Varying Unemployment Experiences?

The economy and mental well-being

Mattias Strandh

Doctoral theses at the Department of Sociology,
Umeå University No 18 2000

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ABSTRACT

From being an unemployment success story, Sweden was during the 1990s thrown into a European normality, with apparent high and persistent unemployment. This has made unemployment a central issue in the Swedish public debate as a social problem directly affecting hundreds of thousands of individuals. In the public debate there is however no consensus on what characterises the experience of unemployment. One perspective emphasises the role of employment for self-realisation. Unemployment here becomes a very destructive experience, due to the psychosocial value attached to employment. An alternative perspective instead views employment as a necessary evil that brings little satisfaction to those who participate in it. From this perspective unemployment mean very little to those struck by it outside the possible negative effects on income (which are minimised by the welfare state).

The objective of this thesis has been to move beyond the postulated truths of what the experience of unemployment means. It uses an empirical approach in order to investigate the consequences of unemployment for mental well-being, and to develop an understanding of the reasons for this relationship.

The following conclusions can be drawn from the five articles that make up the thesis. In line with previous international and Swedish research, the thesis shows that unemployment as compared to employment is in general a distressing experience. This does however not mean that we can draw the simple conclusion that unemployment represents misery and employment represents the absence of misery. The thesis finds the relationship to be more complex than so. There is a need to take into account more of the possible variations in status available both on and outside the labour market. Different exit routes from unemployment were found to have different consequences for the mental well-being of the unemployed individual. Further, the evidence in the thesis shows that there is variation in the impact of unemployment on mental well-being within the unemployment group. We should, thus, not talk about the experience of unemployment, but rather about varying unemployment experiences.

The general effect of unemployment on mental well-being, and the variation in the unemployment experience, was in turn shown to be mainly dependent on two factors. Firstly on the psychosocial need for employment in a society where employment is the norm. Secondly, on the economic need for employment in a society where employment, as the thesis also shows, for many still is necessary for adequate economic resources.

Keywords: unemployment, employment, psychosocial, mental well-being, economy, employment commitment, nest-leaving, unemployment benefits

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Preface

In the preface it is traditional to acknowledge the positive input of all the people around you that has helped make the thesis possible, this while taking the sole responsibility for any mistakes or errors to be found in the book. For me this practice has felt out of place in relation to a sociological thesis. Whereas the thesis might describe issues such as restricting and enabling aspects of hierarchies such as class or gender for the professional career, the preface attributes the achievement of the thesis to the positive input of individuals and research organisations. The analytical tools with which we are trained and armed thus remain something that we enforce on the world that lies outside our own achievements. Our own successes are instead attributed to (besides our own intellectual capacities) the economic support of research foundations, intellectual support from your advisor/the academic environment and the support from a loving wife and family. I always imagined that I in the preface of my own thesis would break out of this format and write the first sociological preface in a sociological thesis. I was going to write a preface that placed the analysis of the completion of my thesis solidly among the social structures that we social scientists are so fond of. I mean, why should I thank the organisations funding my research, my advisor and colleagues for their support and my wife for standing by me, when you look at who I am? Being a married, white, male, heterosexual person from an upper middle class background this kind of backup in an academic environment is what you could expect, isn't it?

Once I sat down and tried to write, however, I very soon realised that it was impossible for me to write that kind of preface. Not because I could not relate the great opportunities and support I have received both in life in general and in academic life to my social characteristics. I am not so self-deluding that I can not see the advantages that I have. No, the reason was rather that the support and opportunities that I have been given have been so great that they transcend a reduction to such advantages. To have all advantages and all opportunities in an academic environment matters very little if your topic is unimportant and the academic environment is not a good one.

Unemployment and the unemployed are important issues, and the research which I have been fortunate enough to be a part of has, besides being interesting research, also been important research. I am very grateful that The Swedish Council for Work Life Research decided to contribute financially to the research, which has resulted in this thesis. Being a part of interesting and important research is also something that has characterised

the conditions under which the thesis has been written. Many describe the writing of their thesis as lonely work. Working with the Long-term Unemployment Project together with my advisor Rune Åberg and my colleagues Mikael Nordenmark and Margareta Bolinder I have never felt lonely with my research. At the same time Rune has allowed me great freedom in relation to what I do and how I do it, something that I personally am grateful for. The environment at the Department of Sociology has also always been generous and more people than can be mentioned have generously shared their research, knowledge and personalities. These people know who they are, and most of them I not only regard as my colleagues and co-workers, but also as my friends. This is not to say that I was not grateful for the opportunity to escape their wonderful company for six months, made possible by economic resources from the Swedish Institute and the hospitality of Walter Müller and the Mannheim Centre for European Social Research. In Mannheim I got the peace of mind and the many hours of stimulating discussions on labour market issues that probably was necessary for the completion of the thesis. Thank you Markus Gangl for those long stimulating conversations, and thank you wonderful persons working in the cafeteria for sponsoring these discussions by allowing us the very Swedish custom of the 'påtår'.

In much the same way all of my opportunities and advantages could not match the support I have received from my wife. Besides being my best friend and lover, thus making it all worthwhile, she has not stood by and understood me. Instead she has worked with me, read what I have written, and when called for questioned it. Thank you Karina for not understanding me, I hope you can say the same!

Mattias Strandh

Umeå, August 2000

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The attached papers:

I. Strandh, M (1999) 'Youth unemployment and economic marginalisation', published in Swedish as 'Ungdomsarbetslöshet och ekonomisk marginalisering', in: Gullberg, A & Börjesson, M (eds.) *I vuxenlivets väntrum*, Borea: Umeå.

II. Nilsson, Karina & Strandh, Mattias (1999), 'Nest Leaving in Sweden: The Importance of Early Educational and Labour Market Careers'. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, vol 61: 1068-1079.

III. Strandh, M (2000) 'Different exit routes from unemployment and their impact on mental well-being: the role of the economic situation and the predictability of the life course'. *Work, Employment and Society*, vol 14, no 3.

IV. Nordenmark, M & Strandh, M (1999) 'Towards a sociological understanding of mental well-being among the unemployed – the role of economic and psychosocial factors'. *Sociology*, vol 33, no 3, pp 577-597.

V. Strandh, Mattias (2000) 'State intervention and mental well-being among the unemployed'. *Journal of Social Policy,* forthcoming.

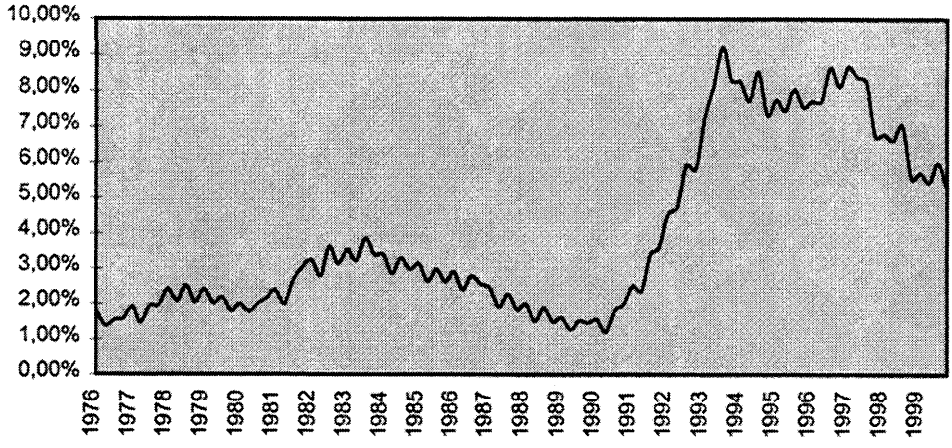
Varying unemployment experiences? The economy and mental well-being

Looking at unemployment today, there is no doubt that we regard it as one of the central problems facing Sweden at the beginning of the twenty-first century. This is reflected in the political debate where there seems to be broad consensus among political parties concerning the desirability of reducing unemployment and stimulating growth in employment. This consensus does not, of course, translate into consensus regarding how this should be accomplished – something for which we should perhaps be thankful, as we are presented with a variety of alternative policy options for combating unemployment. These options range from suggestions about sharing the existing jobs more equally, enhancing economic growth by stimulating the economy, increasing the competitiveness of the labour force through education, to enhancing the functioning of the labour market by decreasing government involvement. For observers from most European countries, the relevance of the unemployment issue and the debate surrounding unemployment are familiar and echo a debate that has been on the agenda almost constantly for the past 30 years. From a Swedish perspective, however, this is a relatively new situation.

