Chapter 10
Gender Equality in the Swedish Educational Sector: A Case Study on Swedish Academia

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10.1 Introduction

> Equal treatment—that is obvious.

This remark was made in 2015 by the head of a Swedish university department. The statement is emblematic of generally prevailing attitudes towards gender in contemporary Sweden. Since the 1970s, gender equality has been a hallmark of Swedish politics and part of the Swedish self-image. It is enforced by an active policy of gender equality and by legislation to which all political parties in Sweden accede. An outcome of this policy is that all public organizations are forced to adjust to gender equality goals and to strive actively to achieve gender equality in their own organizations. This is one of the mandatory tasks of a manager in any public organization; as Swedish academic organizations are almost exclusively public; this goes for academia as well. At the bottom of the academic chain, we have departments with heads who are responsible for everyday academic life, for employees, and for students. They are the ones who are expected to make sure that gender equality is taken into account when decisions are made. They are expected to draw up gender equality plans and to evaluate the work done towards attaining the goals specified in the plans on a yearly basis.

A major difficulty relates, of course, to how this task should be interpreted. What does gender equality mean in practice? The concept is established on a rhetorical and/or discursive level, but that does not entail a generally accepted understanding of what it means in actual practice. A commonly held idea is that gender equality means equal treatment, as testified by the epigraph at the beginning of this section. Issues are reduced to questions of quantity, of representation at different levels, and

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of positions. Such an understanding facilitates efforts to enhance the number of women in an academic context where men overwhelmingly outnumber women, at least in the highest positions. It is more difficult in academia to evoke qualitative efforts and to challenge the academic setting and the way academia defines itself. The reasons for this will be explored in what follows.

This chapter aims to explore how gender equality as a concept is interpreted and how it is practised in academic organizations. The chapter starts with a short historical review and continues with a discussion of an inborn clash of *logics* which arises from the contradiction between academic values and the political ideal of fairness. In the light of this context, the study addresses the realities of the mandatory attention to gender equality, focusing on those who are responsible for fulfilling the mission at the lowest level in the academic hierarchy. What possibilities and what kinds of challenges can be made visible? Why do these efforts sometimes seem so tenacious and volatile? The study builds on interviews conducted during the spring of 2015 with representatives of 10 departments from different scientific areas and from three universities in Sweden.

10.2 Swedish Academy from a Gender Perspective: History and Current State

In 1873, female students were formally accepted into Swedish universities. Ten years later, in 1883, a Swedish woman earned a Ph.D. degree for the first time, but until 1949 women never made up more than 5% of the total number of students completing their doctoral degrees. The number of women employed at higher positions in academia was more or less negligible during the first half of the twentieth century.

Already from the beginning women were seen as outsiders, as deviants with respect to the academic setting, its values and its system of thought. Yet, a turning point can be identified in the beginning of the 1970s. Due to the democratization of the educational system and the rising interest in women's rights in the society at large, women began to enter Swedish universities in significant numbers. Gender equality has been on the agenda in higher education ever since, and, as a result, gender equality has been enhanced on several levels in academia. However, while there has been a breakthrough for *individuals*, Swedish academia can still be characterized by a sexual division of labour where men and women pursue different career paths.

Some examples may serve to illustrate this claim. Women more frequently than men carry on with educational tasks while men continue to have easier access to research careers (She Figures 2009). In mission statements, strong commitments are declared to teaching as well as to research. Yet teaching remains less valued (Volk et al. 2001). Furthermore, in the late 1990s, Swedish researchers Christine Wennerås and Agnes Wold documented both nepotism and sexism in the practices of the Swedish Medical Research Council by showing that women had to work harder to prove themselves and compete with their male colleagues (Wennerås and Wold 1997). They also found that the opportunities for men to reach excellent

research positions continued to be greater compared to those for women (Sandström and Hällsten 2008). Imbalances in the highest positions show the general validity of these studies. Although the number of women students and women at lower positions has increased rapidly, only slightly more than 20% of women in academia are full professors. Due to the impact of horizontal segregation, the percentage differs between the different scientific fields, where the lowest numbers of women as full professors are seen in technical science and the highest in the humanities. This is an international phenomenon, which can be understood as a marginalization of women that is embedded in the structure. It has been expressed in terms of constructing men and masculinities in academia (e.g. Hearn 2001, 2004a; Husu 2001; Valian 2005). It can be seen as an ongoing cloning or reproduction of sameness ingrained in the academic culture, which favours men (Essed and Goldberg 2002, 2012).

