. This study brings two of these new and hidden discriminating factors to the surface.

**Keywords:** Academia, discrimination, Glass ceiling, sick leave, University, women academics, work conditions, work commitment.

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## 1. Introduction

It is well documented that it is harder for women in Sweden to reach high positions in the labor market than for men (Roman 1994, Gonäs 2001). Contradictingly, Sweden often is presented as one of the most gender-equal countries in the world, though having one of the most gender segregated labor markets in the western world (Persson & Wadensjö 1997:3). The difference appears both on a horizontal as well as on a vertical level. This implies that we can find segregation as a gendered 'choice' of profession as well as within the hierarchic structure of the same organization. Universities and university colleges are no exception to this general picture. Though women comprise approximately 60 percent of students in higher education, their prominence is not reflected the picture you get when examining the structure higher up in the organization.

The 'glass-ceiling' hypothesis, that assumes that there is an invisible obstacle for women to advancement, seems to be present in the phase between the undergraduate- and doctoral level for women in academia. However, this is also true for the career steps that follow a PhD degree. Looking at the statistics it becomes evident that for every level on the academic ladder women constitute a decreasing number and only made up 14 percent of the professorships in 2001 (HSV 2001). The explanations that have been put forward for this are numerous. Among the most commonly used we find childbirth, unequal caring responsibilities for home and family, and different forms of discrimination (see Husu 2001, Jonung 1997, Pingle 2001, Roman 1994, Tyrkkö 2001). More specific for the academic working environment are the theories directing the attention towards structural factors, such as male domination, male dominated norms and cultures seen as embedded in the institution<sup>1</sup>(see Husu 200, Kronsell 2002, Rogg 2001, Søndergaard 2001). Even if the glass-ceiling metaphor is frequently used it has been argued that it is in some respects misleading (See, for example. Husu 200, Baxter & Wright 2000). The glass-ceiling metaphor emphasizes that there is *one* level in the hierarchic ordered organization that enables women from vertical advancement. This is misleading since both quantitative and qualitative research has shown that women have to struggle more than their male counterparts to reach every career level. After having successfully obtained the doctoral degree the struggle continue and in this struggle women do not compete with men on equal terms. In reality, there are larger impediments for women's advancement on every academic level. Consequently, it is not an invisible ceiling but more accurately a life long struggle to reach the same positions as their male counterparts. Feminist scholars have also directed our attention on another misleading aspect of the metaphor: the metaphor portrays

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this paper I use the word "institution" to talk about the immediate work place as well as university as an organization. At the same time I use it as Albrow (1999) defines it as social institutions involving standardized practices. And as widespread activities following norms about how things ought to be done (p. 107)

women as passive, when in reality it is a question of a struggle carried out on the initiative of an individual (Husu 2001).

This paper examines why there is a continual struggle for women to reach gender equality within academic professions given a favorable government equality policy as well as institutionalized affirmation action policies at the University. The understandings explored are sociological and based on theories developed within several social science disciplines including feminist research as well as theories of human capital both within sociology (Bourdieu 1988) and rational choice (Polachek 1987). Theories are concerned with the actions of women based on motivational assumptions as well as structural conditions. The aim of the study is to investigate factors that have impact on women's career possibilities within academia that normally are not treated as parts of the glass ceiling phenomenon. I will look at how both the rising number of long term sick leaves and decreasing work commitment, especially among women, in the light of recent organizational changes at our universities can be seen as detrimental for women's career possibilities. The question asked here is: *Given the recent reforms promoting gender equality and changing context of the work environment, how do women's coping strategies affect her possibility of achieving higher positions within academia?*

The methodologies I used to gain more knowledge of discriminatory processes in women's academic careers are three. The first method is a review of background documents of the situation of women academics within the Swedish universities. I concentrated on an analysis of recent reforms designed to promote equality as well as an analysis of statistics concerning women within the faculties of Swedish universities. The second methodology I used was a statistic analysis. I was concerned about sick leaves as an absence from work that would be an obstacle to an academic career. In this section I look at sick leaves for men and women and more specifically for women professionals. The third methodology I used was a focused group interview with five women at the associate professors level (docent) currently employed within Swedish universities. In the initial phase of the project I was working from the hypothesis that changed work conditions could create negative stress and in prolongation may result in sick leave. I anticipated that sick leaves, as an out sorting mechanism, could be one explanation to why women are held back from reaching top positions within academia. With help of the empirical material I wanted to test this hypothesis (deduction). However, throughout the project the empirical material and the results from the focus group interview did not only provide material that supported this theory but also material that pointed in other directions. The results were pointing in the direction of decreasing work commitment for women academics. Even though earlier research have indicated that organizational structures

may have an effect on work commitment, and that this is an increasing problem<sup>2</sup>, for the group of female academics it can only be said to be an hypothesis produced by my material (induction). More research is therefore needed to test this theory.

The first methodology is designed to situate an understanding of the Swedish experience so that theories of obstacles to women in academic careers, and the following section of this paper, can more readily be connected to the Swedish case. The second methodology concerned with presenting data on sick leaves was necessary to develop my hypothesis. The third methodology, empirical analysis of a group interview, is used to generate new hypothesis about how absences from work contribute to discriminatory mechanisms. The women participating in the group interview were a part of the group designated to profit from the political reforms. The group interviewed provided empirical material, which probed the theories of glass-ceilings, as well as the relevance of absences from work for caring for others or because of own sickness, in order to get to the common-sense explanations of how women academics see the development of their own career.

The disposition of the paper is divided into six chapters, so that after I situate the Swedish experience politically and statistically (Chapter Two), I turn to a presentation of different theoretical explanations of the glass ceiling in Chapter Three. In Chapter Four I present results of research concerning women and men's sick leaves. In Chapter Five I present an analysis of the group interview after a brief summary of why I chose a group interview. In this chapter, I also develop hypotheses of absence from work for own sickness, or reasons emanating from the work place, as important in the understanding of the process by which glass-ceilings (if they exist) actually work. I also analyze the changing understanding of the concept of "career" for women academics. In Chapter Six, I present a conclusion based on the Swedish situation and my empirical work in the group interview and suggest a new hypotheses that can contribute to the literature of gender discrimination within the University and among academic personal.

## **2. Background information on women's situation in Swedish academia**

In this initial section I will present and analyze information concerning two recent reforms designed to promote gender equality within Swedish universities. I will also with help of

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<sup>2</sup> The Walker Loyalty Report for Loyalty in the Workplace confirms that companies failing to build loyalty – not merely satisfaction – among employees are paying the price in turnover costs and low-productivity. While the study shows an up-tick in employee loyalty from 2001 findings, still only 30% of all U.S. employees are truly loyal. Employees see their relationships and development within the company – not compensation – as key drivers for retention, commitment, and loyalty (Drizin 2003).

statistics show on the overall gender distribution within faculties of Swedish universities. The background information presented below is important for the following sections because it helps to more readily connect and frame the discussion within a particular Swedish context.

### ***2.1. Trying to solve the problem of gender segregation in academia - Two Political Reforms***

The Swedish university system has undergone a range of changes during the last three decades. These changes have most certainly come about as a consequence of changed norms inside and outside of academia as well as out of political reforms. During the 1960s and 1970s large groups of women entered the labor market and today women and men participating in the labor market only differentiate by a few percent (Jonung 1997:48). Naturally this development has had an effect on the norms concerning women working outside of the domestic sphere. However, these changes have transformed rather than extinguished the division of labor and Sweden still has a very segregated labor market. That Sweden actually has one of the most extensive segregated labor markets in the world is foremost an effect of major build-up of the public sector which primarily employs women in caring occupations (Sainsbury 1996, Roman 1994). The gender segregation at universities and the labor market as whole is hence still very much in play. Most reforms have therefore been aimed at not only enlarging the system of higher education in a quantitative way but also qualitatively. The goal has been to raise the overall percentage of individuals in higher education and increase equality. Equality in this case does not only imply equality in regard to gender but also social, ethnic and economic background (Hetzler 2002:10-15). Apart from reform's concerning the student population there have been a number of reform's aiming at changing the structure of the organization and at the composition of the academic staff. Also here, equality has been the key word.

When looking at gender equality from a governmental policy perspective, two cases stand out. The so called, Tham-Professorships (1995) and the Promotion Reform (1997). The first reform was directly aimed at increasing the number of women professors while the second aimed at increasing the overall number of professors and lecturers through promotion from within the existing academic staff at Swedish universities and university colleges.

In the case of the Tham-Professorships, which got its name from the then Social Democratic education minister Carl Tham, affirmative action was for the first time used in the context of Swedish higher education. Until then, throughout the seventies and eighties, a discussion about affirmative action was in principle undetectable (Bondestam 2003:46). Tham's proposition challenging silent agreement or consensus therefore created some tumult inside as well as outside the academic community. It is often forgotten that the proposition was

designed to raise the number, not only of women professors, but also research associates and doctorate students, albeit being three separate measures. Moreover, the government made it clear that the quantitative change was a step in a more general displacement of power and that the reform should give incitements to challenge the ideals defined by men for scientific conduct and the overall hierarchic gender order. The proposition was built with the understanding that women ask other questions and are interested in other areas than men. Consequently it was a reform aiming both at quantitative and qualitative questions with the aspiration of emancipation (Jordansson 1999:13).

It is not only academically that affirmative action can be seen as problematic. Also the Social Democratic party, whose policies for higher education always had gone under the parole of equality, now found themselves caught in a paradox of difference (Bondestam 2003). The question if equality should be treated as equality before meritocracy came up. The problem was to consciously treat someone different because of his or her genetic composition. Would this not violate the ground rules of equality? And if affirmative action was to be used, the old faith in 'knowledge' as an objective category would have to be revised. Or is this so? In this case the answer is both yes and no, as it often is in Swedish politics. 'Is it possible to believe in affirmative action and meritocracy at the same time?' - was a question that therefore never was articulated.