Up until the beginning of the 1990s, Sweden could be described as an unemployment success story. During the 1970s and the 1980s, most other European countries were hit by repeated unemployment shocks that drastically increased the number of unemployed. Once unemployment had increased, it proved to be very difficult to lower again, and it remained on a higher level despite improvement in the rest of the economy – a situation that has been described as unemployment hysterisis. Sweden, in this respect, appeared to be an exception to the European normality. As we can see in Figure 1, even in Sweden the downturns in the business cycle meant small to moderate increases in unemployment during the 1970s and 1980s. These increases in unemployment were, however, modest in relation to those in most other countries and, moreover, they were compensated for by upturns in the business cycle. Thus, unemployment was kept at a very low level on average, and it appeared as though Sweden had managed to avoid the problem of unemployment hysterisis. Sweden's role as unemployment success story came to an abrupt end, however, at the beginning of the 1990s. During two years of economic crisis, beginning mid-1991, Sweden suffered from what can only be described as an unemployment shock. Open unemployment rose from 2% to over 9% by mid-1993. Interesting to note is

that the dramatic increase in unemployment also co-occurred with a decrease in the labour force (Åberg et al. 1997), meaning that unemployment figures (as grim as they were) actually might have underestimated the effects of the unemployment shock.

Figure 1. Percent of the Swedish labour force in open unemployment 1976-1999 (AKU quarterly statistics 1976-1999)



In the mid-1990s, the success story of Swedish unemployment appeared to have been thrown into European normality. Consistent with hysterisis, the unemployment rate remained at almost record levels during the initial rebound of the economy 1994-1995, and did not substantially increase when the economy slowed down during 1996 and the beginning of 1997. All available evidence suggested that Swedish unemployment levels had settled on a much higher level than before the unemployment shock and begun to cyclically fluctuate around this higher level. This labour market situation remained until the beginning of the current economic upturn in 1998, when the situation improved substantially. But the Swedish unemployment shock of the 1990s did something more than move Swedish unemployment rates into European normality. It also brought the composition of the unemployment group closer to that of the labour force. The drastic increase in the unemployment rate meant that groups previously well established on the labour market experienced relatively larger increases in unemployment risk. Unemployment – which had largely been connected with being female, young, poorly educated, of foreign origin, or living in rural areas – now to a greater extent also struck men, the middle aged, better educated people, Swedish citizens and people outside the rural areas. This normalisation of the unemployment group seems to be related to downturns in the business

cycle in general, but after the 1990s' unemployment shock, it was more marked than during previous economic downturns (see Åberg et al. 1997).

Thus, unemployment during the 1990s struck a broad array of labour market strata, creating unemployment experiences for people who were previously relatively well established on the labour market. For many individuals, the experience of unemployment has not been temporary. Unprecedented numbers have suffered real labour market difficulties, remaining unemployed for prolonged time periods (Åberg & Nordenmark 2000). The development of unemployment in the 1990s not only presented economic difficulties for the Swedish government, it also presented very real labour market difficulties for hundreds of thousands of individuals. This helps to explain the centrality of the unemployment problem in the Swedish political debate. As a central economic issue interwoven with inflation, unemployment merits some serious attention, but it is only when unemployment is also regarded as a central social issue that it becomes a pressing political problem. But is unemployment really a social problem? The fact that many individuals experience it for shorter or longer periods is not sufficient reason to define it as problematic. Unemployment becomes a social issue only if it actually has external repercussions for unemployed individuals themselves and/or their social surroundings. Here the question of what the status of unemployment actually means for the individual becomes central.

Unemployment and psychological well-being

But what are the personal consequences of unemployment for the individual? Looking at the public debate in Norway, Knut Halvorsen identifies two diametrically opposed pictures related to the meaning of unemployment, the 'discourse of misery' and the 'discourse of morality'. Both perspectives are presented as normative postulated truths, and essentially view the unemployed as a single homogenous group. In relation to this, Halvorsen makes an interesting point that these postulations are generally being made by people who have never done research on the experience of unemployment (Halvorsen 1999). Halvorsen's two discourses characterise quite well the view on individual consequences of unemployment in the Swedish public debate, although it is fair to say that the larger forums for public debate have been skewed towards the 'discourse of morality'. The 'discourse of misery' focuses here on the role of paid labour as self-realisation and a precondition for participation as a member of society. Unemployment becomes social death and the unemployed are seen as depressed and without hope. Within this perspective, unemployment is presented as a huge social problem. Newspaper articles with titles such as, 'Deaths in Denmark increase: alcohol

and unemployment have lowered the life expectancy' (DN 1995-10-16), 'At once all doors were closed' (SvD 1996-01-29), or 'Unemployment increases the risk of suicide attempts' (GP 1997-05-11), firmly connect the status of unemployment with personal misery. The 'discourse of morality', on the other hand, views paid labour as a necessary evil. It brings little satisfaction to those who participate in it, but is necessary for society. Thus, excluding possible negative effects on income, unemployment means very little to those who are struck by it. The unemployed are viewed as lazy and, thanks to the welfare state, lacking in economic motivation to look for or accept employment offers. From this perspective, unemployment becomes less of a personal problem than a macroeconomic problem and a problem of morality. This is formulated in news articles about lazy youths, 'We don't give a shit about your jobs' (AB 1996-09-04), indignation over benefit abuse among craftsmen, 'An army of moonlighters – and many claim unemployment benefits' (Byggnadsarbetaren 1999; 19/20; 20-24), or debate articles by economists arguing for the need to economically force the unemployed to get jobs, 'Lower the lowest wages! Lowered minimum wages and lower unemployment benefits are the recipe against unemployment' (DN 1995-12-28).

In the public debate, we thus have a picture of the individual level consequences of unemployment as either very destructive or negligible. The question is, however, how these pictures correspond with the actual experience of the unemployed. Individual and family consequences of unemployment have a fairly long, if not unbroken, tradition as a research topic in social science. This research interest surfaces in a classical period during the 1930s, when great attention and many studies were devoted to the topic. This was, of course, an effect of the great depression and the grim labour market situation individuals and countries faced as a result. With an improving labour market situation after the Second World War, research interest waned and remained at a relatively low level for the following decades. This more obviously in Europe than in the United States, which even during these economically very favourable decades, had problems with unemployment. Research interest in individual level consequences of unemployment again surged when unemployment levels rose and appeared to remain at a high level in the 1970s and 1980s. This high degree of correlation between the actual labour market situation and research is to some extent also present in the case of Swedish research, where we have seen an expanded interest in individual level consequences in connection with the 1990s rise in Swedish unemployment levels. Social scientists in Sweden, however, did not give this aspect of unemployment any particular attention during the 1930s (Meidner 1982), and when international interest increased again this was coupled with increased attention from Swedish

researchers despite the low levels of unemployment during the 1970s and 1980s. This later fact can probably be attributed to the small recession of the early 1980s and the international orientation of researchers in a small country creating interests and motivations that override the urgency of the issues.

Unemployment and psychological well-being in classic research

If we go back to the classic research of the 1930s, we get a grim picture of how unemployment affects the individual. In a comprehensive review of studies, Eisenberg and Lazarsfeld (1938) find a coherent picture of the psychological consequences of unemployment during the great depression. In general, unemployment is found to lower morale and make people emotionally unstable. The unemployment experience is described as a destructive process for psychological well-being, whereby the individual after layoff passes through different psychological phases. Unemployed individuals pass through initial shock after layoff, followed by a period of optimism and resilience in connection with active job search activity, and when this effort fails, they become resigned and suffer from distress. According to Eisenberg & Lazarsfeld, these negative consequences of unemployment for psychological well-being are "....not surprising in the light of the structure of society where the job one holds is the prime indicator of a man's status and prestige" (Eisenberg & Lazarsfeld 1938:363). This explanation, focussing on the psychosocial need of employment, is however not the most striking and convincing finding in classic unemployment research. Instead, the relationship between the psychological consequences of unemployment and the economic difficulties that unemployment meant during the 1930s is quite prominent in the literature.

This can be exemplified by what is perhaps most influential work on the consequences of unemployment conducted during the 1930s, the Marienthal study. In this comprehensive study of life in an almost totally unemployed Austrian village, researchers find three basic attitudes among the unemployed. A small number of unemployed remains *unbroken,* being active and expressing relative satisfaction. Most unemployed, however, belong to the *resigned* or the two *broken* categories: the *apathetic* and the *distressed.* The life situation among the *resigned* is characterised by extreme limitation of all needs, almost no hope nor plans, and no feeling of well-being, whereas the situation for the *broken* is yet more distressing. Here we have people who react to unemployment with apathy and an unconcerned carelessness, or with bitterness, hatred and flight to self-destructive thoughts and behaviour. This distribution of attitudes describes reactions to deprivation and corresponds very well with the economic situation of the unemployed. The authors

perhaps best describe it as, "... a process of psychological deterioration that runs parallel to the narrowing of economic resources and the wear and tear of personal belongings. At the end of this process lies ruin and despair" (Jahoda et al. 1933/1971: 87). Interesting to note is that the deteriorating psychological well-being induced by increased economic deprivation is not only a question of absolute poverty. Although physical maintenance appears to have been a serious issue for many unemployed during the 1930s, the social functions of economic resources are emphasised in another classic study on unemployment; "The economic changes are accompanied by social changes in family and community relationships. The two are closely related and react upon each other. Economic resources provide not only food and shelter but also the means of establishing and maintaining the satisfying relationships and status of social nature within the family and in the community" (Bakke 1940: 176).