10.3 Political Striving for Gender Equality in a Swedish Academic Context

In the early 1990s, the Swedish government declared gender mainstreaming as an overall strategy for the gender equality policy. The policy rested on the idea of equal rights and principles of representation. According to the logic of the gender equality policy, representative fairness was and continues to be in focus, with an emphasis on equal power and opportunities for women and men (cf. Government Bill 2005–2006:155). To meet the overarching objective, the Government Bill from the mid-1990s had declared:

> A gender equality perspective must be applied to all policy areas. This means that proposals and decisions must be analysed from a gender equality point of view, to clarify possible consequences for women and men, respectively. It applies especially to structural changes in society. Gender equality must be pursued in every policy area and measures must be primarily carried out within the framework of the regular activities of the bodies concerned. Nevertheless, special initiatives, too, are needed to propel development in the desired direction. (Government Bill 1993–1994:147).

As the objectives are general and compulsory for all central government activities, they apply also to research and higher education. Since the mid-1990s, therefore, promoting gender equality has been a mandatory requirement for academia. One year later, in 1995, the government presented *Gender Equality in Education* (Government Bill 1994–1995:164), the first bill on this topic in Sweden. The bill presented several concrete suggestions for measures that would amend gender imbalance in both the long-term and the short-term perspectives. In this context, what needs to be highlighted is the point of departure for such measures, based on understandings gained from research on sex and gender and on power relations between the sexes. The conclusion was that gender equality was a question of knowledge rather than of attitudes. Thus, even if the political logic took its point

of departure from principles of representation and fairness, the underlying assumptions were based on long-term programmes for change. Measures to correct quantitative imbalances between men and women might then even comprise a changed view of science itself, and changing the dominant perceptions of the central issues in science.

The need for more women in the academic community has been a recurrent theme among politicians as well as in academia for at least the last two decades. But among politicians, there has also been a notorious dissatisfaction with how these issues have been handled internally within academia, which has been regarded as being quite passive when it comes to taking active measures to redress the gender imbalance. For this reason, several political initiatives have been introduced to speed up the task. But these initiatives have been contested within academia. The reason for this may be found in the nature of academic values.

10.4   Gender in a Meritocratic Organization

In its encounter with academia, the gender equality policy discourse on representative fairness and equal treatment has had to negotiate and combat powerful academic discourses on meritocracy and quality. Since meritocratic fairness rests on entirely different grounds than political justice, gender issues arouse strong feelings. Favouring women in the name of gender equality is judged to be incompatible with an academic understanding of fairness, which forms the basis of the meritocratic order in academia. Academia rests on values that emerge from traditions emphasizing the freedom of inquiry. The field is governed by its own logics, consisting of norms for the activity of scientific research formulated by Robert Merton in the 1940s. These classical imperatives are still taken as the normative starting points in terms of what should govern the production of academic knowledge. The norm of *communalism* entails that knowledge is created socially, in collaborative ventures, where participants are entitled to share the research results. *Universalism* implies that research is assessed according to the actual work done, and not on the basis of the researcher as a person. Moreover, scientific research should be accessible to everyone, i.e. it should be *disinterested*. The researcher is expected to be selfless and neutral in relation to the discipline. Finally, Merton propounds the norm of *organized scepticism*, which means that researchers should have a critical attitude towards the world (Merton 1973).