The Tham-Professorships were consequently placed as an appendix to the existing meritocracy and the foundations of meritocracy as a system were never really questioned. Some 30 professorships, especially created for women, were established and appointed in 1997 (Jordansson 1999:49). This became a onetime experiment that came to an abrupt end when the EC-court decided that affirmative action violated the rules for freedom of competition. Since then, meritocracy as a system has been left untouched and the debate about gender segregation in Swedish academia has been carried out parallel to, but without affecting, the meritocracy. Goals for recruiting and appointing women professors have since then been established for every university and discipline. The responsibility to obtain these goals now lies on the individual university and university college (Odeberg 1997)

The Promotion Reform can be seen as an extension of this development in regard to gender segregation. The intention was not only to create a new career structure but also a hope that these changes would enhance women's possibilities of becoming professors. However, the overall purpose with the reform was to create one career path for everybody. While the Swedish academic career ladder in the past was made up of two separate paths, one teaching and the other research, it was now decided to combine them into one in order to make it possible for all academics to reach the highest positions (For a more exhaustive exposition see Schenk 2002). It was also recognized that the old system created an intellectual surplus that

had to be used. Traditionally professorships were limited to a restricted number. The professorships were in general fewer than the qualified applicants and the system therefore created a surplus of individuals with the right merits for becoming professors (Abrahamsson & Lund 2003:11-13.) The government changed the system in 1997 so that it became possible for duly qualified individuals to become professors through promotion. However, the promoted professors only hold the title, the promotion has no affect on working tasks or payment (Ibid. p.5). The consequence is that we now have two kinds of professors where the promoted professors do not hold the same privileges as the 'old' professors. The reform holds striking similarities to the Tham-Professorships in the sense that it kept the old system and just made an amendment to it.

Symptomatic for the two reforms is also that they have not directly aspired to solving the problem of gender segregation (Jordansson 1999:48). Instead, the responsibility has been put on the local universities. The reforms have rather been a way for the government to show its good will and declare that they are serious in their attempts at obtaining gender equality at the Swedish higher education institutions. The question is now whether it is possible to create real and lasting change through political action while at the same time increasing the local rights of self-determination (ibid.)?

The goal with the Tham-Professorships, where the appointed professors should be seen as role models and not as symbols, was that they should help in creating a more stimulating milieu for women academics to work in. The professors should also participate in the work of breaking with the male dominance, both at the universities and in the scientific conduct (Jordansson 1999). However, the thirty appointments did not result in a new trend of any sort. It is for example so that out of the increase of women professors between 1996 and 1997, 2 out of the 2.4 percent units were comprised of the Tham-Professorships (Tengner & Karlsson 2002, Table 1b. Own Calculations). The modest increase of two percent between 1997 and 2002 also gave witness to the fact that the reform did not bring about the desired change.

In the case of the Promotion Reform the National Agency for Higher Educations evaluation report concludes that the government almost reached their goal of doubling the number of professors from approximately 2000 in 1996 to 4000 in 2002 (Abrahamsson 2003:19). Thus, the intended effect of increasing the percentage of women professors did not take place. Only 22 percent of the applicants for promotion were women, and consequently 78 percent were men. This must be put in relation to the percentage of women and men among the duly qualified senior lecturers targeted in the reform as the recruitment group where women constituted 24 percent in 1998 and rose to 34 percent in 1999. These figures reflect the fact that more men than women applied and got promoted. Thus, even though women are underrepresented among the applicants the statistics show that they have the same, or actually

slightly better chances of getting promoted. When the share of promoted professors was 59 percent for men in year 1999/2000 it was 62.5 percent for women. The report can consequently conclude that women are underrepresented among the applicants but give no answer as to why this is so (ibid.). We will, in coming sections with the help of a focus group interview, explore the reasons for why women are not applying for promotion. For now, this information at least gives us enough evidence to conclude that these political mandates and reforms have not had the desired effects and have not led to any real or permanent changes. However, in the next section we will first look at the overall distribution of gender in Swedish universities.

## ***2.2. An overview of women academics in Swedish universities***

Regardless of the discussion above it is easy, before even consulting statistics, to conclude that the reforms and the overall changes of norms and attitudes towards women have enhanced women's possibilities for a successful career in academia after all. That the prospects for women of reaching top positions have become drastically improved over the last three decades in Sweden becomes evident when for example looking at the percentage of women among doctoral students. When in 1969 women only comprised 22 percent of the doctoral students the figure has by today risen to 49 percent (Schenk 2002:31). When discussing these things we should also bear in mind that women were not allowed at all at public universities until 1927 in Sweden (Jonsson 1997:16). Regardless of how interesting it is to study the historical development, this overview will lay its focus on the most recent development. This is done with respect to the political will that has been articulated over the last ten years.

The figures treating the number of academic employees between 1995 and 2002 give an idea about this rapid improvement. When in 1995 women only constituted approximately 20 percent of the Senior Lecturers the same figure for 2002 was 30 percent. The same improvement is valid for women in almost all academic occupational categories between 1995 and 2002 (Tengner & Karlsson 2002:7-11). These figures certainly bear witness to a vast improvement. However, a closer look at the statistics gives us reason to be less optimistic.

To get an overarching picture of women's career possibilities in Swedish academia we can start by looking at the overall distribution of gender at different occupational positions. Out of the whole body of fulltime employed academic personnel at Swedish universities women representation has increased from 29 percent in 1995 to 38 percent out of 22, 678 individuals in 2001 (National Agency for Higher education 2001:60). Even though we have to be conscious of the fact that these figures only give a canvas understanding of the complete

picture, they also give an idea of the improvements that has taken place. However, even if the situation for women has become better on every vocation level, and the uneven gender distribution in fields of study and faculties also improved over the years there is still strict horizontal and vertical gender segregation at play at Swedish universities. As mentioned earlier, and displayed in the table below (Table 1), the under representation of women is much more severe in the higher strata's of the organization.

Table 1. All Academic Staff Divided on Occupational Categories and Gender (2001).

	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Count %</i>
Professors	14%	86%	100%
Senior lecturers	30%	70%	100%
Lecturers	53%	47%	100%
Research Associates	39%	61%	100%
Guest –and part time Lecturers	39%	61%	100%
Research and Teaching Personnel	41%	59%	100%
Doctoral students	49%	51%	100%

Source: National Agency for Higher Education: Personal 2001

The data given in Table 1 shows the overall vertical gender segregation at Swedish universities. It is evident that some kind of obstacle prevents women from reaching the top positions. When for example women comprise 53 percent of the Lecturers they only constitute 30 percent of the Senior Lecturers. Except from the position as lecturers, women are underrepresented in every category and the statistics shows a pattern with a decreasing representation for every career step.

However, these figures do not explain why women are underrepresented in higher positions even though there has been a steady increase of women academics over the years. It is logical to conclude that the increasing number of female students will after a decade or two, lead to an increase in the number of women professors. Thus, when considering that the share of women students has been higher than 50 percent since 1977 this explanation appears to be insufficient (Schenk 2002:3). It is therefore plausible to assume that the share of women studentships does not stand in a causal relationship to, for example, women professorships even when the time displacement is taken in to account.

This assumption is true, but only to a certain extent. We can actually find a relationship between the percentage of female students, the total number of women academics and professors. For example, in the technical fields of study women comprise 31 percent of the total student body and 6 percent of professorships (SCB, tabell 15.8, 2003). Both the figures for the female students as well as the professors are in this field below the national average

and the same picture evolves if we look at areas where women students are over represented. Social Science is one such area with 62 percent women among the students and consequently a higher representation of women professors (21 percent) (ibid.). Thus, the problem with this line of reasoning is that the number of professors does not bear a relation to the number of female students. Even if there is a relationship between women's representation among students and women's representation among professors this explanation is far from complete and cannot explain the big discrepancy between the high percentage of female students and the low percentage of female professors.

It is also possible to contest the very notion we started this section with. It cannot be said to be an undisputed fact that everything is getting better. Looking at the statistics we find that between 1995 and 2002 the total number of professors in Sweden has increased by 76 percent from 4,855 to 5,863 persons and lectures with 21 percent. The reason for the big increase is without any question the promotion reform that made it possible for the individual university to promote duly qualified lecturers to professors and adjuncts without a doctorate degree to lecturers. Remarkably is that during this same period, the number of women professors has only increased by 6 percent and women lecturers with 10 percent (Tengner & Karlsson 2002:8-9). When considering this information it becomes clear that looking at overall statistics does not give an accurate picture of women's situation and possibilities of doing career in Swedish universities. This becomes even more obvious when taking into account the horizontal gender segregation displayed in Table 2

Table 2.

All Academic Staff and Professors divided on Gender according to Discipline (2001)

<i>Discipline</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women prof.</i>	<i>Male Prof.</i>
Humanities & Religion	46%	54%	25%	75%
Law	42%	58%	18%	82%
Social sciences	45%	55%	17%	83%
Mathematics	21%	79%	4%	96%
Natural sciences	33%	67%	11%	89%
Technology	21%	79%	6%	94%
Forestry Agriculture	37%	63%	17%	83%
Medicine	50%	50%	14%	86%
Odontology	52%	48%	16%	84%
Pharmacy	49%	51%	16%	84%
Veterinary Medicine	63%	37%	24%	76%
Others	82%	18%	47%	53%

Source: National Agency for Higher Education: Personal 2001

Table 2 shows the overall level of horizontal gender segregation at Swedish universities and the percentage of women professors divided among the different areas of studies. The differences between the disciplines are remarkable with a range of women academic staff from 21 percent in Mathematics and Technology to 82 percent in the category 'Other', where we find academics from art, music, and theatre etc. The incredibly low percentage of women in the technological disciplines, for example, can only partly be explained with reference to the fact that women's share of studentships were only 8 percent in the mid-sixties, 21 percent in the mid-nineties and today stand at 31 percent (Jonsson 1997:18). This is especially true when considering that women only constitute 6 percent of the professorships in this discipline today. It is easy to plead to historical conditions, but as we have seen this is not sufficient in explaining the present situation. And consequently, gender segregation is not something that will outgrow and disappear from the academic system left to its own accord.

### **3. Traditional explanations of the glass ceiling**

Since gender segregation cannot fully be explained on the basis of historical factors there must be other variables reproducing segregation. In this section an attempt is made to review the most commonly theories used in trying to explain the glass-ceiling phenomenon. For the sake of lucidity it suits our purpose well to divide the theories up in those centered around individual factors and those focusing on structural factors. However, it must be taken in to account that to separate the theories is only a theoretic maneuver. Even though single theories lay weight on specific factors that presumes to be driving forces for segregation, they often rests on assumptions related to other theories and are therefore, in some cases, to be seen as interrelated.