What makes many of the classic studies on individual level consequences of unemployment compelling reading is the way in which they were conducted. They succeed in coming almost eerily close to their objects of study, often because the investigators lived alongside and participated in daily life with the unemployed. One of the most marked examples of this is probably Bakke's study of the unemployed in Greenwich, London. By sharing their living conditions, activities and idleness, he tries to get close to the experience of unemployment (Bakke 1933). This allows the reader to come very close indeed to this experience. What further makes the findings convincing is the methodological resourcefulness applied in some studies. To describe the experience of unemployment in Marienthal, Jahoda, Lazarsfeld and Zeisel combine among other things detailed life histories, time sheets, participant observation, meal records, school essays and statistical data relating to the village (Jahoda et al. 1933/1971). Similarly, Bakke's study of the unemployed in the American town of New Haven combines participant observation with intensive case studies, investigation of 10% of the unemployed households in New Haven, interviews with 200 randomly selected families, informant interviews and secondary information from reports and documentation (Bakke, 1940). This kind of thoroughness helps to paint a very complete picture of the experience of unemployment, and also makes the findings more convincing as they are derived from a number of different sources.

There are also drawbacks to the approaches used in classic research. The closeness and the methodological approaches help to describe the experience of unemployment in a most explicit manner. As the purposes of these investigations were also largely descriptive, one must conclude that they were very successful in what they set out to do. This means that the

empirical findings have a tendency to stand on their own, and the explanations for the relationship between unemployment and mental well-being are not integrated into a theoretical framework that is tested. The closeness approach also reduces the reliability and replicability of the results. The ability to generalise from the results is reduced by the use of a relatively small, often not randomly selected, number of respondents. The restrictions in time, and most particularly space, characterising the studies further accentuate this. Typically, they are studies of poorly educated unemployed workers in an area with high unemployment rates (Nordenmark 1999). Moreover, the fact that the studies normally investigated people in continuous unemployment raises questions about the possibility of selection effects into unemployment biasing the results. This implies a situation where there is a selection into unemployment based on the deficiencies of the worker. Such a selection process could create the results found in the studies. There are, however, some very good reasons to believe that classic unemployment research gives a good description of the overall experience of unemployment during the 1930s. The focus on unemployed workers and their families would have been less of a problem in the 1930s due to the composition of the labour market in general, and the unemployment group in particular. In September 1934, the Swedish unemployment group consisted of 57% of former industry workers and farm or forestry labourers, an additional 34% were unclassifiable as they were mostly unskilled casual labourers or young workers (SOU 1935:6). In some studies, the use of areas with particularly high unemployment helps to control for possible selection effects. In the case of Marienthal, the almost total unemployment was caused by the closure of the dominating flax factory, and as unemployment struck almost everyone in the village, the risk of the results being contaminated by selection effects is drastically reduced. The difficult general labour market situation during the depression also helps to minimise the risk of selection effects. In their review, Eisenberg and Lazarsfeld conclude that most studies indicate that unemployment was mainly due to unselective economic conditions, although some selection effects are obvious among the earlier unemployed as compared to the later unemployed (Eisenberg & Lazarsfeld 1938).

These factors along with the coherency of classic research make a strong argument for accepting that the findings do describe the actual consequences of unemployment. Such acceptance of the clearly detrimental effect of unemployment on mental well-being in classic research would appear to strongly support the picture of unemployment presented within the 'discourse of misery'. The graphic descriptions of the unemployment experience seem to readily provide a picture of unemployment as 'social death' and of the unemployed as depressed and without hope. However, we can not

take for granted that the interpretation and deduction of classic research can be applied to the current state of affairs. That unemployment had drastic consequences for those struck by it during the 1930s can not be directly translated into unemployment having the same effect on individuals today. On the one hand, the basic assumption of the 'discourse of misery' perspective – that the central role of employment for self-realisation and participation causes the negative consequences of unemployment – receives some support. This could mean that unemployment still has basically the same consequences for mental well-being as it had in the 1930s. It is even possible that the changes in working life since then would help to aggravate these consequences. A labour market where tasks are upgraded and where workers are better able to participate in decision making should lead to decreasing economic instrumentalism in relation to employment (Blauner 1964, Korpi 1978). With more rewarding tasks and organisations for those in employment, those who lose their positions on the labour market could be expected to be more affected by their job loss than otherwise would have been the case. On the other hand, the overarching impression from the classic studies is the centrality of poverty and extreme material deprivation for the experience of unemployment. With the advent of the welfare state, deprivation of this magnitude will have been reduced most dramatically, and even if unemployment still means a loss of income, this loss will have been dramatically decreased as compared to the situation in the 1930s. From the perspective of the 'discourse of morality', this means that employment, which is a necessary evil, has for the individual become much less necessary an evil. The negative consequences of unemployment for individual mental well-being that were observed in the 1930s should no longer be present because of the mitigating effects of the welfare state. Unemployment as a problem for the unemployed should have become more or less irrelevant, while it instead should have shifted to a moral problem for a society that is dependent upon paid labour for its survival.

Unemployment and psychological well-being in contemporary research

The question of the remaining validity of classic findings is, however, an essentially empirical issue. Thus, we must turn towards the substantial international research interest devoted to the issue since the 1970s. As this interest in the relationship between unemployment and psychological well-being has been highly empirically oriented, it should be able to resolve the question. Interesting to note here is that the empirical approach has changed substantially since the 1930s. Instead of the methodological use of closeness, in the form of deep interviews or observation, research in the last three decades has largely been based on a methodology of distance. Developments of sampling procedures, computational power and of standardised measures

of well-being have led to a focus on statistical analyses of larger and more representative samples. The price of this has been, of course, an increasing distance to the object of study and some loss of touch with what the findings actually mean for the people behind the statistics. Consequences of unemployment for mental well-being are described by a regression coefficient instead of with the graphic descriptions of individual experiences presented in many classic studies. This loss is, however, duly compensated by the increased reliability and replicability of research findings during the last three decades. Larger and more representative samples make possible generalisations that previously would have been impossible, while the use of standardised measures make possible the comparison of mental well-being between individuals with different positions on the labour market or of individuals over time.

The body of international research on psychological consequences of unemployment since the 1970s is indeed extensive, almost to the point of becoming difficult to grasp. The general coherency of results makes the findings within the field relatively clear, however. Without a doubt, the largest part of the literature is represented by cross-sectional analyses of large samples comparing the mental well-being of those in current employment with those in current unemployment. In these studies, the unemployed are almost always found to have a clearly lower psychological well-being than people in employment (see for instance Shamir 1985, D'Arcy & Siddique 1985, Kessler et al. 1987, Marsh & Alvaro 1990, Whelan 1992, Viinimäki et al. 1993a, Chen et al. 1994). Very few survey-based studies deviate from this finding, and I was able to find only one study where those in unemployment were psychologically better off than those in employment. This was found in a relatively small (181 individuals) sample of recent graduates, and the finding could be (and is) interpreted as being caused by particular characteristics in the life situation of these graduates. As recent graduates, the still hopeful unemployed were compared with employed who had largely been forced to accept jobs that did not match their aspirations (Cassidy 1994). Evidence from cross-sectional studies thus seems to give very strong, if not overwhelming, support for detrimental consequences of unemployment for mental well-being. The problem with cross-sectional studies is, of course, the inability to show causality. Even if the cross-sectional studies usually control for the make up of the unemployment group using background variables, or by creating a comparison group of employed that matches as closely as possible the unemployed, we can never be completely sure that the results were not caused by selection effects. It is quite possible that, everything else being equal, those with poorer mental well-being are less attractive on the labour market and thus suffer increased risks for becoming unemployed and decreased chances for reemployment.

Such a selection process is impossible to completely control for using cross-sectional data, and could very well mean that the unemployed have poorer mental well-being than those in employment in the absence of any causal effect of unemployment on mental well-being. This has also been found to be the case in several studies addressing issues of health-based selection in relation to unemployment (see for instance Björklund 1985, Schaufeli & Ypren 1992, Clausen et al. 1993). However, the importance of selection effects should not be overemphasised. In a meta-analysis of 91 independent studies of the relationship between unemployment and psychological well-being conducted between 1980 and 1996, Hallsten found that even if there existed a statistically significant health-based selection, the actual strength of the effect was limited. The conclusion drawn from the analysis was that selection effects could only explain a small part of the cross-sectional difference in mental well-being between employed and unemployed in the average study, while roughly two-thirds of the difference was the result of a causal effect (Hallsten 1998).