The principles that must guide researchers and their career opportunities in the academic system should, according to this view, not include gender at all. It is research as such that must be in focus, and the producer is less important. Even though these imperatives have been debated and modified, the core idea persists: academic rules should govern academic activities. When positions are to be filled and research funds distributed, the decisions are expected to be made according to objectively meritocratic principles. Academic rhetoric thus pervades the system of meritocracy, in which the people who are selected are supposed to owe their

selection to formal, and thereby fair, grounds. The best research must be rewarded, irrespective of who conducted it and regardless of whether this would hypothetically result in a single-sex research community. The imperatives just described form the 'ideal academic world', and they are recurrently highlighted when the imbalance between men and women comes up. Furthermore, the peer-review system serves as a guarantee for the legitimacy of the meritocratic system.

Yet, in actual practice, this system involves people who act in different ways (Lemont 2009; Van Arensbergen et al. 2014). Cognitive particularism or partiality is a concept that captures this process. Assessments do not, in other words, take the shape of purely rational processes. They entail some element of attitudes and personal preferences, and this also affects the work itself. Since academic culture is premised on men and their relationships with other men, women from the beginning have fewer opportunities. The very way in which academic excellence is defined may be tantamount to constructing maleness in the academic world (Hearn 2004b). Or, as stated in a report discussing the relationship between excellence and underlying notions of gender, 'even an unbiased measure, when applied to a biased system, will produce biased results' (Brouns and Addis 2004, p. 26). This is seldom a matter of deliberate attempts to actively disregard someone. Rather, it is a result of the manner in which assessors interpret quality, and of gatekeeping functions and 'old boys' networks' (Husu and Cheveigné 2010).

10.5 Gender Policy Meets Academia

Despite adherence to these ideal principles of assessment, academia is well aware of the gender imbalance and of the under-representation of women. But rather than accepting structural reasons for this imbalance, academia tends to attribute it to individual women and their failures. It is suggested that women have quite simply been unable to hold their own vis-à-vis men in fair competition. Currently, perceptions of women as not even having reached the starting line are widespread. In other words, it is widely believed that women have not managed to attain enough qualifications, and they are expected to drop out rather than struggle to enhance their careers. The metaphor of the 'leaking pipeline' is used to suggest that at every stage of the academic career track, a certain proportion of women leak out of the system. This is an idea that is generally taken for granted, and several arrangements have been put forth to remedy this at the individual level. 'Helping projects' are launched recurrently, but according to Christine Wennerås and Agnes Wold, the authors of the article that actually brought down the Medical Research Council in the late 1990s, 'what Sweden's female researchers need is objectivity in the filling of positions. Women don't want to be 'helped'. Women want to be treated fairly' (Wennerås and Wold 1995).

A striking example of the collision between the political and the academic logic emerged in 1995, when the then Swedish minister of research and education proposed setting up 30 positions at the highest level (full professorships), with the

possibility of resorting to affirmative action in the recruitment process, very strictly based on only small differences in terms of competence. The proposal focused on quantity at a time when the percentage of women at that level was very low: only 7%. But underlying the scheme were assumptions about the promotion of long-term efforts to change perceptions regarding central issues in science, i.e. through interventions at the structural level. It was a decision based on the belief that this was the only way of challenging 'the corridors of power', and it could be seen as a very effective measure if serious attempts to change the gender balance were to be taken. The legislative effort illuminated a problem that had been known for decades. Yet, academia perceived the proposition as a threat to the entire academic system, principally because the proposal's focus on enhancing women's careers through recourse to affirmative action ran counter to the academic community's self-image. All in all, the proposal led to a bitter debate, with academics criticizing it for viewing sex as more important than competence (Jordansson 1999).