#### ***3.1 Individual centered theories***

I chose to define individual centered theories as those that place explanations outside of the system of production. However many macro-theories have related the sphere of reproduction as determined by the system of production. In such an argument, every theory would be related to the means of production. For the sake of developing the argument, I chose to divide theories of discrimination as related to production systems or related reproduction systems. *Division of labor within the family* is one such factor that is proven to be determinant for women's choice of occupation (Jonung 1997:50). Normally this explanation is used when discussing the horizontal gender segregation, but it is also useful in explaining the vertical gender segregation. Not to mention that the two forms of segregation are interrelated themselves. The fact that women carry out two thirds of the unpaid work at home implies that women spend 33 hours doing this kind of work (cooking, laundry, cleaning, caring responsibilities etc.) compared to men's 20 hours. The statistics confirm that men continue

working almost as if nothing has happened when becoming parents, while women adjust to the child's needs (Roman 1994:48-49). This uneven distribution of labor within the family hinders women from working fulltime and therefore prevent her from procureing the right merits, at least in the period during which the children are small. Thus, this is more than an individual's choice; it is also depending on a number of structural factors. One such example is that men generally earns more than women, and that this in turn makes it more profitable for the family to have the woman stay home with the children.

It is not only the division of labor at home that limits women's possibilities of choosing work orientation and career pattern. Research has shown that horizontal gender segregation partly has to do with individual and rational choices, as shown above. The choice can be based on a number of different factors and as well as being seen as a product of the culture or the society it was produced in, but it is still a choice. Just as men seem to be drawn towards natural sciences and technology women seem to have a preference for the arts and medicine. This is what we can call *gender specific choices*: when women or men choose an educational or career path that is typical of their gender. Gender specific choices are assumed to be a product of women and men being socialized differently and they therefore prioritize differently and have different attitudes and preferences. Family life, traditions, norms and other external factors impact our choices throughout life, but there is also an internalized gendered preference system that seem to be at work here. Women choose differently from men, not because they are forced to, but because they want to (Jonung 1997:48).

One answer to why women choose differently from men is deducible from research focusing on women's experiences of conflicts between work and family commitments. Here it is easy to conclude that women seem to be more home-oriented than career-oriented. They want to work, but in a way which does not interfere too much with their family life (Jackson 1989:117-33, Roman 1994:54). Women not married is also shown to be more involved in their work than married women, while the opposite is shown for men (Uhlenberg & Coony 1990:373-78) However, this picture is most likely not valid for the category of women academics of interest in this study. There are strong indications pointing at the fact that women with independent and qualified jobs are strongly engaged in their work. In couples where the woman has a high level of education and a qualified job, it is also shown that the man takes on more of the caring responsibilities and plays a bigger part of the unpaid work at home (Roman 1994: 61). This, however is not to say that there are no conflicts between family life and work for the women of our concern. The informants in this study, for example, all give witness of having gone through periods defined by conflicts related to family and children. During some periods, even for well-educated women, the family and the children are prioritized.

The theories focusing on the division of labor within the family have further been tied to the human capital theory. According to this theory the individual can affect her productivity at work and accordingly her salary through education, through in-service training, and through her choice of profession. Since different professions demand different levels of education, time spent at work, continuity, and ability to be available for overtime and extra work the theory assumes that women with their bigger part of unpaid work at home choose differently than men. Based on the division of labor within the family, the theory argue, women take the rational decision to invest in a shorter education, enter professions where part-time work and times of absence is accepted and do minimal harm to the prospects of advancement and salary. The demands that a higher education and a career profession often put on the individual is according to this theory not the most profitable choice for women. If they choose a career profession nonetheless, they will not be able to compete with men and reach the highest posts because of the division of labor within the family. The absence in form of maternity leave, sick children, etc. will also affect their possibilities of following the wage trend within the profession (see for example Polachek 1987, 1993).

Other explanations are based on rational choice arguments and biological determinism. They argue that biological and psychological differences between women and men determine preferences and choice of occupation and that physical strength, mathematical and language skills, motivation or suitability for caring responsibilities should be relevant for choice of occupation. These theories argue that women choose education and career where the advantages of their innate talents are best (See Jacobsen 1994 chap 1.). The problem with this theory, and actually with all the theories here listed under 'individual' centered explanations, is that they are generalizing too much. They do not differentiate between different women. At best they can show on trends and patterns, but do not carry the potential of explaining differences. Another problem connected to theories focusing on individual factors is that it underplays the importance of structural factors. The focus on the individual's choice is problematic, and not only from an academic point of view. It has been pointed out that because women have chosen, she believes that she is free. Birgit Pringle (2001) argues that what is the most distinguished quality of the image of freedom of choice is the focus on the individual. The society, institutions and organizations appear as neutral, without responsibility for processes holding back or promoting the individual. With focus on the individual, women's situations can be explained as dependent on a lack of competence, motivation, attitude, family situation or background (Pingle 2001:100). The next section will therefore focus on structural and organizational theories. These theories, however, should be seen in the light of the previous overview.

### 3.2 *Structural centered theories.*

Economical theories have suggested that the employer when recruiting for a position uses the established picture of the division of labor within the family. The result of employing men is then assumed to be a better and more secure investment than employing women. They argue that it is a rational decision to choose a man applicant over women because, statistically, this will be a more profitable choice. *Statistical discrimination* implies that the average traits of a group are used when recruiting for a position. Because women, statistically, for example spend more time taking care of the family and children, women are collectively evaluated as a less attractive choice than men. A group's collective traits are used in evaluating an individual's suitability for the post, and this falls upon career oriented women as well as family oriented women (Jonung 1997:56).

Other theories lay focus on male norms and male domination inside the organizations. It has, for example, been argued that since women can be perceived as newcomers, and hold few top positions in the male-dominated area of academia, male professors hold the position of gatekeepers. Elisabet Rogg, following Bourdieu, argues that these male professors, most recognized within academia, have the authority to define "the ideals for scientific conduct, and to classify conducts, works and other agents within the field" (2001:155). Rogg claims that women, as newcomers, might have problems being approved of both as individuals (as women) and on the basis of their research topics. The gatekeepers defend the ideals that legitimate their own positions through classification of 'right' and 'wrong'. They both defend a scientific 'way to be' and the scientific product *per se*. Newcomers and new ideas can therefore become victims of discrimination, on the basis of them being deviant from the predominant ideals, more specifically the male-as-norm phenomenon (ibid.).

Related to this are theories which focus on what has been named *Old-boy networks*. It has been established that men tend to seek support, friendship, relaxation, and self-identification with other men. These *homosocial relationships* are unofficial, but contracts and friendships are often established outside the actual work-place, but might have impact on what goes on inside the academic setting as well. Through these relationships men seek confirmation of their own gender identity and that by the culture-defined ideal, and through this consciously or unconsciously contribute to preserve the male dominance (Pingle 2001:101). One such example is the fact that male professors tend to recruit male doctorate students, and support them in a more active way than their women counterparts (Kronsell 2002:40-41). When women enter these male dominated areas the profession becomes harder to define in male terms. Women's possibilities to succeed in male dominated areas are therefore dependent on how open and accepting the male managers or gatekeepers are.

Other structural theories focus on political decisions and reforms. In previous sections some of the reforms trying to change the existing gender segregation at Swedish universities were discussed. Thus, it is not only the reforms and policies directly aiming at the institutions for higher education that is of importance here. Taxes, access to child care, wage gaps, and the design of the parents' insurance system are all structural factors that have impact on women's possibilities of pursuing career. If it is more profitable for women than for men to stay at home when the children are small. It will effect their chances of advancement within the organization. It becomes practically impossible for women to obtain the same merits, and compete on the same terms as men if structural factors, directly or indirectly, hold them back.

Even if these theories are of use in explaining parts of the mechanisms leading to gender segregation, they do not really help us in understanding the social processes, and the relationship between individual and structural, organizational and political factors, which continue to be decisive in limiting women's positions as professors. In the next chapter the possibility of perceiving long-term-sick-leave as one such explanation form is explored.

#### **4. Long term sick leave as an exit pattern from the labor market**

As we have seen absence due to child bearing is often used as an explanation to the glass-ceiling phenomenon. In this section we will look at other forms of absence that possibly can be proven to have the same effect on women's career possibilities. We will discuss the sick leave patterns for Swedish academics. The question of long-term sick leave as seen as a particular form of exit, temporarily or permanent, from the profession will be raised as its possible connection to age will be discussed. A trend of women not returning to previously held positions after longer periods of absence due to sickness are also demonstrated and its relationship to the glass-ceiling hypothesis is discussed.

##### ***4.1 Sick leave patterns in the Swedish labor market with a focus on academic personnel employed at Swedish universities***

The percentage of people absent from work owing to illness has in Sweden increased dramatically since 1997 after having decreased throughout the beginning of the nineties. The sick leave statistics have also gone through a change of character during the nineties with an increasing number of psychological diagnoses and an overall increase of long term sick leaves. Between 1997 and 2001 the number of men absent from work more than 60 days owing to sickness doubled and more then doubled for women (Lidwall 2002:9-11). In the Swedish labor market the risk for long-term sick leave is proven to be much higher for

women than for men. The risk is calculated to be 20 to 30 percent as high for women (Lidwall 2001:5). One of the reasons for women's higher level of sickness absence is often explained with complications following pregnancy. Approximately 10 percent of long term sick leaves for women is due to this kind of complications. However, this cannot for example explain the high increase of sickness absence for middle-aged women (ibid.). It should be added that the dramatic increase during the past ten years can primary be ascribed to the growth of psychological diagnoses. When in the beginning of the nineties 14 percent of all long term sick leave was due to psychological diagnoses, it has rise to 18 percent in 1999 and to 25 percent in 2001 (Lidwall 2002:9).

According to a report written by the National Social Insurance Board (Lidwall 2002) the increase of psychological diagnoses can be seen in all areas of the Swedish labor market and are assumed to be a reaction on a general increase of demands and a decreasing prospect for the employees to influence and control their situation. The authors of this report are building their argumentation on Karasek and Theorell's (1990) well known demand-control model that explains the connection between psychological demands and the room for the individual to take decisions to deal with these demands. When the discrepancy between demand and control is too big, the theory argues, the individual can develop negative stress and in prolongation may become sick.