The conclusion that there is a causal effect of unemployment on mental well-being is further strengthened by a number of longitudinal studies. In these studies, the psychological well-being of the same individuals is followed over time. This allows the researcher to relate changes in mental well-being to changes in labour market status, making it possible to draw conclusions about causality. If respondents who exit unemployment for employment, for instance, greatly improve their mental well-being, while those who remain in unemployment do not, this would show that unemployment indeed leads to poorer mental well-being than employment. Almost all international longitudinal studies on the relationship between unemployment and mental well-being have also found this kind of causal relationship. In Britain, where research interest perhaps has been strongest, Warr and Jackson found this kind of causal link both in a study longitudinally following 906 (1280 in the original interview) recent school leavers with academic qualifications lower than average for their age, and in a study longitudinally following 711 (954 in the original interview) unskilled or semiskilled manual labourers registered at unemployment benefit offices. Among the recent school leavers, a move from employment to unemployment was found to increase negative self-esteem, while a move from unemployment to employment was found to decrease negative self-esteem (Warr & Jackson 1983). In the study of unemployed manual labourers, those who regained paid work showed large improvements on a variety of measures of psychological health, while those in continuous unemployment showed no change, or in the case of the recently unemployed at the initial interview, a decrease in mental well-being (Warr & Jackson 1985). Similar findings are also seen in other British studies, for instance, in a non-random study of 49 recently unemployed men

and 49 matched employed men in Brighton, conducted by Bolton and Oatley, and in study by Patterson of 80 already long-term unemployed 16- to 17-year-olds in Sheffield. Reemployment was found to significantly improve mental well-being in both studies, while those in continuous unemployment were significantly worse off at the time of the second interview in Bolton and Oatley's study (Bolton & Oatley 1987, Patterson 1997).

Longitudinal evidence of detrimental effects of unemployment on mental well-being has further been shown in a great variety of national settings. In Germany, Frese and Mohr longitudinally follow 51 (of 147 originally interviewed) older blue-collar workers from two employment offices in Berlin. They find that prolonged unemployment seems to lead to decreased psychological well-being, while reemployment was related to improved psychological well-being (Frese & Mohr 1987). Using a random sample, with weighted selection probabilities to ensure sufficient numbers of unemployed, Kessler et al. reveal the same findings in the United States. When longitudinally following 414 respondents (of 492 originally interviewed) in south-eastern Michigan, they find substantial effects of unemployment on distress as well as positive effects of reemployment on emotional functioning (Kessler et al. 1989). Similar results have also been found in a Scandinavian setting. In Denmark, Iversen and Sabroe followed male workers at a shipyard shutdown, along with a control group of men employed at another shipyard that was not closing down (1275 followed longitudinally of 1594 initial respondents). Here both changes to and from unemployment were significantly associated with changes in psychological well-being, whereas remaining employed or unemployed did not lead to any systematic changes in psychological well-being (Iversen & Sabroe 1988). In Finland, Lahelma found strong positive changes in mental well-being following reemployment in a nationally representative study of 703 middle-aged respondents (of 1315 initial respondents) registered as job seekers within the manufacturing industry (Lahelma 1992).

The results from almost all of these longitudinal studies suffer from some problems of generalisability. This as they in most cases have very restricted and non-random samples, or have samples that cover only certain groups of unemployed such as youths or male manual labourers. However, taken together they do provide very strong evidence for the negative psychological consequences of unemployment. Individually they show clear and strong causal effects within the groups they focus on, and together they show that this causal effect of unemployment on mental well-being exists in a variety of groups and in a variety of national settings. When this evidence is then combined with findings from more representative cross-sectional analyses, of general differences in psychological well-being between unemployed and

employed, we can say that international research has proven beyond reasonable doubt that there are detrimental effects of unemployment on mental well-being. Reviewing international research on the relationship between unemployment and mental well-being it is, thus, easy to arrive at the conclusion that the 'discourse of misery' provides a picture of the experience of unemployment that essentially corresponds with the empirical findings on the issue.

Does this mean that the discourse of misery correctly describes the experience of unemployment in Sweden? Not necessarily. As seen in the initial description of the development of unemployment in Sweden, the Swedish experience has been quite different from that of the other studied countries, to some extent even in the cases of Denmark and Finland. Adding to this the peculiarities of an active labour market policy, and high compensation levels in a broadly available unemployment benefit system, raises the question of whether the experience of unemployment actually means the same thing and thus has the same detrimental consequences in Sweden. That this is possible with this kind of national deviation is to some extent demonstrated by the case of Norway, which perhaps shares most similarities with Sweden. Norwegian longitudinal studies of mental well-being consequences of unemployment have found only a very weak, if any, link between unemployment and mental well-being. Following a representative sample of 2000 17- to 20-year-olds over five years (1229 followed through the full five years), Hammer finds a statistically significant, but very weak effect of unemployment on mental health problems (Hammer 1993). Clausen et al. find an even weaker relationship in a study on a random sample of 310 (277 followed longitudinally) unemployed in four municipalities. They find a considerable mental-health-related selection to reemployment, but very little causal effects of reemployment on mental well-being (Clausen et al. 1993). Similarly, Halvorsen finds no positive effect of reemployment in general when following a nationally representative sample of 1000 (ca. 500 followed longitudinally) long-term unemployed (Halvorsen 1998).

Thus, we can not automatically translate the general international findings of detrimental psychological consequences to the Swedish case, but should instead look at it as an issue that must be empirically resolved in its own right. As mentioned previously, there has been quite a bit of interest in this issue among Swedish researchers, and the research interest has also resulted in a number of relevant studies over the last 20 years. Just as with the international longitudinal research, many of these studies might have some problems of generalisability due both to the size and type of samples used. The development of the Swedish labour market might also present some

difficulty. Most Swedish studies have been made either during the 1980s or on data from the 1980s, when the labour market situation was relatively much more favourable. This might raise some questions about the validity of these findings for the situation after the early 1990s, when the labour market situation looked entirely different. There appears, however, to be no clear differences in findings from studies based on data from either side of the unemployment shock. What then has Swedish research told us about the relationship between unemployment and mental well-being? The result that perhaps stands out most is Björklund's findings from a study using the nationally representative Swedish level of living survey for 1968, 1974 and 1981 (each year has a sample size of about 6500 individuals), which also contains a small panel. In this data, he finds a clear cross-sectional relationship between unemployment and mental well-being, but no statistically significant longitudinal relationship between unemployment and mental well-being (Björklund 1985). This would indicate that there actually is no, or at least only a very weak, causal effect of unemployment on mental well-being. Problematic for the findings in Björklund's study is the fact that the low unemployment levels make it impossible to measure unemployment as current unemployment, instead the unemployment variable is unemployment experience any time during the past year.

Other studies using data from the 1980s give a somewhat different picture. Korpi follows 830 (523 followed longitudinally) randomly selected unemployed youths from the county of Stockholm, initially interviewed at the beginning of 1981 and reinterviewed at the beginning of 1982. The result from this data set is quite different from Björklund's study. Here, unemployed youths are found to have clearly poorer mental well-being as compared to those who have re-entered employment, and this relationship is clearly causal (Korpi 1997). Basically the same findings are revealed in a study interviewing all 1083 pupils in the last year of compulsory school in the municipality of Luleå in 1981, and then reinterviewing them two years later (the attrition in the study was as low as 1%). Those individuals who were classified in the unemployment group when reinterviewed showed both cross-sectionally poorer well-being as compared to the others, and had a significantly larger increase in a number of well-being measures. This is interpreted as indicating a causal relationship between unemployment and mental well-being (Hammarström et al. 1988). This conclusion can, however, be problematic based on the data used. As in Björklund's study, the relatively low unemployment levels do not allow the researchers to use current unemployment as the unemployment variable, but instead the experience of unemployment for over 12 weeks during the year preceding the interview. The use of young school leavers can also be problematic as, in principle, only those who have unemployment experience have actually

entered the labour market, which could call into question claims of causation in the study (Björklund & Eriksson 1998). A third study using data from the early 1980s is Angelöw's investigation of the employed at a shipyard shut-down. Angelöw follows 374 workers (223 followed longitudinally) during a three-year period, from after the decision to close down in 1982 to one year after the actual shutdown in 1984. He finds a pattern whereby there appears to be some positive effects of reemployment on mental well-being after the job loss, although this is not necessarily the case (Angelöw 1988). The study lacks, however, statistical analyses, which somewhat reduces the strength of the empirical findings. In a fourth study conducted during the 1980s, Isaksson follows 100 (76 followed longitudinally) single male social assistance recipients in Stockholm. She finds a statistically significant improvement in mental well-being among those who are reemployed (Isaksson 1990). The use of a particular group such as relatively young, single, male, social assistance recipients might be somewhat problematic for the generalisability of results. The small sizes of the groups with different labour market experiences, and the limitation of the analysis to changes in mental well-being only within each group, creates some additional problems for the reliability of the findings.