10.6 Distinctions Between Equal Opportunities and Gender Equality: An Analytical Statement

Thus far, gender equality has been used as a universal concept, and I will continue to use the term in this manner in what follows. Yet, there are reasons to make a distinction between the concept of gender equality and that of equal opportunities/equal treatment. Julia Nentwich, for instance, explores 'how gender equality is constructed in talk and text' (Nentwich 2006, p. 504; cf. Wullum Nielsen 2014). 'Equal opportunities' or 'equal treatment' refers to fairness vis-à-vis individuals, while the notion of gender equality refers to a broader understanding of structural and/or institutional inequalities. The latter persist due to current ways of *doing gender*, where gender, regarded as an integral and situated part of organizational practices, is said, done and performed in everyday academic life (cf. Acker 1990; Poggio 2006; West and Zimmerman 1987). The persistence of culture, practices and processes that constitute structural inequality, based on sets of values that define specific configurations of gender, brings disadvantages for women both in research and in managerial careers (Leathwood 2005). Without recognition of gendered structures and the reasons why they persist, the under-representation of women in academia tends to be explained through essentialist conceptions of 'male' and 'female'. To quote Nentwich, 'if the basic assumption of differences between women and men is not challenged, the hierarchy will remain in place' (2006, p. 514). Discussion of the under-representation of women at different levels thus tends to focus on the differences between women and men or highlights women's voluntary choices. Thus, under-representation is attributed to women's lack of interest in academic careers rather than to situated social gender practices; the 'leaking pipeline' is said to account for the lack of women in higher positions. Women's duties as caregivers are often brought forward as an argument in such discussions. In this way, women themselves are seen as responsible for their under-representation in the academy.

Addressing equal opportunities without awareness or recognition of systemic, institutionalized gender barriers might end up yielding only a Pyrrhic victory. It might enhance individual careers but does not alter the 'business as usual' behaviour, which in turn legitimizes the established order of things. Sociologist Tilly (1998) helps us see how adaptation to organizational behaviours can reproduce a durable inequality, even if an increasing number of women are given opportunities to take advantage of the system through opportunity hoarding. Paradoxically, focusing too much on equal opportunity without awareness of structural inequalities might lead to an even stronger set of traditional values. This is because those who get the opportunities might be personally interested in meritocratic gatekeeping processes, as the system demonstrates possibilities for those who show themselves to be strong enough to grab those opportunities (ibid.). This phenomenon became apparent when 30 full professorships were earmarked for women in the late 1990s, as mentioned earlier: female professors who had already been appointed resisted the proposal to a great extent (Jordansson 1999).

Measures for durable gender equality, then, must address academic values per se, as well as take into account how academic culture and meritocracy are interpreted as situated knowledge in specific academic settings. What kinds of activities are accomplished at the university, faculty and/or the department level? Are there any activities addressing the structural dimensions of gender equality at all?

When investigating measures for equal opportunity as well as proposals for ensuring gender equality in academic organizations, there must be careful consideration both of how gender equality is interpreted and how concrete tasks can be put into practice. Laws on discrimination have to be taken seriously, but if the movement for gender equality ends up as a reactive cleaning-out process rather than a proactive effort towards real change, 'the show will go on', and the gender-blind mode of business as usual in academic settings will continue. While 'gender equality' is the concept that will be deployed in what follows, I will return to the different understandings of the concept in the summary to the chapter, suggesting what outcomes are feasible, and why gender equality seems to be such a 'mission impossible' in academia.

10.7 Organizational Prerequisites in Academic Settings

Increasing marketization and severe competition between different parts of each university, as well as competition between universities at both the national and the global levels, have promoted organizational changes in academia in Sweden (cf. Ek et al. 2011). These changes have arisen not least due to changes in the distribution of economic resources, which nowadays is increasingly based on the number of publications in high-ranked journals. This phenomenon pervades the academy from the top (ministry level) to the bottom (faculty and department levels). On the whole, academic organizations are becoming more like private companies, where managers are expected to function as professional leaders. This emphasis on professional

leadership is one of the most obvious alterations in the remodelling of academic governance, and is supposed to help govern the sector in a more efficient manner (cf. Bosetti and Walker 2010).

Different universities have adapted to the new governing principles in different ways. Some more or less submit to the new public management order, while others hold on to more traditional values based on collegiality, where peers are in charge of their colleagues for a certain amount of time. Yet, independently of the kind of management, all universities are expected to meet and fulfil certain objectives in accordance with challenges and demands from the outside. In this context, in-built tensions may arise between leaders/heads and the traditional hierarchy maintained by collegiality and legitimized in positions and status based on scientific capital (Bourdieu 1988). Further, the power of department heads at the lowest level in the academic hierarchy differ from university to university. Some universities have carried autonomy through to the lowest levels, and the department head is more or less a position of responsibility, while other universities continue to have boards that make all the decisions.