Even if very useful, the stress model has one serious shortcoming that has to be addressed before moving on. It does not take social factors into account. The individual is thought of as experiencing this in isolation. An alternative is to see the individual as if s/he is experiencing stress. Consequently, when trying to understand problems concerning stress it is important not to separate the individual from her context. However, when looking at professionals with active jobs with high demands and a high level of control the sense of coherence (SOC) theory has proven to be more useful. This theory suggests that persons with a high sense of coherence tend to experience "environmental stimuli in a manner sufficiently structured to enable them to anticipate events and the resources available to meet the demands imposed upon them" (Kivimäki et.al. 2000:584). These individuals also tend to perceive demands as intriguing and challenging, rather than as threats and stressors. It can be seen as a form of personal armor that protects you against pressure and demands, and prevents you from developing negative stress. People low in SOC are consequently less well protected and therefore runs the risk of developing negative stress even if their work leaves room for a high level of control (ibid.). The theory is certainly useful, however it carries the weakness of not being able to tell us what comes first – the chicken or the egg? We do not know how stable the SOC is and to what extent it can be effected by negative external stimuli such as a lack of a social networks.

In an evaluation report conducted by Statistics Sweden (Ljunggren et al 2002) the experienced working environment at Swedish Universities and university colleges is presented. Even though the report has some serious shortcomings it gives us an overarching picture of the difference between women and men's work experiences within the university. The most serious weakness of the report is that it does not have the ability to show both professional categories and gender at the same time. It therefore makes it impossible to see differences in experiences between women and men holding the same positions. However, what we can see is differences between men and women among all academic personnel. When, for example, 44 percent of the men state that they always have influence over their working schedule the same figure for women is only 33 percent. The same pattern is shown when answering to the question if they can decide when a task is to be done and other questions related to control. The overall picture we get is therefore that men feel that they have more control over their working situation than women (Ljunggren et.al. 2002).

What we have to be conscious of is that this can be a direct effect of that men in general holds higher positions than women and that this gives them more room for taking decisions and affecting their own situation. Furthermore, when women states that they get more social support than men, they at the same time want even more support than what they get. This is true for support given (or not given) by superiors as well as working colleagues. When asked about their work load over 50 percent of both women and men states that they have too much to do (ibid.) What is missing in the report is how the respondents feels about these things. Why do women feel that they need more support, even when stating that they get more support than their male equivalents? Or how does the feeling of having too much to do affect different individuals? Do women and men cope with the feeling of having too much to do in the same way? Unfortunately the report does not provide any answers to these questions. We will therefore come back to these questions and explore them further when analyzing the outcome of the focus group interview. There the methodology will allow us to explore experiences in a more detailed way and the collective stimuli can help us bring unanswered questions to the surface.

#### ***4.2 Sick leave and its relationship to the glass ceiling***

The statistics used in this section are extracted from two interrelated and longitudinal studies of long term sick leave. The studies are based upon two parallel populations collected with ten years in between. The first population is made up by detailed information about 8,000

individuals on long-term sick leave from 1990-93<sup>3</sup>. The sickness profiles are based on the social insurance office's own rehabilitation forms and are complimented with information about the individual's occupation, employer, primary- and secondary diagnosis, and why the sick leave period stopped. The parallel population is made up by 4000 cases from 2002 containing the same information as the first study along with some additional material.<sup>4</sup> The data from the two populations can be sorted in four main groups: *Individual related data* with information about gender, age etc. *Work related data* holding information about the individuals working conditions, occupation, employer, working place, the size of the company, line of business etc. *Sick leave related data* where primary- and secondary diagnosis, earlier rehabilitation, industrial injury, the duration of the sick leave period among other things are to be found. And finally *Rehabilitation related data* where the evaluation by the social insurance office, detailed information of measures taken by the office, purchasing of rehabilitating services etc., is located. From these populations I extorted a group of women professionals and looked at their sick-leave pattern and compared them to a similar group of men.<sup>5</sup>

It has from this material been possible to deduce that women with a high level of academic education in the chosen professions in 2002 do show a higher frequency of sick leave than men<sup>6</sup>. 62.5 percent of the long-term sick leaves in this category comprise of women. However, there is no significant difference in diagnosis between women and men with a high level of academic education<sup>7</sup>. Thus, a severe discrepancy between men and women has been detected as to what extent women and men return to their previous place of work after a period of long-term sick leave (60 days or more). With approximately 63 percent of the men returning to their previous work ten percent less (53%) of the women return to their work place after a period of long term sick leave<sup>8</sup>. It is therefore reasonable to assume that long-

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<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed description of the research design and method see Hetzler et al 1995. Professor Antoinette Hetzler carried out the projects at the department of sociology, Lund University, Sweden. The studies are Work, Sickness and Rehabilitation I and II. A number of reports and articles have been published from the studies. See Hetzler 1994, 1995, 1999

<sup>4</sup> For a more detailed description of the research design and method see Hetzler, Melén and Bjerstedt forthcoming 2003

<sup>5</sup> Since the number of women academics employed at universities are too few for statistical analysis in our population, something similar is to be used. I have extended the category of women academics employed at Swedish universities in this section to include women in similar professions. Doctors, lawyers, architects, chemists, engineers, are a few examples of professions which are incorporated in this new category. All the chosen occupations share a few traits that make it possible to view them as comparable. They are as similar regarding to education as possible, they are all originally male-dominated and they are all carried out in intellectual work-environments. They are also to be characterized as independent jobs with a high level of control. Though discussion of the enlarged group of women professionals cannot be considered reliable for only women employed in academic careers at universities and colleges in Sweden, I hope to demonstrate that tendencies in the result reasonably can be considered valid for this group.

<sup>6</sup> See appendix 1

<sup>7</sup> See appendix 2

<sup>8</sup> See appendix 3

term sick leave functions as an out-sorting mechanism for women employed at Swedish institutions for higher education as well as for other academically educated women. A logical assumption following this is that sick leaves, for women more than for men, operate as a hindrance for advancement within the organization. The figures give weight to the assumption that there might be a relation between long-term-sick-leave and the glass-ceiling hypothesis since advancement becomes impossible for individuals not returning to their positions. However, probable is that a majority of these women find similar jobs elsewhere, but then the informal paths of recruitment will most likely be closed for a foreseeable future. They will be lacking a social network, so important for advancement possibilities discussed in the previous section.

Women on even short sick leave absentees, i.e. up to three months have a much lower frequency of returning to their previous work place than their male counterparts. At first glance it is logical to assume that women already at this early stage are being sorted out of the labor market. However, when we take a closer look at the material it becomes clear that the picture is more complex than that. It becomes evident that a majority of the women in this category do not return to their jobs because they have been on sick leave due to complications connected to pregnancy and now are on maternity leave. However, women between 41 to 50 and between 51 to 60 years old show the same pattern. That implies that it is the absence from work that is important as an obstacle to career advancement. Much of literature on glass ceiling (see above) has pointed to child bearing as an obstacle to women' career. Thus, I suggest that this is, of course important, but it works through the processes of being absent from work. Consequently, it is the absence *per se* that is important.

It has also been possible to identify a negative trend over the last ten years in this respect. The results from the first study shows that when 70 percent of the men went back to their previous work place, the same figure for women were only 64 percent in year 1991-1993<sup>9</sup>. In year 2001 the same figures were 63 percent for men and 53 percent for women. This makes it possible to conclude that an impairment has taken place, for both women and men, where women with their poorer point of departure have paid the highest price. The increase as pointed out above is not due to more women having problems connected to pregnancy and ending their sick leave period in maternity leave. This figure is relatively stable over this ten-year span. It is instead a percentage increase in every other category – for example unemployment and early retirement pension - that swallow this increase. This might imply that when women's possibilities for pursuing a career in academia formally have been strengthened, new and hidden obstacles preventing advancement within the organization have

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<sup>9</sup> See appendix 4.

appeared. Among them are the consequences of a sick leave to be found, where women, to a much larger extent than men, do not return to their former place of work.

The fact that there is a strong correlation between age and sickness absence is well documented (see for example Alm-Stenflo 2002:26-27). The reason for this is however not very well documented. Although there is no causal relationship between age and sickness the fact that most employees at our universities are to be found in the age group between 55 and 59 years implies that this group, statistically, runs a high risk for sickness absence (Tengner & Karlsson 2002:26). Thus, important to consider is that sick-leaves is not necessarily a direct effect of sickness. To say this would be to underplay the social dimensions of sickness. To understand the social aspects of sickness it is useful to divide the category into three interrelated categories that explain different aspects of the term. *Illness* can be said to stand for the problems experienced by the individual. While *Disease* stands for the sickness the medical science can diagnose as a sickness. And finally, *sickness* represents the social dimension, e.g. the social role a person that has either illness or disease takes on or acquires from the society (Alexanderson 2000:281). Within the different dimensions it is the function or capacity, and changes of these, that are central, i.e. person's psychological (ability to concentrate, memory etc.), physical and/or social capacity and how this is experienced and received. This might imply that elderly people are judged differently, take on a different role or in some way are discriminated against, and that this in turn can explain their higher frequency of sickness absence. This is valid for women as a category too. Their higher sickness absence might be due to social factors rather than medical.

Whatever the cause is, social or medical, the increasing age of the employees at Swedish universities and university colleges can be assumed to explain a big part of the increasing number of long-term sick leave. To this we can add that the traditional 'women' fields like humanities and social sciences are affected by increasing age of employees more than others. This is especially true when it comes to new recruitments, i.e. doctorate students.<sup>10</sup> The figures given by the National Agency for Higher Education can also give us an appreciation of the general gender imbalance among doctoral students. The single largest group for women doctoral students is the age group '40 years and over'. As much as 32 percent of the female PhD students are part of this group which can be put in relation to 24 percent for men. Additionally, 47 percent of all women PhD students are over 35 while only 40 percent of the men are (HSV 2001:64). Even though we know that far from all doctorate students choose a career in academia it is reasonable to assume that since women have their highest representations on every occupational level within social sciences and humanities, together

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<sup>10</sup> Only 40 percent of the new doctoral students in these fields are under 30 and slightly more than 20 percent are over 40. These figures can be put in relation to the technical fields and natural sciences where 65 percent of the doctoral students are under 30 and only 8 percent are over 40 (HSV 2001:64)

with fields such as nursing, odontology, and veterinarian medicine, which are the most age stricken fields the high average age will influence the possibilities for women of reaching higher positions. This is not to say that all older students will be part of the academic staff later employed at the university, but rather that the recruitment group of women is generally older than that of men.