If one is to sum up the findings from pre-unemployment shock Swedish research, there seems to be some support for the notion of detrimental consequences of unemployment for mental well-being. The findings are, however, somewhat contradictory (in the case of Björklund's study), and the evidence of somewhat questionable reliability due to the data sets used. The investigation that stands out as the most robust is without doubt Korpi's study, but also this study might suffer somewhat from a lack of generalisability due to the limitation of the data set to unemployed youths in one region. This inconclusiveness also characterises to some extent present in research done after the unemployment shock. In a comparison of 99 unemployed youths and 143 youth trainees in a small municipality in central Sweden, Hagquist and Starrin argue that they find support for causal detrimental consequences of unemployment (Hagquist & Starrin 1996). As in many studies, the focus on youths and the limitation to one municipality create, of course, some problems for the generalisability of results. Problematic for the reliability of the results is, however, that the study is essentially cross-sectional. The findings of detrimental consequences of unemployment are based on retrospective questions that relate to the respondents' impression of the development of their mental well-being since the onset of the current labour market status. Hallsten finds somewhat less clear effects of unemployment on mental well-being in a study that is truly longitudinal. He follows, in three waves of interviews, 412 individuals (300 followed over the entire period) affected when a public authority is closed down; the waves

are: prior to shutdown, immediately following and one year after shutdown. That a shutdown of a public authority is in focus is quite interesting, given the age, gender and educational distribution among public employees in Sweden. The sample consists of mostly female white-collar employees, who have an average age of 50, outstanding in a field of research where focused samples usually include youths, or male blue-collar workers. This does not, however, lead to dramatically different results. Findings give some limited support for a causal effect of unemployment on mental well-being, but the strongest impression from the study was perhaps the strength of the health-based selection to unemployment and reemployment (Hallsten 1995). Something that is problematic for the reliability of the results, and could lead to both strong selection effects and a relatively weak causal relationship, is that the study deals with the shutdown of a public authority. As Alm points out, the amount of resources spent on supportive measures for those losing their jobs was larger than would normally have been the case, a factor that could very well contaminate the effects (Alm 1998). Using a nationally representative data set of 800 unemployed 26- to 50-year-olds (594 followed longitudinally) interviewed initially in 1992 and reinterviewed in 1993, she finds the unemployed to have clearly increased risks of depression as compared to those who became reemployed. She finds, however, no longitudinal relationship between unemployment and two other indicators of mental well-being, insomnia and anxiety (Alm 1998). This study does not share the problems of generalisability suffered by all other Swedish studies, but there are some problems in relation to the measurement of mental well-being. First, the measures used are singular items. This could lead to less stability in the measures than with the use of indexes, which is normally the case, and to finding less of a difference than actually exists. Second, the measures used in the study are not related to the current situation, but retrospective in the sense that they relate to any experience of, for instance, anxiety during the past twelve months. This removes the measure from the current labour market status and thus reduces the reliability of results.

Varied experiences of unemployment and reemployment?

In the review of contemporary empirical research, we have seen so far that unemployment appears to have negative consequences for mental well-being. This was very clear in the case of international research and somewhat less clear in the case of Swedish research. Thus, on empirical grounds, we would seemingly be able to conclude that unemployment, as argued in the 'discourse of misery', is a very unpleasant experience. The issue that has been the centrepiece of research interest thus seems to be largely resolved, and what remains to be done is perhaps to establish this relationship irrefutably in individual countries using well-designed studies. But is this

really the case? Concluding that the experience of unemployment is definitely characterised by the misery described within the 'discourse of misery' might be premature. This implies, based on statistically significant relationships, talking about the experience of unemployment. The unemployed are treated as a single group and the experience of unemployment as a shared one. But is it possible to talk about one experience of unemployment? The statistical relationships show that there, without doubt, are negative features in the unemployment situation that tend to be shared. If this were not the case, we would not find these nice statistically significant negative effects of unemployment on mental well-being. Still, we must acknowledge that these significant statistical relationships do not show that unemployment leads to decreased mental well-being for all, nor that the negative impact of unemployment is equally strong for all. The statistical measures are just that, statistical. They have standard errors (usually relatively large depending on the type of dependent variable) even if they are statistically significant. This means that they are based on individuals who both suffer less than, and more than, the measures actually show. The experience of unemployment might thus in reality be a question of varied experiences of unemployment. That there could exist varied effects of unemployment on mental well-being is perhaps not so surprising when we consider the variations within the unemployment group.

While we, during the 1990s in Sweden, have had a normalisation of the unemployment group, as described in the initial chapter, we have still largely discussed and regarded the unemployed as one group. But what does this group actually share besides their involuntary unemployment? If we look at the composition of the unemployment group at any point in time, we find people who before unemployment were everything from cleaners to university lecturers, there are young entrants on the labour market and persons that log 40 years of employment, international immigrants and people that have never left the town where they were born. Such a list of diversities within the unemployment group could become quite long. The point is that although all unemployed share the attribute of being unemployed, the diversity in other characteristics within the unemployment group is almost as large as that within the employment group. In many cases, we could expect diversity in terms of these other characteristics to be more important to the unemployed than the one classification all unemployed actually share. If we take the time to ask unemployed persons the somewhat ontological question "what are you", chances are good that, unless you explained that you were interested in their labour market status, they would not answer by saying "I am unemployed". Only very few unemployed persons would probably regard unemployment as their central characteristic. The fact that unemployed are, or have been, other things than unemployed

could have substantial consequences for how the experience of unemployment is manifested in an individual, and thus for how unemployment affects mental well-being. Even if we only looked at features that are directly related to the unemployment situation, there still exists a diversity that could have a very real impact on the experience of unemployment. In the Swedish case, it is easy to imagine that, for instance, access to unemployment benefits or involvement in active labour market policy measures would mean a quite different life situation than having no access to unemployment benefits and being in open unemployment.

The notion of differentiated consequences of unemployment for mental well-being is not new within unemployment research. Eisenberg & Lazarsfeld conclude in their review of research into the psychological consequences of unemployment conducted during the great depression: "Western culture is by no means a uniform entity, and a study of sub-groups within it will probably reveal that unemployment has different effects for different groups" (Eisenberg & Lazarsfeld 1938: 374). Relatively little work has been done on the issue, however, probably due to methodological difficulties. There are, however, even some findings indicating differentiated consequences of unemployment for mental well-being in classic research. One example of this is, for instance, the relationship between economic resources and mental well-being among the unemployed, another example is the finding of psychological stages in response to the unemployment situation. These examples, of course, relate to a development of mental well-being that tended to be shared among the unemployed, but they do show that the status of unemployment does not imply exactly the same level of mental well-being. Findings in several contemporary qualitative studies have also raised the issue of how we in quantitative analyses make conclusions about the experience of unemployment based on statistical analyses. Although quantitative analyses often show a very strong negative impact of unemployment on mental well-being, it is relatively easy to discern individuals or groups of individuals that obviously do not suffer from their unemployment status (Fryer & Payne 1984, Maccoby 1988, Björnung-Andersen & Garsten 1995). This shows that although unemployment in general represents a very distressing experience, this does not necessarily have to be the case. The unemployment experience among individuals most likely represent a continuum ranging from 'unemployment is no problem' to 'I might as well be dead as unemployed'.

This picture is confirmed in a number of quantitative studies focussing on what kind of characteristics can moderate the negative impact of unemployment on mental well-being. A great number of different variables have been found to differentiate mental well-being among the unemployed. Among

these variables we might mention age, gender, social class, type of household, duration of unemployment and ethnicity (see for instance Hepworth 1980, Stafford et al 1980, Jackson & Warr 1984, Warr & Jackson 1985, Hammarström et al. 1988, Warr et al. 1988, Shamir 1985, Harding & Sewel 1982, Winefield et al. 1991, Viinimäki et al. 1993a, Hagquist & Starrin 1996), as well as variables related to attitudinal structure or economic situation (see for instance Warr & Jackson 1985, Ullah et al. 1985, Harpaz 1989, Underlid & Thuen 1991, Gallie & Vogler 1994, Nordenmark 1999, Kessler 1987, Whelan 1992, Viinimäki et al. 1993b, Brief et al. 1995). That these variables have been found to structure mental well-being among the unemployed shows that all unemployed do not suffer the same level of misery. The evidence they do provide is, however, in most cases not strong enough to prove that the impact of unemployment on mental well-being is actually mediated by these characteristics. Most of these investigations are cross-sectional studies of the unemployment group or cross-sectional comparisons of the structuration of mental well-being among the unemployed with that of the employed. Thus, we cannot be sure that the findings of differential mental well-being among the unemployed are due to these variables really moderating the negative effect of unemployment. The differences in mental well-being in the sample could exist, although at a higher level of mental well-being, even if the sample was in employment. Some studies have, however, used longitudinal data, and they show characteristics that actually seem to mediate the impact of unemployment on mental well-being. Here, for instance, non-financial employment commitment (Warr & Jackson 1985, Nordenmark 1999), gender (Hammarström et al. 1988, Harding & Sewel 1982, Winefield et al. 1991) and unemployment duration (Warr & Jackson1987) have been found to longitudinally mediate the impact of unemployment on mental well-being.

As we have seen so far, we can conclude that unemployment is indeed a distressing experience, although the level of negative impact on mental well-being is differentiated. This means that our picture of the relationship between unemployment and mental well-being generally corresponds with the 'discourse of misery', but that there is a need to nuance the picture in order to accommodate the possibility of a varied impact of unemployment on mental well-being. Thus, we must abandon the dichotomous perception of the relationship between unemployment and mental well-being and instead try to understand the experience of unemployment as a continuum of responses, which in almost all cases are probably negative, but which vary in degree of severity. People, thus, suffer from unemployment to different degrees, and they will, therefore, benefit from reemployment to different degrees. The challenge becomes to delineate what variable factors in the

unemployment situation cause both the general negative mental well-being effects of unemployment, and the variations in these effects.