One thing that is common to all the universities in this study is recent reorganization resulting in growing departments. On average, the departments in the study have 100–120 employees at different levels, composed of administrators as well as teachers, researchers and PhD students. Furthermore, in Sweden, the heads themselves can decide the amount of time designated for administration. For most of the respondents in this study, their responsibilities as heads took up 50 to 70% of their total work time, while the rest of their work time was devoted to research and/or teaching. One exception was a head, who decided to devote only 30% of total work time to fulfilling the role, stating, 'We do not want to be professional leaders; we still want to be colleagues'. Another was supposed to work as head 50% of the time, but in fact discharged administrative duties full-time. In reality, administrative tasks take considerably more time, which presumably stretches working hours far beyond the stipulated 40 h per week in Sweden.

Such examples show the realities at work in the academic community. Being part of the research community and loyalty towards one's colleagues are priorities, and administrative duties are often adjusted to these expectations. It could be difficult to take sides against the research community even if the head has all the right to make these decisions. It should be added that the majority of heads have assistant or deputy heads who are responsible for certain aspects of administration, such as research/graduate education. Together, these teams form executive committees.

10.8 Findings from the Interviews: Understandings of Gender Equality

On the whole, the conditions for active work on gender equality are limited at the level of departments. Addressing gender imbalance is seen as something that has to be done or at least something to which attention must be paid, but it seems to be a

well-known fact that almost nothing will happen if the tasks are set aside, i.e. no legal measures will be instituted. Gender equality plans have to be drawn up every year, but sometimes heads refer to existing plans at the faculty or university level, or more self-critically they cite lack of time as a reason for non-implementation. Or, as one of the heads frankly put it: 'If they had forced me to, I would have done more'.

Another reason for this negligence could be uncertainty regarding what kinds of activities might be undertaken to facilitate gender parity. Moreover, as long as no one really asks for active engagement, and follow-ups or yearly evaluations are not carried out, the focus will be placed on different tasks that are considered more important. In combination with lack of knowledge, and indifference to 'doing gender' at different levels, the results could be counterproductive or dismissed as irrelevant, as in a statement from one of the heads: 'We have a pretty good workplace, with a balance between men and women, perhaps, even more, women than men, which could be a problem in our department'. Gender equality, then, is seen as a question concerning the lack of women, meaning that as long as women are in a majority, the question of gender equality is not relevant. Yet there was obvious uncertainty, as expressed by one of the heads: 'It is not that easy to understand what gender equality is about. Perhaps there is a need for teachers to be educated [on gender topics] as students ask for gender and gender equality'.

The meritocratic system anchors a dominant standpoint in this regard, expressed by one of the heads as follows: '[I]t's important with a balance among men and women but there has to be competence'. The meritocratic system is taken for granted, which makes it possible for almost all of the respondents to unambiguously highlight equal opportunities, often expressed in the form, 'the conditions should be equal but if women rather would not, we should not…'. The statement, an opinion shared by all of the respondents, is a reflection on the possibilities of using allocation of quotas or—the weaker option—affirmative action to redress gender imbalance. Even the head, who considers the need for gender balance as well founded, ended by saying: '[I]t's a matter of what could be looked upon as grounds of fact and to what extent one argues for it. It's not that easy, as a small university we have to make sure we choose our colleagues on equal conditions. We can't undermine the system'.

10.9   Gender Equality as Part of the Work Environment

The interviews indicate an obvious connection between gender equality and the work environment among the heads. The respondents share an explicit focus on the individual rather than on structural processes. Sometimes this focus is related to the supposedly weaker ability of women (compared to men) to succeed in a hard academic culture, which stresses individual struggle and the setting aside of all but one's personal career. A 'protective hand' may be extended to those (women) who are believed to be worth the investment. Even those heads who are conscious of the

overall structural patterns of inequality in society, and understand how these patterns reflect in academia, avoid taking a stand. Doing 'business as usual' is more convenient than starting up processes of change.