Moreover, a significant change has taken place for women in the age group between 41 and 50 in our population. When in the first population from 1991-1993, 85 percent of the women from this category returned to their previous place of work after a period of long-term sick leave, this figure had decreased to 71 percent in year 2001. Accordingly we can draw the conclusion that women in this age group, and their tendencies to not return to their previous place of work, must have a negative impact on their possibilities of advancement within the organization. Especially since this must be presumed to be the most critical age for promotion for higher positions. As we have seen the average age is high at universities and university colleges in Sweden and it is therefore not likely that the possibility for promotion or advancement, either to docent or professor, occurs before the age of 40 to 50. In the next chapter we will continue the discussion about age, gender and health as out-sorting mechanisms for female academics with the help of my empiric material.

## **5. Exploring experiences: Outcome of a focus group interview**

In order to understand how women targeted for the political reforms of increasing equality and decreasing gender segregation at higher levels of university employment for the development of their career, I performed a focus group interview with five women docents. Each one had a possibility to be promoted to professor. I did not know if they had contemplated applying for a promotion to professor or not. I also did not know how they saw their career path at the University. Nor if they had experienced long term absence from work because of sickness and how they thought about this in terms of barriers to their career.

### ***5.1 Focus group as a methodology***

Group interview is a well-known sociological method that has been used since 1920. However, it was through Robert Merton's critic against his mentor Paul Lazarsfeld's use of the group interview that the method began to develop into the focus group interview used today. Merton's criticism is one of the leading characteristics of the method and responsible for its current popularity. The criticism focused on the problem that the researchers questions

lead the respondent's answers. Merton suggested that participants should talk more and the traditional interviewer should become a moderator instead (Wibeck 2000: 17).

Advantages of the focus group interview are that it is especially good to use in research areas of sensitive matters. It has shown to work well with people that are on the margins of society and collectively, in discourse, can provide a new perspective unlike those of the researcher. Another advantage with the method is that the data produced allow the researcher to study interaction between members of the group when they try to reach consensus or understanding with each other. The method allows for the possibility to see how meaning is constructed. In this area of women's careers within the university, the method was also appropriate to see how attitudes, opinions and ideas are presented within the group (ibid. pp.27).

The focus group interview is a type of group interview but not the same as a group interview. Morgan (1996:130) defines a focus group interview as a "research method where data is gathered through group interaction around a subject which is decided by the researcher" (see Wibeck 2000). Wibeck shows that a focus group interview has been part of a typology of group interviews. Other types of methodology that use group interview are nominal groups and Delphi groups (natural or formal group interviews) brain-storming groups, discussion groups without leaders etc.

The focus group consequently consists of a number of respondents and a moderator. The ideal number of respondents has been calculated to be between 6-12 participants. More than 12 participants has shown to be difficult to manage and hindered participation of all members while with less than 6 participants the interview runs the risk of being dominated by a few individuals (Stewart 1990:10). It has also been suggested that compatibility – the extent to which the individuals in the group have similar personal characteristics – is important for a group's affectivity, performance and satisfaction. Age, class, education and occupation have all been demonstrated to have an impact on the outcome of the focus group. Compatible groups have shown to be more effective in performing their task and less time is devoted to group maintenance (Stewart 1990:42). The group of women docents can therefore be said to meet the ideal criterion for a focus group interview fairly well.

The moderator leading the group can choose an active or a passive roll. Since I was interested in the participants own experiences of pursuing careers within academia a more passive approach suited my intentions well. This approach lets the participants negotiate their positions in interaction with each other rather than with the interviewer. As Sue Wilkinson (1998) points out, this is one of the big advantages with the focus group methodology, i.e. "the particular advantage of focus groups is the opportunity they offer for researchers to observe how people engage in the process of collective sense-making: how views are

constructed, expressed, defended and (sometimes) modified within the context of discussion and debate with others” (Wilkinson 1998:186). I, as the moderator, only provided the agenda or the structure for the discussion. I wanted the participants to focus their discussion around their experiences, as women in a male dominated area, doing a successful career in academia. The low level of structure and authority was a conscious and careful choice since I was foremost interested in what was important to the members of the group. However, throughout the interview I periodically interrupted to ask additional questions concerning topics of special interest for the project.

Since focus groups are a good methodology both for obtaining general information about a topic and stimulating new ideas and creative concepts, it is good to have some structure but still remain as much in the background as possible. This is important for maintaining one of the most advantageous aspects of the method, i.e. the natural flow where the individuals are free to negotiate their position through the interaction with the other participants. Closely related to this is one of the other major advantages with the method: it allows the respondents to react to and build upon the responses of other group members. This, what Stewart calls “synergetic effect”, carries the potential to produce data or ideas that might not have been thought of in individual interviews (1990:16). Literature in the field suggest that, compared to individual interviews, focus groups cannot be seen as either more or less naturalistic. The fact that the moderator has the same role as an interviewer, i.e. s/he initiates the contact, determines the content of the conversation, asks the questions and serves as the audience for the responses to those questions strengthens this argument (Morgan 2002:150). However, the moderator-bias can be said to be less prevalent in focus groups since s/he is not involved in the conversation to the same extent as in an individual interview and her/his position could be said to be reduced since s/he is just one among the others in the group. Critique against the focus group interview often claims that it is less valid because people are more likely to say what they really think in individual interviews, and that the presence of others will influence what they say. Thus, as Morgan defending the focus group states: “it is certainly true that the same people might say different things in individual interviews than they would in a group discussion, but that does not mean that one set of statements is distorted and the other is not”(Morgan 2002:151).

## ***5.2 The selection of participants***

The focus group approach was used for one group of five women who were in the position to be promoted to professor. This group was chosen because they were identified in the structural reforms as a group who would both increase the number of professors and the number of female professors. This reform was however not successful (see above). They were also chosen because they represented women at an advanced level in their careers. That is,

they had already crashed through several “glass ceilings”. Moreover, they represented both women employed at traditional, prestigious universities, and new “red brick” colleges in Sweden. The focus group thus included individuals who were ‘objects’ in a variety of experiments to increase equality among gender and class in Swedish universities. The selection was thus made with a number of reasons in mind. Docents are the level under the professors in the hierarchic structured academic career ladder and I therefore wished to get some answers to what holds women back from applying for professor posts. I was also interested in possible the differences between the two institutions of higher education. Do female academics experience the academic environment more as ‘women friendly’ at the ‘new’ university college’s as Schenk (2002) intimated in her report “Women in Swedish higher Education: A statistical Overview”?

Having representatives from different disciplines was important because of the horizontal gender segregation we have mapped out in the preceding sections. This facilitated the possibility to investigate if there were any differences in experiences of pursuing careers in a male dominated area from in a more equal one. The choice of only inviting female academics came naturally for the simple reason that I was interested in their experiences. The thinking behind this was that the experience is inseparable from the actual situation and that the experience of the reality is what affects the individual, not some kind of external reality that can be deduced from statistics and the like.

The participants were selected from their respective university homepages. They were selected as representatives according to their disciplines as well as to their gender and title. The participants were first contacted via email and were asked to respond, negative or positive, to the request to participate in the focus group meeting. After a week the individuals that did not respond to the first invitation was contacted by phone. Following this initial phase I only managed to get 4 out of 8 persons to accept the invitation. It was therefore necessary to contact an additional 4 people in order to get the ideal 6 participants that I had hoped for. Two out of the four responded positively to the invitation, and as a result, I now had the six participants I aspired for. Unfortunately, one of the participants had to cancel in the last minute, the result being that, since I did not have enough time to recruit a stand-in for her I had to do the interview with only five participants.

When the interviewees were contacted the interview was established to durate one hour. We met in a conference room at the department of sociology at Lund University. The interview was recorded and the participants were promised full anonymity. After one hour I announced that the time was up, but the respondents insisted on continuing approximately an additionally fifteen minutes.

### **5.3 Analysis**

The focus group data was transcribed the day after the meeting. It was important to do the transcribing soon after the actual meeting in order to be able to recognize the voices and nuances in the conversation. A cut-and-paste technique was used when analyzing the material (Stewart 1990:104). It is a cost- and time-effective method for analyzing a transcribed focus group. I went through the transcribed material and identified those sections of it that were relevant for the research question. I thereafter classified these sections into five major topics. When the parts of the transcribed material were coded each piece of the coded material was cut out and sorted under the topic where the citation had relevance. In the interpretation and analysis below, each topic is treated in turn and the transcribed materials are used as supporting material. This technique is very useful, but it relies very much on the individual researcher. Since I determined which segments to use, their importance, and how to best present them, the opportunity for subjectivity and potential bias is very high (Stewart1990: 105). However, this is also the case for more sophisticated and time-consuming approaches. The problem with the transcribed material was that in its original form it was in Swedish and it had to be translated into English. This might be a problem since literal translations seldom make sense and nuances might disappear when converted into another language. However, I hope that my translation depicts the intended messages as precisely as possible. My hope is also that I have managed to present and analyze the material in such a way that the interviewees recognize themselves and that I, at the same time, managed to unveil structures hidden from the respondents.

#### **5.3.1. Experienced gender discrimination and the problem of special treatment**

When discussing discrimination with individuals who might be the targets of discrimination, it is important to be aware of the fact that they may not be aware that they are being discriminated against. However, it is not likely that any female academic in Sweden in present day is totally ignorant about, for example, the uneven distribution of professorships. Thus, this does not tell them when they themselves are discriminated against. One problem with academic meritocracy is that it takes on the pretence of being objective while everybody knows that it is not. This is the built-in paradox in the academic career system. No one really believes in meritocracy's objectivity and it is therefore not its practical applicability, but its principal that we believe in. This makes it practically impossible for an individual to detect when it is a question of discrimination and when they, for example, did not get the position because there was someone that was better qualified. It has to be very obvious to be assigned discrimination by the individual.