Theoretical understanding of the relationship

But how can we understand the general negative consequences of unemployment, the possible variations in these consequences and varied mental well-being outcomes of exits from unemployment? Most studies on the relationship between unemployment and psychological well-being have had a very strong focus on the empirical aspects of either finding a causal effect of unemployment on mental well-being, or finding differences in mental well-being among the unemployed. In relation to the mass of empirical studies devoted to these subjects, very little has been done in the way of developing an understanding of the (varied) relationship between unemployment and mental well-being. Some interesting developments towards a theoretical understanding of this relationship have, however, been attempted. A general problem with these theoretical developments is that they, although based on previous empirical findings, remain largely at an abstract level and are only seldom operationalised and empirically tested. Instead of raising empirical hypotheses or questions, these theories have largely functioned as given interpretational frameworks for the findings from empirical studies.

If we look at the explanations used to understand the relationship between unemployment and mental well-being during the last twenty years, it is obvious that there has been a substantial shift since the classic research. Whereas research from the 1930s largely searched and found the explanations for the negative impact of unemployment on mental well-being in economic factors, contemporary research has instead placed an emphasis on psychosocial factors. Behind this shift lies an assumption that the welfare state has largely reduced the economic impact of unemployment, and as the poverty and squalor following unemployment during the great depression has disappeared, explanations for the negative impact of unemployment on mental well-being must be sought elsewhere. This can be exemplified using the words of Marie Jahoda who writes: "There can be no doubt that unemployment now, as it did then, involves financial hardship for most individuals and their families. But while the unemployed half a century ago suffered absolute deprivation, the experience now is relative deprivation.....While it is impossible to compare systematically the intensity of the experience of poverty when it is absolute with the intensity when it is relative, one must assume that the former is more debilitating, if for no other reason than because it undermines the strength of the organism. This is why current psychological responses to unemployment can with somewhat greater confidence than in the past be attributed to the absence of a job not

just restricted finances." This text, *Employment and unemployment* (Jahoda 1982: 58), is without doubt the most influential theoretical work on the relationship between unemployment and mental well-being.

From this assumption of drastically decreased importance of economic factors, she uses other findings in classic research to develop a theoretical explanation that focuses on the psychosocial functions of employment rather than the economic function. The assumption here is that employment, besides fulfilling the manifest function of providing economic resources, also provides for latent psychological needs that are necessary for good psychological well-being. If these psychological functions are not provided for, the individual suffers psychological distress. She identifies five crucial latent psychological functions, which are filled in principle only when the individual is employed. The employment situation is seen as providing (1) a time structure, (2) social contacts, (3) participation in collective purposes, (4) status and identity and, finally, (5) regular activity. The negative impact of unemployment on mental well-being becomes understandable in that the unemployment situation typically implies a lack of all of these psychological functions (Jahoda 1981, Jahoda 1982). As Jahoda's 'latent functions' approach is directed principally towards explaining differences in mental well-being between employed and unemployed, it suffers some problems in relation to explaining differential impact of unemployment or reemployment. This as the status of employment is seen as providing for the latent psychological functions, whereas unemployment does not. It might, however, be possible to accommodate variations in mental well-being among the unemployed by looking at the position of unemployed in relation to other social institutions, as Jahoda also assumes that other social institutions can fulfil one or more of the latent psychological functions, although not all of them simultaneously as does employment.

A further development of Marie Jahoda's 'latent functions' approach is Peter Warr's vitamin theory. He does not draw the distinct lines between employment and unemployment that Jahoda does, although he means that there are notable differences between the two different labour market positions. Warr uses general traits in the environment to explain differences and changes in mental well-being for individuals. He defines 9 mostly psychological traits in the environment that are highlighted as central for good mental well-being. Variations in mental well-being can be understood as dependent on variations in access to these environmental traits. Interesting to note is that most of the vitamins can also be destructive. Both too low quantities and too high quantities of the vitamin 'externally generated goals' are, for instance, assumed to reduce mental well-being. The general negative effect of unemployment is, of course, not understood as resulting from too

high presence of vitamins, but as a result, much like in Jahoda's latent functions, of less access to almost all of the vitamins as compared to the employment situation (Warr 1987, Warr 1994). Compared with Jahoda's approach, Warr's has at least two distinct advantages stemming from the less strict line between unemployment and employment. With this approach it becomes possible to account for differential consequences of unemployment for mental well-being, and to account for differential outcomes depending on exit status. This at least to the extent that we can find differences in the presence of vitamins among the unemployed and those who have left unemployment.

The two functionalist approaches share some problems, however. They are both relatively detailed in relation to more or less observable functions or environmental traits. This makes them difficult to operationalise properly and, thus, to both test and apply when investigating, for instance, differential impact of unemployment on mental well-being. This might help to explain why this very popular way to explain the negative impact of unemployment on mental well-being has only seldom been empirically tested (although this has been done in some cases, see for instance Gershuny 1994, Brief et al. 1995), and is usually applied as an ad hoc explanation. The assumption of more or less unchangeable, latent psychological needs also leaves very little room for individual and social change. This limits these approaches in the sense that we, from this perspective, can explain changes in individual mental well-being only insofar as they are related to changes in relation to social institutions that can provide for the primary psychological functions. The possibility that people have different psychological needs, or that needs can change for individuals and for humans in general, is not an easily introduced notion. Criticism has also been directed towards the role played by individuals. Individuals are seen as passive and dependent on social institutions for their mental well-being. The individual has no role as an interpreter or an agent in the unemployment situation (Fryer & Payne 1984, Fryer 1986).

Another reasonable question in relation to the functionalistic approach is whether we can assume that the economic impact of unemployment has been diminished to the degree that it only plays a small role in relation to the impact of unemployment on mental well-being? Jahoda is, of course, correct in concluding that the welfare state reduces the economic impact of unemployment from being a question of absolute deprivation, where the very physical maintenance of the organism is threatened, to a deprivation that is only relative in relation to the level of consumption of other individuals in society. The question is, however, whether relative deprivation caused by unemployment is not also of importance for the mental well-being outcome

of unemployment. If we return for a moment to the classic research, we can see that it is indeed very much the social consequences of lack of economic resources that is central for the unemployed individuals. Bakke, for instance, emphasises the social aspects of economic resources and consumption. Economic changes caused by unemployment in turn caused social changes for the individuals and families struck. The economic restrictions caused by unemployment made it increasingly difficult to maintain the way of life the unemployed were previously accustomed to, both in relation to the family and the community (Bakke 1940). Fryer and Payne point out that also in the Marienthal study, in which Jahoda herself participated, there was evidence of social considerations in the consumption patterns of the unemployed. Despite an extremely difficult economic situation, resources were spent on seemingly irrational items, such as flowers or coffee (Jahoda et al. 1933/1971, Fryer & Payne 1986). The rationality of such consumption must of course be sought elsewhere than in the nutritional value of the items, and a reasonable assumption is that the social value of these items outweighs the need for these resources elsewhere. Economic deprivation caused by unemployment also had social aspects in the 1930s, and led to a highly undesirable social exclusion from normal life patterns. The consequences of economic deprivation caused by unemployment can, thus, be very real, even if economic deprivation is only relative and the consequences only social. The role of economic resources for participating actively in society has probably not decreased since the 1930s, prompting the questions of how correct the assumption is that, today, the economic consequences of unemployment play a very little role in the mental well-being consequences of unemployment.

An alternative theoretical perspective is the approach developed by David Fryer. In what is largely a critique of the individual's role within the functionalistic perspective, he suggests a perspective based on the notion of the individual as an intrinsically motivated agent. In this agency theory, people are seen as social actors who try their best to control their situation and reach what they see as desirable goals. The agency of the individual is routinely foiled and restricted by the social-industrial environment. Thus, the ability to exercise agency and to reach the goals and rewards deemed desirable is determined by the individual's social position. When agency is foiled, the result is lowered mental well-being. According to this line of reasoning, the negative effects of unemployment are understood as a consequence of decreased control over the life situation. The unemployment situation imposes restrictions on individuals' ability to reach their individually determined goals, which in turn results in a lowering of mental well-being. Reasoning that most employment positions in reality carry very little rewards besides economic resources, the economic strain and unpre-

dictability of the unemployment situation become the central factors for understanding the negative impact of unemployment on mental well-being (Fryer 1986, Fryer & Payne 1986). Using the notion of individually determined goals and restrictions on the ability to reach them in the unemployment situation, the agency perspective provides an explanatory tool that is relatively more versatile than the functionalistic perspective. It can be used to explain variations in mental well-being among the unemployed, since goals can differ and the ability to exert agency can be connected to social institutions other than employment. It can also be used to understand varied outcomes of exits from unemployment. This as the exit status could, to varying degrees, resolve the restrictions faced by the individual in the unemployment situation. It can finally, through individuals' ability to change their goals, also be used to explain individual change in mental well-being irrespective of changes in social institutions.