For example, all of the respondents pointed to the issue of equal pay. Wage adjustment is something very substantial that can be carried out more easily than structural change. Wage mapping is provided for by the law and has to be done regularly in accordance with wage negotiations and with assistance from the HR department. Yet, from the perspective of changing values, wage adjustment seems a rather harmless issue even if it is obviously very important from the perspective of the individual.

Some departments have one person, or maybe a group of persons, dedicated specifically to carrying out tasks related to gender equality. Mostly, these individuals have been voluntarily engaged with this kind of issue for a long time. However, even though they themselves might be seriously engaged with questions of gender equality, the rest of the department rarely supports them. In these cases, efforts to improve the gender balance seem to consist largely of decisions made by these individuals on how to build up their work and what kinds of activity to propose. The importance of management support has been pointed out in the research (e.g. Beer and Nohria 2000; Fernandez and Pitts 2007). However, one of the respondents drew a picture, probably not unique to academia, in which gender equality–related tasks were relegated to those who were engaged with these issues, and managerial support seems to have been passive: 'It seems as if the group is still trying to find out what to do. The work is meant to generate activities but still, nothing has happened'. Sometimes, having failed to support, the group introduces activities that have not been discussed with the executive committee at the department, resulting in what one head described as a 'very wobbly process' with limited opportunities for follow-up.

One of the heads interviewed attributed the reluctance to allow a more stable organization of gender equality issues to the extended overhead costs involved, which, in the end, would impinge on the core activities of the department (education and research). Overall, respondents at this department considered such tasks to be the head's responsibility, and therefore as being already 'paid for'. At universities that are most dedicated to professional leadership, gender equality tasks have been devolved to the faculty, or to the university level where a person employed at the HR department takes responsibility for these functions. Such steps might be interpreted as facilitating efficiency through assigning what have been recognized as important tasks to experts who can devote full-time work to these issues. Sometimes this works, at least partly, as an example from one of the universities in the study shows. In this case, a lot of programmes relating to gender equality were offered, and the respondents who participated in these activities seemed to appreciate the initiatives taken. As one of them said: "[I]t puts new life into these topics. We got educated and were asked to apply the questions to our own everyday life, think about what could be put into the plan of action at our own department'. These activities had been initiated only recently and it was too early for them to be

evaluated, but the example shows how a conscious effort could perhaps be a starting point for action.

But other instances testify to the continuing vulnerability of these programmes. In the case of another university, where again a person employed in the HR department was responsible for gender equality measures, one of the respondents said, 'I have no impression of active work. It feels as if someone is sitting somewhere and 'knocking them' [activity plans] out. They are active when it comes to salaries and look for experts when it comes to appointments, but that's all'. Another respondent from the same university was even more critical:

> I don't believe this is an issue here. Once there was a discussion related to the coming wage negotiations but it was the heads that brought the question up. Further on, there was a meeting where some people were invited to talk about stereotypes. It was miserable and I believe it had to do with lack of knowledge. They invited consultants who were not competent, which is conspicuous in an organization where we have people doing research on those topics.

10.10 Challenging Core Activities

The main purpose of departmental activities is research and education. This is the reason why people apply for research funding and/or decide to affiliate themselves with a certain department. To a great extent, then, questions that tend to lie outside the main purpose of department activity are perceived as annoying. For example, issues relating to the work environment and related problems tend to be regarded as irrelevant. One of the respondents made this clear by a statement that really is conspicuous: 'Activities related to work environment tend to be our most far-reaching problem of the working environment!' This is not to say that such topics are considered irrelevant or as questions to be disposed of among colleagues, but commissions to enhance gender equality are poorly supported in everyday life. With reference to the quote in the epigraph at the beginning of this chapter, one respondent offered the following reflection: '[W]e have a politically correct climate, which makes it hard to raise questions of gender equality. There are radical and progressive forces but simultaneously strong gender structures. We have made some efforts but heavy processes of organizational change and economic cut-downs have taken up all the energy'.