The subtle and covert forms of discrimination are not easy for the individual to question or detect and according to the interviewees it has changed a great deal over the years. When the older respondents can give witness of direct and overt discrimination the younger ones shows a lack of understanding for this. One of the docents explains that it was different when she started her career. She was interested in questions concerning gender, but this was not approved as a topic for a psychologist when she started her career. Following Bourdieu (1988) we can assume that the interviewee was a victim of what he named 'symbolic violence'. That implies that the old male professors, defending their ideals that legitimate their own position, through classification of right and wrong defined the quality or the suitability of the scientific product (Rogg 2001:155). When responding to one of my questions concerning social support, she replied:

My generation of women has been outsiders in a whole other way than women that entered academia in the fifties and thereafter. It should be totally ... not in accordance with the truth ... if I should state that I have gotten any support. I have not. That was one of the main reasons why we started the women's movement and gender research; we did not get any support.

Even if she believes it to be a question of generations, and that it is changing for the better, she still sees the structures as very male dominated. The male professor still holds the positions as gatekeepers and this implies that he have the authority to define the ideals for scientific conduct, the topics worth studying and other agents suitability. The interviewee explains how these homo-social relations are displayed and reproduced in her own department:

It is also a historical aspect that all of those that holds positions in the appointing committees in psychology and medicine, and other disciplines that have money ... the men hold on to their privileges, they are born in the forties and in the end of the thirties. It is also a problem of cohort. But it is not only that, now when they are retiring they want to have the same sort. Now they want positivist academics. So they recruit these young guys for the few available projects and doctorate positions that exist. So it has become a backlash effect with old positivistic, young male researchers that dominate among the younger.

Even if the interviewee states that the situation is changing for the better she describes a reproduction process of male dominance at her department. That men tend to seek support,

friendship, relaxation, and identify themselves with other men is a well-known fact. So is the fact that men through these relationships seek confirmation of their gender identity and that by the culture defined male ideal, and through this consciously or unconsciously contribute to preserve the male dominance. She describes the gatekeeper and how men maintain power structures and eliminate women by subtle change of requirements that automatically exclude women yet leave the field open for the "prince". These structural relationships are what Lipman-Blumen in 1976 named homo-social relationships (Pingle 1997:101).

Then again, none of the other respondents give witness to this kind of overt discrimination. They even state that they never have had any problems because of their sex, or even related to their sex. However, the more we talk about these things, the more problems we discuss, the more obvious it becomes that all of them experienced some kind of obstacles directly or indirectly connected to their gender. One of the more interesting things that came up during the discussion was the unintended effect of the university's equality programs. The political reforms discussed earlier have led to policies at the universities, where equal representation in committees and similar engagements is required. Even at the faculties where women are gravely underrepresented there must be women representatives in every formal committee of any importance. For some of the interviewees these policies, that were introduced to secure that gender discrimination was not to take place, have now become a big problem. One of the respondents explains:

The problem is not that I don't like my research. But first I have the research, then I have the teaching and on top of that I have all the administrative engagements at the department. And that is also a problem here. We women at the department have had a problem with this. They have an outspoken ambition of raising the number of women. We have a principal when it comes to the appointment of PhD students, that it should be fifty percent women. And it's the same in the administration. That has led to them now chasing us with a blowtorch.

It is ironic that the very same reforms that were meant to support women now backlash on them and make them carry an even heavier workload than before. It seems as if when the research path to promotion was collapsed into one with the teaching path the equation now reads: research = teaching + administration. These complaints by women as a result of the organizational change may however also be complaints made by men. From the material at hand it cannot be established that the reformation of the organization particularly effects women. Thus, the interviewees experience that they have more administrative work than their

male colleagues and that their male colleagues seem to handle the situation better. What we have here might be an organizational change that de-professionalizes a profession by demanding that they now do tasks that they previously did not do. The reform's emphasis on equality also results in that women in this group do more of these 'de-professionalizing' tasks than their male colleagues. The overall workload is one of the topics the interviewees were most eager to talk about in general. The amount of work and hours spent on work was for most of the docents experienced as a problem. This is why the next section deals with questions related to forms of employment and its effect on work commitment and health.

### **5.3.2. Employment form and its effect on the working conditions**

That academics, both women and men, employed at universities have a heavy workload is well documented. Approximately three out of four academics employed at Swedish universities state that they work more than what their official contract requires (Ljunggren et al 2002:77). Most of the interviewees understand working overtime as built-in to the academic system. If you want to get the merits to be able to advance you have to work more than what is written on your contract. The combination of different commitments produces a lack of time that most of them experience as being very frustrating. As one of the younger docents that received her title just two years ago chooses to articulate:

I can put it like this: I have a fantastic amount of fun tasks, so none of them are fun any more.

It is not only the feeling of having to much to do and to many tasks at the same time, but also that all combined it creates a situation where they feel like they cannot do anything as thoroughly as they would like to. Some of the respondents also bear witness to that it is very important which form of employment you have. To be employed through projects create a sense of incoherence, where they feel insecure. This form of employment also makes it impossible to plan for the future, which can be frustrating and may effect one's private life negatively. The combination of insecurity and the enormous workload that are put on them creates discontent, and for some, in prolongation, a lack of work commitment as the next citation shows:

I see a serious structural fault in the system that makes me doubt if I want to continue in this way. We were talking about this with forms of employment. I try to combine ... I have a position as a lecturer, I try to apply for research founding, I'll get the founding ... I trick the founders that I will work fifty percent, when I in reality, if I work overtime maybe can do research thirty percent. And I feel that this is not doable. But, what is interesting is that

when I speak with my colleagues about this, all the girls that I discuss it with agree that it's not working. But, in some way the guys seem to be able to deal with it better. I don't know if they are less ambitious, sloppier with their tasks, or ... I don't know.

A related situation was told by one of the other interviewees who is working in an especially male dominated area. When she was working on projects, without a permanent contract, she felt like she had to prove herself worthy of being there. She stated that she worked very hard to get the merits necessary to reach a permanent lecturer position at the department. Upon reaching that position she noticed that the position she took over from a male colleague was transformed into something else.

I have many more tasks now when I have a lecturer post at the same time, if I shall be lecturer on fifty percent, and if I shall compare the teaching hours I now have with my male colleague that had this position before. I have taken on a bigger load, and have a lot more lectures, and take care of a lot more things than the male colleague did. I spend a lot more time on this than I am paid for. And therefore I wonder how the male colleagues did it. When it now is transforming into a women occupation, it might be changing into a different kind of occupation ... that has happened to a lot of other occupations, right?

Both these examples give weight to the notion that there are differences between women and men working in academia, experienced or real. The fact that the position changed when she "took over" implies that the objective structure might change when women come in positions higher-up in the hierarchy, i.e. that the position is lowered and that the male-dominated structure is maintained. What is interesting is that the informant fails to recognize that she has 'inherited' a different position. Her denial of the changes that occurred with her occupancy – "I wonder how the male colleague did it" – suggests that she has internalized the perception that she and the previous male occupant were equal. If following Bourdieu (1988) or Gramsci (1981) we can understand this as a process where if the ideals are unchallenged they are taken for granted and appear as natural; also by agents in dominated positions. It is also well documented that professions change when women enter the field, through a so-called feminization process. When women enter, men leave the profession for more prestigious occupations and the profession loses some of its prestige and wage development stagnates (Jonung 1997:19-21). Apparently the job also changes in reality, but the women occupant does not recognize it. In this case crashing through the glass ceiling had no result because the definition of the position has changed.

The account given by the interviewees also strengthen the assumption that women working in the same positions as men experience that they work more than their male colleagues and that they feel that they have less control over their situation. As the by now well known demand – control model, developed by Karasek and Theorell (1990), explains, it is very important to have a balance between the sense of control and psychological demands. If this balance does not exist, the risk of developing negative stress dramatically increases. Thus, an important question to ask is if the experienced psychological demands stands in proportion to the actual demands put on them from the department. One possibility is that you as member of a minority create an internal pressure that is not proportional to the expectations others have of you. It is, for example, shown in a number of studies that women, as a minority in a male dominated working place, develop a higher level of negative stress than their male counterparts, even if they are not discriminated against (See for ex. Frankenhaeuser 1993). This argument will be further discussed in coming sections, but for now it is more important to focus on the health aspects of over-time and being employed on projects. The question of a decreasing work commitment, as a consequence of the above-mentioned factors, will also be dealt with in the coming section.

### 5.3.3 Health and sickness

That long term sick leave is a particular form of exit from the labor market or from a specific profession was discussed in the previous section. When looking at the interviewees statements it appears as if there is, not only a glass ceiling on the career ladder, but also a health-risk barrier that has to be forced. Four out of five of the interviewees stated that they at some point in their career felt burned out or so exhausted that they considered dropping out and leaving their jobs altogether. One of the docents states that her work at the law department has been so demanding that she is not sure if she want to continue her career as an academic:

I'm in a situation now where I seriously doubt if I shall continue my research career or if I should take a break. It is so laborious right now. I haven't had a weekend off work in the last year.

A similar situation was told by one of the other respondents. She had been working in the department of psychology with questions concerning gender in decades and when looking back on her career she recall experiencing a similar situation:

Yes, I have had one of those periods of being burned out, just because of that reason. Because *I* had to carry everything. Since I also was the only survival from my generation with that research focus, right? So I had a period where I

was totally, totally burned out. But I came back and now I refuse to take all of this on me. So, it has been an inverted revolution in the nineties for us that were offensive in the seventies.

When discussing health problems the respondents automatically comes back to forms of employment and the years when they had to work exclusively on projects without the security that a permanent post gives. It was not that they did not enjoy it, but that the psychological pressure produced by the form of employment was too much. One of the interviewees, when describing her experiences, was considering possible differences between men and women when coping with these situations:

I can say that it felt unhealthy to be on short-term employment. Temporary employment, where you only have half a year at the time. It was really a struggle during this time. But it is not only women that find themselves in this situation ... but, maybe women in this situation feel it to be harder? However, that made me consider if it was worth it. Now in retrospective I can feel that it was worth it. That I stayed on. But at the time I felt really bad and even depressed during some periods.

One of the other interviewees directly interposed that she had had the exact same experience and that that short perspective without any possibilities to make plans for the future made her feel really bad:

I went through the same story. I mean, being on those short-term employments and should probably have been put on the sick list.