But even this theoretical approach suffers from several problems. Whereas the functionalist approach is criticised for over-emphasising the importance of environmental features, Fryer is in turn criticised for not systematically analysing the environmental constraints (Jahoda 1986). The origin and formation of individual goals and motivation are not analysed, and although structural constraints on agency are implied, they are not systematically analysed. Another question is whether it is reasonable to reduce the social institution of employment to a means of receiving a predictable inflow of economic resources necessary to achieve control over one's life situation and to reach the goals one strives for. Can an institution so central to the individual life course as is paid labour be of no further consequence? This question is especially relevant in relation to the strong normative positions on the centrality of paid labour for both the individual and society, as demonstrated both in political rhetoric and by the two discourses on the well-being consequences of unemployment.

An attempt to solve the problems of both the functionalistic and the agency approach is presented by Douglas Ezzy. His starting point is the conclusion that the real problem is not whether the individual is an actor or reactor, as individuals no doubt are both. The challenge is instead to incorporate the interplay between an actively interpreting individual and social institutions. In order to do this, he suggests a theory of status passage, which uses identity theory to explain mental well-being consequences of unemployment. Mental well-being among the unemployed is seen as a product of the subjective meanings individuals give to their objective social relationships. The interpretation of unemployment is dependent on both past and concurrent experiences (a socially constructed identity). Thus, unemployment has different consequences for mental well-being, depending on how

central certain identities are for the individual, and on the extent to which the passage into unemployment disrupts the strategies used to sustain a positive self-image. Similarly, the individual's ability to reinterpret the unemployment situation and to create a more satisfying alternative identity opens up the possibility of individual change in mental well-being during continuos unemployment (Ezzy 1993). The end result is a perspective on the relationship between unemployment and mental well-being that allows for a synthesis of the strong points from both the functionalist and the agency perspective. Thus, using a socially constructed identity, Ezzy succeeds in combining structure and agency in a way that largely solves previous problems. What is problematic with Ezzy's approach is, however, that it is left on a rather abstract level, and he never uses it to develop an empirically useful model for understanding the relationship between unemployment and mental well-being.

Summarising the theoretical discussion, we can conclude that, given the pros and cons of the functionalist and agency perspectives, there indeed seems to be a need to view the unemployed as both actors and reactors. This at least if we wish to understand the varied and perhaps variable experience of unemployment. Here Ezzy provides a perspective that on at least an abstract theoretical level manages to combine strong points of both the functionalist and the agency perspectives. The challenge is, however, to provide a theoretical model that is empirically founded and testable. Such a model should, on both the theoretical and empirical level, be able to deal with issues such as the general effect of unemployment on mental well-being, variations in this effect, and the possibility of individual and social change. Here, no doubt, the different factors pointed out by the functionalist and agency perspectives as explanations for the (varied) consequences of unemployment for mental well-being could play a central role. The functionalist approach, on the one hand, assumes, very much in line with the 'discourse of misery', that employment had lost its economic significance. This leads to the conclusion that the consequences of unemployment must be understood from the psychosocial meaning of employment for the individual. The agency approach on the other hand, like the 'discourse of morality', assumed there to be few rewards connected to employment besides the economic compensation. The consequences of unemployment for mental well-being must, thus, be largely understood in terms of the economic impact of unemployment (the difference in relation to the 'discourse of morality' lies here in the assumption that unemployment still has economic consequences and thus an impact on mental well-being).

These lines of reasoning vary somewhat in their foundation in empirical research. That there is today a psychosocial meaning of employment among

the unemployed, and that this meaning is translated into (varied) effects of unemployment on mental well-being has been fairly well documented in empirical research. Here, for instance, the fact that unemployed generally are very strongly committed to employment for non-financial reasons (both in absolute terms and in relation to those in employment) has been well documented (see for instance Gallie & Vogler 1994, Nordenmark 1999). This non-financial employment commitment has further, as mentioned in the section on varied experiences of unemployment, been shown to be causally related to the level of mental well-being among the unemployed. The question of the economic meaning of unemployment has attracted relatively less interest, although there have been cross-sectional findings of a very strong relationship between the economic situation and mental well-being among the unemployed. Here several questions need to be answered. Is there, today, in the context of the welfare state a relationship between unemployment and economic hardship? Does the existence of such a relationship also carry with it a real impact on the life situation of the unemployed? If so, does this economic impact of unemployment translate into a causal determinant of the impact of unemployment on mental well-being?

The aims of the dissertation

This dissertation aims to empirically investigate the consequences of unemployment for mental well-being in relation to other labour market and non-labour market statuses in Sweden. It also aims to explore whether economic difficulties induced by unemployment play a role in unemployment's consequences for mental well-being. This is done by answering four questions: Does unemployment still cause economic difficulties for at least some of the people who are struck by it? Can these economic difficulties, induced by unemployment, cause real social restrictions? Is the economic situation important for structuring mental well-being within the unemployment group? Does the economic situation while in unemployment structure reemployment's consequences for mental well-being? Three articles in the thesis relate to this line of reasoning:

- The first article investigates whether unemployment in Sweden still can play a role in financial difficulties. This is done by analysing the impact of unemployment on economic marginalisation among youths who have left the parental home.

- That the economic restrictions brought on by unemployment can imply very real social restrictions is shown in the second article. Here, the importance of the early educational and labour market career for nest leaving and for returning to the parental home is investigated.

- The third article investigates the impact of unemployment in Sweden by looking at how different exit routes from unemployment affect mental well-being. The role of economic difficulties and uncertainty about the future as explanators of the relationship between unemployment and mental well-being is placed in focus.

On the basis of previous theoretical and empirical research on unemployment's consequences for mental well-being, the thesis further aims to develop and empirically test a theoretical model that can be used to understand the differentiated mental well-being consequences of unemployment. This is done in the fourth article of the thesis:

- The fourth article develops and empirically tests a model for understanding differentiated mental well-being consequences of unemployment, which on a theoretical level integrates both the structural restrictions of the unemployment situation and the agency of the individual.

The final article in the thesis uses previous findings, and theoretical developments, in an empirical investigation of how state intervention into unemployment affects the mental well-being of the unemployed:

- The fifth article investigates how Swedish labour market policy affects mental well-being among the unemployed. Involvement in three kinds of active labour market policy measures and access to two kinds of unemployment benefit systems are investigated.

Data

This thesis is primarily based on a large longitudinal data set collected within the framework of the "Long-term Unemployment Project" (LUP) at the Department of Sociology, Umeå University. The LUP project was initiated in the mid-1990s against the backdrop of that decade's labour market developments, and was aimed at providing a broad picture of the experience of unemployment in Sweden after the unemployment shock. In order to do this, a data set meeting three criteria had to be created. First, the

data should be able to cover subjective aspects of unemployment and exits from unemployment, aspects such as mental well-being and work involvement. Second, they should cover the search behaviour and wage demands of the unemployed, and third, they should give a good description of the labour market transitions of the unemployed. In order to achieve this, two waves of interviews were conducted with a national random sample of unemployed individuals. The sample was drawn from the register of all unemployed persons (HÄNDEL) that is kept by the Swedish Labour Market Board. As all people registered as looking for a job are included in HÄNDEL, the sample thus included individuals that both were openly unemployed and those in active labour market policy measures, which was also desirable from our point of view. Excluded from the sample were people who could not immediately take a job, those with only part-time unemployment, those involved in policy measures where unemployed were in fact working in regular jobs but via some kind of Labour Market Board involvement (educational deputyship, recruitment support, small business start-up allowance) and people involved in permanent labour market arrangements for the disabled.

The interviews addressed issues such as mental well-being, household economy, work involvement, belief in the future, wage demands, job search behaviour, and were conducted in 1996 and 1997. The interviews were then complimented with register information from HÄNDEL about each individual's day-by-day labour market status (openly unemployed, involved in labour market programme and not unemployed) from the beginning of 1992 until the date of the second sample in 1997. The initial interview was directed at 3500 individuals and answered by 2590 respondents (or some 74% of the respondents), of which 1806 individuals were still unemployed at the time of the interview. The second interview was directed at the 1806 individuals who answered and were unemployed at the time of the first interview; this time, 1415 respondents answered (or some 80% of the respondents). In both waves of the panel, only about six percent of the attrition was due to refusal to take part in the investigation. The remaining attrition was due to factors such as having no phone or an unpublished telephone number (17% of the respondents in the first wave and 14% in the second wave), the respondent being prevented from participating in the study due to, for instance, illness or being institutionalised (roughly 1% of respondents in both waves) and non-residence in Sweden when the interviews were conducted (also roughly 1% of the respondents in both waves). Furthermore, the non-responses do not seem to be structured in a way that renders the data set problematic. In an analysis of the attrition in the LUP data set, Nordenmark finds very little differences in non-response rates between different groups. In the first survey, the non-response rate was somewhat higher among the very long-term unemployed (over 3 years),

30%, the middle aged, 31%, men, 28%, non-Swedish citizens, 40%, those with the lowest education levels, 30%, and those living in bigger cities (over 100,000 inhabitants), 36%. In the second survey, the differences in non-response rates were even less, here men, 22%, non-Swedish citizens, 30%, those with the lowest education levels, 23%, and those living in bigger cities, 25%, had somewhat higher non-response rates (Nordenmark 1999).