Furthermore, the tension between collegiality and professional governance became obvious when one respondent expressed how gender equality efforts could even be looked upon as part of an increase in top-down governing. One of the respondents recognized the necessity of these efforts, but could not look away from the experienced reality:

> It [gender equality] could be more directly pointed out but if so, it would probably be met by resistance. People do not want to be *told*, one has to treat one another with kid gloves and find the right driving forces. We have to respect the strong engagement most of our colleagues have for their own tasks.

Rather than scrutinizing the underlying conditions, the department heads look upon their responsibilities as taking care of the department as a whole, i.e. independent of structural patterns of gender inequality. Even if some of the heads recognize the existence of structural problems, a degree of resignation to the prevailing state of affairs is in evidence, as seen in an observation made by one of the respondents: 'Because of the patriarchal order, things seem to be more easy-going for men, while women sometimes make decisions [like the decision to take care of children and family] which might end up negative in the long run. Perhaps we could be more active and discuss values and ethical attitudes'.

A similar observation, offered by another respondent, highlights a culture in which the idea of the 'inspired genius' who needs no help from outside predominates: 'When expressions like you shouldn't rake the paths, if someone has the right spirit everything will go well, are established, great demands are required for processes of change'. This department head was quite new to the position and exhibited a willingness to work on prevailing norms and values, but the majority of the respondents, who had held their positions for several years, seemed more or less reluctant or perhaps were just tired of dealing with these tenacious structures.

A position in between these two was expressed by one head, who highlighted the importance of starting early and not focusing all the attention on the top of the ladder of success. According to this respondent, the focus on full professorships is misleading; it is more important to take care of young postdocs, those who would be full professors if they were facilitated, 'Sometimes recruitment of full professors seems to be a failure. I don't believe in going for some elderly professor, rather a younger one who might bring family with them and stay for long. The route to success depends on finding colleagues who are willing to stay'. The respondent continued: 'One has to treat the young women carefully. They are vulnerable in a position halfway between career and family'.

However, what is not taken into account in such observations is what might happen in the future. The career ladder does not look the same for everyone, and changes do not automatically follow from increasing the numbers of women in lower positions. Even if the interviews contain an underlying awareness of this possibility, substantial suggestions on how to put such questions into the practical form are not forthcoming. Lack of knowledge might explain such hesitation, and this could be addressed through education and courses on gender equality. However, as one of the respondents put it, 'If you chose a head who does not believe those questions are so bloody important, you could push him to attend as many courses as you can but nothing will change him or his opinion'. An underlying resignation is evident in the following statement by a respondent at a department where at least some of the colleagues evinced a scientific engagement with gender issues: 'We find ourselves in a treadmill of impossible change'.

10.11   Nature of the Tasks

The lack of women in leading positions is emphasized in these interviews. From the point of view of equal treatment, the underlying issues here involve having the same rights of access to positions and a focus on representative fairness. But some of the heads interviewed pinpointed the difficulties of being the sole women in groups dominated by men. They emphasized problems like not being regarded on equal terms within the group, and/or not being looked upon as professional and competent persons, but rather, at worst, simply as 'tokens' or representatives of their sex (cf. Moss Kanter 1993). The expression of such experiences could indicate recognition of the difficulty of being a woman in this position, and deciding that as a woman it would be better not to make an effort to be part of the group. On the other hand, such complaints might also index the belief that more women should enter the academy so as to break through the glass ceiling and enable the composition of groups of women. This would have the consequence of giving women the status of individuals rather than viewing them solely as representatives of their sex. But perhaps matters are not as simple as that. From a gender equality perspective, encouraging women to strive for positions as directors of studies, heads or deans might be counterproductive, in that women in leadership positions would get stuck in administrative tasks, preventing them from engaging in further scientific work. While their work for the department might give them credit, in the academic community such endeavours do not really carry weight. Indeed, working in these positions could backfire because the women would have no time for research, and this might even lead to an ending of their careers. One of the heads, cited previously, was fully aware of this dilemma when she decided to keep 50% of her working hours for research—a decision that was made at the cost of what could be regarded as a reasonable workload. A male head expressed the same dilemma as follows:

> I advise against younger persons for assignments as managers. It will be hell, as they will still go on as usual. More than six years is bad for the career. It might look good on paper but as long as they are in an academic career it is not so good being a manager.