We can understand that almost all of the respondents' state that they have gone through a very demanding period, most often in connection to a temporary employment, when they either became sick or considered quitting, or both. After having gone through such demanding periods some of the interviewees admitted to the fact that they changed their attitude towards their work. They have been forced to reconsider their position in life and prioritize themselves and their health before their work. This is demonstrated by the citation below where one of the participants is happy to notice that others have had the same experiences as her:

It was really nice to hear you say that ... no, it's not worth it. It is exactly what I think too. No, It's not worth it. It is nice to hear ... what the hell, your career is not worth killing yourself for.

Unfortunately we do not know how this change in attitude manifests itself. It is possible that after having gone through a very difficult period you slow down on the working cadence and on the work engagement, in other words a decrease in work commitment, to spare your own health. It is unfortunately nothing we can prove with the material at hand, but if this is a common coping strategy, for a common problem, it can have direct effects on individual's career possibilities. Another factor that most of the respondents consider to be the determinant factor for women's problems of obtaining the top positions in the academic hierarchy is child bearing and that is, among other things, what the next section lays focus on.

#### **5.3.4 The biological question**

Usually a distinction is made between theories that try to explain gender segregation from a structural perspective and those that try to explain it from an individual perspective. Child bearing is problematic in that sense because it is not possible to categorize as either one or the other. Although this is true for almost all factors discussed in this field, child bearing and childcare stands out as especially problematic. When for example choice of education, even when a gender specific choice, can be ascribed to the individual, child bearing and family life is both an individual choice and strongly dependent on the structure encompassing the individual. Access to a good childcare system, distribution of responsibilities between the parents, the wage gap between the parents, and the employer's reaction to the absence following the birth of the child, is just a few examples of this. For the interviewees it was the absence *per se* that they experienced as having the most negative effect on their possibilities of advancement. A rather representative view is expressed like this by one of the interviewees:

I believe that the biggest obstacle is the biological problem. That is to say, that women give birth. Because women give birth, the child demands more intimacy by its mother. Men can't breast-feed. Because we stay home and give birth to children, we get out of the career for a while and then it is others that have time to advance. And then they have better merits when they apply for posts. More teaching experience and the like, that's what I think!

Even though some of the participants feel this explanation to be a bit too one-dimensional, most of them agree that having children takes time and the time spent on their children puts

them in an imbalanced position vis-à-vis men. One of the docents conveys that she feels the academic career system to have no room for having children. It is a system created by men, for men that have wives that stay at home and take care of the children. Another respondent states that:

You have to work over-time; it is built-in to the system, if one should have time to qualify oneself. You only have those twenty-four hours a day, and everything you have to do with your kids ... if I didn't have the kids it would be different. Naturally, I could have worked more then. [...] you really fall behind. I think that's most important.

Another question related to this is that of age. As discussed in previous chapters, women tend to be older than men when starting their academic career. Even though age officially is not used as a recruitment criterion, the informants describe how age has been used in recruitment and evaluation situations. None of the informants claim to have been victims of this, instead they describes situations concerning other women at their respective departments:

But, in relation to this with child bearing. When a research associate post was advertised, the formula was designed in such a way, or the application rules ... I think it was four women and one man that could come in question for the post ... but, all the women were ruled out because of their age since they had brought up four children each.

It is not only that child bearing and maternity leave can create problems for women to obtain the right qualifications required for the higher posts but consequentially also the time *per se*. This implies that it is practically impossible for women with children to, so to say, catch up with their male counterparts. Women are loosing time when on maternity leave and if age is an unofficial recruitment criterion when later obtaining the right qualifications, the door to higher posts is shut. Liisa Husu has described how the current Finnish science policies have a strong stress on supporting young researchers and how this might have a negative effect on women academics that traditionally have been somewhat older than men (2001:87). Taking into account the warning that has been raised, regarding the increasing average age at our universities, by the National Agency for Higher Education (Tengren & Karlsson 2002:26), the same situation might occur in Sweden. However then the question is why women stay in academia if no promotion is in sight? Are women not interested in advancement?

When asked about plans for their academic futures and if they had applied for professor posts through recruitment or through promotion the respondents answers can be divided up in two categories: the ones that had not applied and the ones that had applied and did not get it or did

not know yet. The group of docents that had applied but did not get the post did apply for a professorship and not a promotive professor post. The ones that had applied and were waiting for the result had all applied for a "traditional" professorship and were considering applying for a promotive professors post if they did not get recruited. This shows that a traditional professorship was more desirable among the respondent, thus, more interesting is the answers delivered by those that had not applied. These respondents stated that they had not applied because they thought they were lacking the qualifications required. They had only been working for a few years as docents and therefore thought that it could wait to apply for a professorship. One of the interviewees sums up this argument but adds another equally interesting and important reason for not applying:

I have not applied for a professorship or promotion. The reason for this is that I became docent only two years ago and therefore assume that I haven't been able to get the merits acquired together. An entirely different thing is that I for the moment not am prioritizing scraping together merits. Except from what can be done working normal office ours, which normally is not the case for me.

This implies that some women do not put their career in the first room. And if that is the case in more general terms it throws a different light on the problem of few women professors.

### **5.3.5 Role models and social support**

That support is important for individual's ability to cope with a situation is well documented Frankenhaeuser (1993) have, for example, listed four different kinds of support that is equally important for the individual's well being. It has also been demonstrated that social support help the individual to minimize the risk of developing any kind of negative stress. To have someone that takes the time to listen to you and show empathy (emotional support) is as important as getting valuable information and advice (informative support) when needed. To get feedback (estimating support) on an accomplished task also helps the individual to estimate their own capacity or capability and finally, it is good to know that you can ask your colleagues for practical help (instrumental support) when needed (Frankenhaeuser 1993:21). When asked about social support the informants were not unanimous as to what extent they had received social support. As mentioned before, one of the informants felt that she never got any support at all when she started her career, but that it had changed and that she now received support from younger academics, both women and men. Other studies have shown that the homo-social reproduction in the academic setting leaves women, as a minority, outside the supportive network (see for example Kronsell 2002, Rogg 2001, Husu 2001). However, as one of the informants declared:

My experience when I applied for different positions or projects, is that men have positively evaluated me while women more negative. So, I don't believe that there exists any kind of community feeling among us women.

That there exists a supporting network among men does clearly not imply that there should be one for women. Quiet the opposite, if we shall believe our informants. Instead the competition is between women. This situation can be compared with a traditional class analysis, where the working class lacking the sense of solidarity and consciousness turns against each other. Dickenson has for example shown that women measure themselves against other women at work because "the dominant ethos is 'male' and most work environments, in the higher echelons especially, are governed and dominated by men" (2000:153). Men maintain the "gatekeeping" function, perpetuate job definitions and inclusion through relationships and networks while women seem to be standing outside and have to rely on individual characteristics and help from individual mentors. Consequently, women compete with other women, not with men, for posts, i.e. as if there were only so many positions at the top for women. Thus, this is far from true when talking to some of the other interviewees. One of the informant's claims that she has felt supported throughout her whole career, from both men and women:

Looking back on my career I experience it as if I have had support the whole time, also from men. Though I have had a female supervisor and I think that has played a role to. She had had a really strong position at the department and has been able to fight for her interests ... but, I have never felt, concretely, that I have been put in a worse position because of my being a woman.

This contribution leads us to the importance of role models. The fact that there are other people further up in the hierarchy that a person can identify herself with can have a positive effect, especially when it comes to expectations, motivation and goals as one of the informants give witness to:

We shall not underestimate the importance of role models. We see that it is possible for women, and that they are there. Then we see that it is possible for me to make it too ... that has been important for me. I have had women role models, I didn't think about it to begin with, but then you remember ... when you think about what made me get my self into this. That is because I have seen that I can identify with someone else.

This returns us to the discussion about commitment. During the interview when dealing with the topic of role models the informants had many positive things to say about their own role models from the younger years, but showed reluctance to take on this role for younger academics themselves. This is what one of the younger docents says about her role models and her view of herself as one:

I have also had female role models. But now when I'm a senior researcher myself I'm not interested in living up to what they stand for. They are, they are superwomen. They write an enormous amount, they fix everything, they know everything, they take care of a 1000 doctoral students, they publish 50 articles and 3 books in a year. It makes me ask my self if this is how we must be in order to succeed?

And this is probably the most significant, and representative, question that comes out of this focus group. How much must we do to obtain the goals we want, and at what price? Is it worth working so hard for? The last citation also shows on a gap between competence and confidence, i.e. that women tend to underestimate their own capability. In this section we have been able to see how the respondents thorough interaction with each other have conveyed attitudes, opinions and ideas about their situation as women academics. The focus group methodology allowed the participants to negotiate the meaning of their experiences and made it possible to deduce the above presented results.

## **6. Conclusion**

In the previous sections I have outlined the overall gender segregation at Swedish institutions for higher education. A discussion about a few political reforms aiming at reducing the gender segregation concluded that political mandates and reforms have had no real effect and did not lead to any permanent change (Chapter 2). Traditional theories trying to explain gender segregation have been reviewed (Chapter 3) and used throughout the paper. In the second section I connected long term sick leave, as a sorting mechanism, with the glass ceiling hypothesis and discussed it (Chapter 4). And in the last section the outcome of a focus group interview with five women docents was presented and analyzed (Chapter 5). In this final chapter I will try to tie the strings laid out in the previous sections together in a final conclusion.

We have seen how male professors, most recognized with academia, hold the positions as gatekeepers. Because gatekeepers position rests on the ideals that legitimate their own position they can be said to have an interest in defending a status quo. The gatekeepers

position can also be said to legitimate itself since the position gives them the authority to define the ideals for scientific conduct, classify conducts, works and other agents in the field. However, this should not necessarily be seen as a conscious process. Thus, the gatekeepers have internalized the ideal and accordingly treat them as natural and objective. Some of the interviewee's responses showed on how the gatekeepers through classification of right and wrong could keep newcomers with new ideas and ideals from entering the field. Interesting is that some of the comments made by the participants in the focus group can be interpreted as if the respondents also had internalized the prevailing ideals to such an extent that they did not recognize when they were treated differently from their male colleagues.