Here, even young males are included in the advice, which makes sense in a society where highly educated young men struggle to achieve a work–life balance.

On an organizational level, there have been breakthroughs in enhancing the number of women professors during the last few decades. Besides the 30 full professorships established in the 1990s, specific goals for recruitment have been set up by the Swedish Department of Education, for the first time in 1997–1999 and thereafter in 2001–2004 and 2005–2008. After a hiatus, these goals were once again promoted in 2012 and, by the end of 2015, 47% of recruited professors were expected to be women. The goals have been adjusted to the specific prerequisites of the universities, but on the whole, they have to—or are expected to—act on these objectives.

Some universities do have plans for action, while others do not; the universities which are part of this study belong to the latter category. When administrators at the university level are passive, one cannot expect much from the levels below. As long as there are no extra resources forthcoming from the university or the faculty, the departments have to economize based on what is available. Their hands are almost literally tied, as the existing resources do not cover any extra activities at all. As one of the heads explained it: '[A] full professor is expected to do research at least part of the time but the department can't pay for it. He or she has to put in external money, i.e. pay for his/her own salary'.

The national recruitment goals could have been seen as a push factor, but none of the heads even mentioned it, and some of them did not even seem to be aware of their existence.

10.12   Summary

As discussed in the preceding sections, the interviews capture built-in tensions between managerial governance and academic collegiality. This indicates that department heads are often trapped between their compulsory tasks as managers and loyalty to values and practices deeply rooted in the academic culture. As one of the respondents puts it: 'Other things than gender equality have to be prioritized. Rough demands of effectiveness, being economical with resources, and excellent research based on external funds come to the forefront and that is what we have to focus on'. In other words, these are the core activities legitimized by the academic community that heads must concentrate on. While there is no obvious contradiction between the two sets of imperatives, as one of the respondents expressed it, 'The difficult thing is that in the short term different tasks will be pitted against one another'.

Management in academia is hard enough, which makes it more or less legitimate to put what is regarded as irrelevant or less important aside. The exercise of authority, which includes debriefing, may be set aside when it comes to certain tasks, and this is certainly valid for tasks defined as lying outside the core activity. The following conclusion, which seems to be true for everyone, was drawn by one of the respondents: 'There are an awful lot of things to do and we can't manage all of them faultlessly. One has to prioritize among tasks one believes are important and hope that no one reports things that will not be done'.

Although the study relies on experiences from different universities with different degrees of adjustment to the new public management system, there are similarities in their practices, which can be interpreted as an outcome of a predominant set of academic values. Most of the respondents are more or less aware of the structural dimensions of their work environment, and they do recognize the durability of gender inequality in the academic community. But to a high degree, they individualize the problem by focusing on the more obvious difficulties faced by women in reaching positions at the higher levels. In terms of the distinction

between equal treatment and gender equality that I made previously, the focus of the respondents is on equal treatment. They emphasize women's right to move upwards and to be treated as equals, but they believe that the scope of possibility for these rights is limited. Some of them—for example, those who have their own research groups—try to place young women in favourable positions when there are options for doing so. But as heads or administrative managers, their opportunities to act in sync with research groups are limited. And, even if almost everyone confirms the importance of equal treatment, the tasks themselves are perceived as being of secondary importance. It appears to be hard to institute proactive measures, and what remains is more or less individual support in certain situations. Recurrent economic cutbacks make it even more difficult to foreground the gender issue, and independently of whatever strong will exists to put these tasks on the agenda, most heads back down in the face of short-term realities. Change is believed to happen by more or less automatic control, while core tasks have to be prioritized.

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