This power of definition can be compared to Gramsci's (1981) term hegemony. For Gramsci hegemony is a form of social control not influencing behavior through rewards and punishment. Instead it should be understood as a social mechanism that has the power to mould personal convictions into a replica of the prevailing norms. It is to be understood as an internal control based on an order in which a common social and moral language is spoken and in which one concept of reality is dominant. What Gramsci tried to show was how bourgeois rule in the advanced capitalist society were based, not on material force, but on their ability to establish its own moral, political and cultural values as conventional norms of practical behavior. The people, or the ruled, are seen as wearing their chains willingly "condemned to perceive reality through the conceptual spectacles of the ruling class, they are unable to recognize the nature of their own servitude"(Simon 1982:31). Gramsci's term hegemony can be compared to what we have talked about as academic ideals. I believe that the gatekeepers have succeeded in establishing their ideals as norms and that it prevents agents in the field from detecting discriminating processes. One of the respondents did, for example, not recognize the subtle changes that took place when she "inherited" a position from a male colleague. That implies that she have internalized the norm stating that women and men are equal, if not in the society at large, at least within the academic community.

This is also possible to relate to what we discussed earlier concerning women comparing themselves to other women, and not to men, in the organization. As some of the respondents gave witness to, conflicts and competition has foremost been experienced vis-à-vis other women. According to Dickson this is most common in the higher strata's in male dominated professions (2000:153). This can therefore be presumed to be a mechanism created by gender segregation that maintains status quo through competition between women for posts as if there were only so many places in the higher echelons for women. An internalization of the overall ideals serving a status quo can therefore be presumed to have taken place also by individuals debilitated by the system.

As mentioned in previous sections, when the research path was collapsed into one with the teaching path the workload consisting of teaching responsibilities, research engagements and administrative tasks increased more for women than for men. This was an effect, not only of the new career structure, but also a side effect of the local equality programs. This was at least how the women in the focus group experienced the change of their work tasks. With the increasing number of administrative engagements a “de-professionalization” process has taken place particularly for women. This does not only imply that women holding the same position as men have to do more of these “de-professionalizing” tasks, but also that their overall workload now is bigger than their male “equivalents”. As we have seen the overall workload is the one thing the women in the focus group complained most about. Some of them even stated that they, at times, had considered taking a brake to spare their health. I believe that these organizational changes can explain a large part of the increase of long term sick leave for women. The overwhelming workload did also affect some of the respondent's attitude towards their work. As we could understand the interviewees felt like they could not do anything as thoroughly as they wished to do and this resulted in a lack of commitment in some cases. These conditions created a situation where the respondents lost the urge for doing their work tasks and their work engagement were diminished.

However, it is not only that these changes have increased the risk for absence due to sickness among women and in some cases diminished their work commitment. Thus, most likely is also that there exists for women a health risk barrier that they have to cope with. The temporary forms of employment following an obtained doctoral degree with their lack of continuity made the respondents consider leaving their posts or led to depression or a feeling of being burned out, or both. We can therefore assume that some women are sorted out during this period because they either become sick or leave the profession. It is also likely that the remaining ones, the ones that succeeded in forcing this barrier anticipate that the struggle should end, after braking through the ceiling, i.e. after a successfully completed doctoral degree or a post. Doc. position. Then they discover that the struggle is never ending and that achieving a career in academia for women is a life long struggle. This can lead to a feeling of hopelessness and might result in lack of commitment and in worst cases health problems.

The respondents also stated that their workload was so heavy at times that they had to slow down on the working cadence and on the work engagement to spare their own health. If a decreasing work commitment is the only coping strategy to be able to continue working it might have serious consequences for women's possibilities of obtaining higher posts in academia. Even if this situation is created by the institution, the norms it is built on and the reforms aiming at improving the situation for women, the same institution might now interpret the coping strategy used by women as lack of commitment. Though this is true, the fault should be ascribed to the institution and not to the individual. However, I suggest that

the institution perceives women in this situation as unengaged and as lacking commitment and therefore sees them as less attractive candidates for higher posts within the organization. The working situation can therefore be said to create a catch 22 for women, that is, the workload creates a situation where women have to slow down on their work cadence or else their health will be affected and may result in sick leave. Whatever their "choice" will be it will affect their prospects of advancement negatively. I suggest this is an institutionalized form of discrimination. The discrimination can be said to hide behind the academic meritocracy that is defined on premises dictated by the men, earlier mentioned as most recognized with academia. This makes the conditions seem natural, not only by the individuals in positions with power to define the ideals, but also by those who can be seen as dominated. Women losing on the present situation can be said to have internalized a picture of meritocracy as objective and neutral and that hinders both them and the men in power to perceive the system as discriminating. In this way I believe that we should treat both absences due to sickness and coping strategies dealing with negative working conditions for women at our institutions of higher education as parts of the glass-ceiling phenomenon.

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**Appendix 1**

Absence due to sickness for professionals in 2002 (ASYR II).

**Statistics**

Gender		
N	Valid	392
	Missing	0

**Gender**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Men	147	37,5	37,5	37,5
	women	245	62,5	62,5	100,0
	Total	392	100,0	100,0	

Absence due to sickness for professionals in 1991-93 (ASYR I)

**Statistics**

Gender		
N	Valid	690
	Missing	0

**Gender**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Men	291	42,2	42,2	42,2
	Women	399	57,8	57,8	100,0
	Total	690	100,0	100,0	

**Appendix 2.**

Diagnoses for female and male professionals in 2002 (ASYR II)

**Case Processing Summary**

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Diagnosis 1, cat2 * Gender	382	97,4%	10	2,6%	392	100,0%

**Diagnosis 1, cat2 \* Gender Crosstabulation**

			Gender		Total
			Men	Women	
Diagnosis 1, cat2	Psychological	Count	46	68	114
		% within Gender	32,4%	28,3%	29,8%
	Muscular pain	Count	23	57	80
		% within Gender	16,2%	23,8%	20,9%
	Injuries/poisoning	Count	15	20	35
		% within Gender	10,6%	8,3%	9,2%
	Life conditions ef health	Count	8	21	29
		% within Gender	5,6%	8,8%	7,6%
	Other	Count	50	74	124
		% within Gender	35,2%	30,8%	32,5%
Total		Count	142	240	382
		% within Gender	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

**Chi-Square Tests**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	5,075 <sup>a</sup>	4	,280
Likelihood Ratio	5,199	4	,267
Linear-by-Linear Association	,083	1	,774
N of Valid Cases	382		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 10,78.

**Appendix 3.**

The reasons for ending the sick leave period for female and male professionals in 2002 (ASYR II)

**Case Processing Summary**

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Case closed do to: g1 * Gender	387	98,7%	5	1,3%	392	100,0%

**Case closed do to: g1 \* Gender Crosstabulation**

			Gender		Total
			Men	women	
Case closed do to: g1	Well, same work place	Count	92	129	221
		% within Gender	63,0%	53,5%	57,1%
	Well, other work place	Count	4	3	7
		% within Gender	2,7%	1,2%	1,8%
	Well, unemployed	Count	5	5	10
		% within Gender	3,4%	2,1%	2,6%
	Well, studying	Count	2	1	3
		% within Gender	1,4%	,4%	,8%
	Early retirement	Count	18	29	47
		% within Gender	12,3%	12,0%	12,1%
	Partial early retirement	Count	13	31	44
		% within Gender	8,9%	12,9%	11,4%
	Other AFL-measures	Count	4	25	29
		% within Gender	2,7%	10,4%	7,5%
	withdrawn sickness benefit	Count	1	1	2
		% within Gender	,7%	,4%	,5%
	Retirement pension	Count	4	2	6
		% within Gender	2,7%	,8%	1,6%
	diseased	Count	2	6	8
		% within Gender	1,4%	2,5%	2,1%
	Other	Count	1	9	10
		% within Gender	,7%	3,7%	2,6%
Total		Count	146	241	387
		% within Gender	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

**Chi-Square Tests**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	18,688 <sup>a</sup>	10	,044
Likelihood Ratio	20,397	10	,026
Linear-by-Linear Association	6,857	1	,009
N of Valid Cases	387		

a. 12 cells (54,5%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is ,75.

**Appendix 4.**

The reasons for ending the sick leave period for female and male professionals in 1991-93 (ASYR I)

**Case Processing Summary**

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
case closed do to: * Gender	685	99,3%	5	,7%	690	100,0%

**case closed do to: \* Gender Crosstabulation**

		Gender		Total	
		Men	Women		
case closed do to:	well, same work place	Count	201	256	457
		% within Gender	70,0%	64,3%	66,7%
another post, s work p	Count	4	7	11	
	% within Gender	1,4%	1,8%	1,6%	
New work	Count	6	1	7	
	% within Gender	2,1%	,3%	1,0%	
early retirement	Count	27	29	56	
	% within Gender	9,4%	7,3%	8,2%	
withdrawn sickness benefit	Count	2	4	6	
	% within Gender	,7%	1,0%	,9%	
partial early retirement	Count	10	26	36	
	% within Gender	3,5%	6,5%	5,3%	
parents' allowance	Count		35	35	
	% within Gender		8,8%	5,1%	
maternity allowance	Count		5	5	
	% within Gender		1,3%	,7%	
Rehab money	Count		2	2	
	% within Gender		,5%	,3%	
LAF-life annuity	Count		1	1	
	% within Gender		,3%	,1%	
Temporary parents' allowance	Count	1	1	2	
	% within Gender	,3%	,3%	,3%	
expired benefits	Count	1		1	
	% within Gender	,3%		,1%	
Studier/Utbbidr	Count	1	2	3	
	% within Gender	,3%	,5%	,4%	
Well, unemployed	Count	11	5	16	
	% within Gender	3,8%	1,3%	2,3%	
vacation	Count	4	8	12	
	% within Gender	1,4%	2,0%	1,8%	
Not heard from	Count	1		1	
	% within Gender	,3%		,1%	
retirement pension	Count	8	7	15	
	% within Gender	2,8%	1,8%	2,2%	
diseased	Count	9	7	16	
	% within Gender	3,1%	1,8%	2,3%	
occupational pension	Count	1	1	2	
	% within Gender	,3%	,3%	,3%	
77	Count		1	1	
	% within Gender		,3%	,1%	
Total	Count	287	398	685	
	% within Gender	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	

**Chi-Square Tests**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	52,483 <sup>a</sup>	19	,000
Likelihood Ratio	69,569	19	,000
Linear-by-Linear Association	,149	1	,700
N of Valid Cases	685		

a. 23 cells (57,5%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is ,42.