In articles one and two, other data sets are used. These data sets are based on compilations of information from official statistical registers. In the first article, a data set created by the Centre for Epidemiology at the National Board of Health and Welfare is used. It provides individual level register information for four percent of the cohorts born 1965-1976 mainly from the register of incomes 1990-1992, the censuses conducted 1985 and 1990, and from the register of all unemployed persons 1992-1995. The data set used in the second article originates from a database called TOPSWING (for Total Population of Sweden, Individual and Geographical Database). This is a longitudinal database linking individual information from various official statistical registers and censuses, as provided by Statistics Sweden, and covering anonymised micro data for the total population resident in Sweden between 1985 and 1995. From TOPSWING, individual level information covering 1985 to 1995 was collected for the entire cohort born in 1973. This created a longitudinal data set that in principle could not suffer from attrition as it was based on register information. Of the 118,000 individuals in the cohort of 1973, there is nevertheless 5.5% attrition due to incomplete information about the individuals for the years 1990-1995 (the actual years of analysis in the article). Individuals for whom such information was lacking were people born in 1973 who immigrated to Sweden after 1990, and people born in Sweden in 1973 who have died or emigrated from Sweden. The exclusion of these individuals should have no consequences for the interpretation of the results.

Summary of the articles

Article 1. *Youth-unemployment and economic marginalization*

Since the economic depression of the 1930s, social research has focused on the consequences of unemployment for individuals. Classic studies conducted during the 1930s reveal the negative psychological, social and economic effects of unemployment. In contemporary unemployment research, however, the importance of unemployment for individuals' private economies has piqued somewhat less interest than the psychological and social aspects. This is probably due to assumptions that the expansion of the social safety

net has taken the edge off unemployment's financial consequences. Loss of salary today does not seem to be the catastrophe it was during the 1930s, since partial compensation nowadays is provided by transfers through the welfare state. Recent developments, however, with dramatically increased unemployment in conjunction with cutbacks in welfare expenditures, once again raise the issue of unemployment's economic consequences. This chapter investigates the relationship between unemployment and economic marginalization, measured as dependence on social allowances, among independently living youths that have entered the labour market. The purpose is to provide a description of the strength of the connection between youth unemployment and economic marginalization, and additionally to provide a picture of the combination of factors structuring the risk of economic marginalization among young unemployed. To this end, a register database compiled at the National Swedish Board of Health and Welfare's Epidemiological Center (Epc) is used. The database consists of individual level register information for the first half of the 1990s on four percent of the age cohorts born between 1965-1976, and on their parents.

In the analyses, it was clearly shown that youth unemployment is intimately coupled to economic marginalization among young people living independently. Receiving social allowances was shown to be quite common among young people with unemployment experience, whereas it was quite uncommon among young people lacking such experience. Unemployment was also shown to be a long-term and draining economic process as regards the individual risk of economic marginalization. The risk of economic marginalization increased sharply as a function of length of unemployment. Thus, youth unemployment – particularly long-term youth unemployment – would appear to impose serious limits on young people's integration into adult life. Length of unemployment was, however, not the only factor influencing the risk of economic marginalization among the young unemployed. The risk appeared to also be dependent on access to three forms of resources – family resources, state resources, and individual resources – and on the general expenditure pressure under which the young people lived.

Access to family resources entails transfers between parents and children no longer living at home as well as transfers within a household. Parents' labor market positions (as a measure of financial resources) and proximity to parents' resources (measurable in terms of children's age) were both shown to affect risk of economic marginalization. Having a partner was similarly important, but we can assume that the economic advantage of this factor is governed by the partner's labor market position – if resources are to be transferred within the household, they must exist. Access to state resources was shown to be of great importance for the risk of economic marginal-

ization. Those youths who had qualified for the unemployment benefit system were found to have much lower risk of economic marginalization than young unemployed who were not eligible for unemployment benefits. In addition to these two sources of economic resources, there were indications of the importance of what could be labeled access to individual resources. Here educational background and country of birth were shown to affect the risk of economic marginalization. It is possible that they measure the access to financial resources at the outset – resources that determine economic staying power in the event of unemployment. They can also give an indication of the size and value of young individuals' contact networks – networks that can facilitate access to financial resources. The importance of the expenditure pressure for structuring the risk of economic marginalization was demonstrated through the effect of duration of unemployment, but also through the impact of certain difficult-to-influence household expenses. Children and housing imply an expenditure pressure that is difficult to reduce and that structures the risk of economic marginalization among unemployed youth.

The conclusion was also drawn in the chapter that the risk factors identified should be seen as cumulative. Lacking one type of resource probably does not mean that the individual will end up in a marginal economic situation. Instead, it is the accumulation of negative factors that implies a heightened risk.

Article 2. *Nest Leaving in Sweden: The Importance of Early Educational and Labour Market Careers*

Deciding to continue education, getting a job or becoming unemployed are central events in the life of young persons on the brink of adulthood. These events *per se* are important for growing up, but might have wider importance for enabling further transition into adulthood. This article empirically investigates the importance of the early educational and labour market career for one key transition from adolescence to adulthood, namely nest leaving. Three questions relating to the connection between the early educational and labour market career and nest leaving are examined in the article:

(1) How do different early educational and labour market careers structure the probability of nest leaving?

(2) Do early educational and labour market careers structure the probability of returning to the parental home after nest leaving?

(3) Are there gender differences in the way early educational and labour market careers structure the probability of nest leaving and the probability of returning to the parental home after nest leaving?

To answer these questions, the article makes use of a unique longitudinal geographical database based on register and census information for all persons residing in Sweden 1985-1995 (the TOPSWING database). Individual level information, and information about the parents, for the entire cohort born in 1973 was drawn from this database. These life course data were then used to model the impact of early educational and labour market careers on the time to occurrence of nest leaving using proportional hazards models, and on the probability of returning to the parental home using logistic regression models

The results clearly show the importance of educational and labour market careers for young people's nest leaving pattern. Young people in continual employment are more likely to leave the parental home than are young people with labour market problems. This is interpreted as a result of the economic resources that employment entails, leading to an increased individual control of the life situation, and resulting, in turn, in increased probability of nest leaving. Few youths, however, belong to both of these two career categories. Most youths continue to secondary school, which was connected with very low probability of nest leaving, but this lower probability changed after finishing secondary school. It does not seem to be schooling *per se* that causes the low probability of entering adulthood. Instead it is likely that lack of access to independent sources of economic resources creates this situation. Thus, both those continuing with university studies and those entering employment quickly catch up with those in continual employment. It is probably access to grants and student loans during university education that makes nest leaving equally possible for university students as for the employed.

When analysing the risk of returning to the parental home after nest leaving, the same pattern was evident as in the analysis of the nest leaving. Those who were in employment had the lowest risk of returning, whereas the categories that experienced labour market problems and those in university education had higher risks. Access to a regular income, thus, appears to be of importance for the stability of residential independence. This is provided to a greater extent through employment than by ongoing university education. Another reason for university students' greater risk of defunct nest leavings is probably a tendency to return to the parental home after graduation. Thus, university students' nest leaving may not be qualitatively the same leap into adulthood as the nest leaving of those who enter into employment.

Looking at the role of gender in relation to the impact of the early educational and labour market career, some interesting findings were revealed. Women's nest leaving appeared to be more independent of parental resources and family situation, and more dependent on their own resources. The educational and labour market career is, thus, of greater importance for structuring women's nest leaving than men's. This does not necessarily mean, however, that parental status is less important for young women than for young men. The fact that parental social class and country of birth were of importance for only young women's nest leaving shows that the parents' status also plays a role for women. The impact here, however, is probably not an effect of economic resources but of culture.

Article 3. *Different exit routes from unemployment and their impact on mental well-being: the role of the economic situation and the predictability of the life course*

Internationally, the relationship between unemployment and mental well-being has received considerable attention. Longitudinal studies have shown unemployment to have a negative impact on mental well-being, whereas reemployment has a positive impact. These findings are undoubtedly important for achieving an understanding of the human costs of high unemployment rates, not merely the macro economic ones. What most of these studies fail to do, however, is to take into account a more complex concept of labour market status than the dichotomy employment vs. unemployment. This article argues that if we are to understand the consequences of unemployment and changing labour market status for mental well-being, we must acknowledge two things: (1) that the concept of labour market status is more complex than just "employed versus unemployed", and (2) that the contemporary welfare state offers alternative exit routes from unemployment. On the labour market, the shifting contractual situation means that unemployed people who exit into paid labour experience differential job security and might also, to an increasing extent, choose to become self-employed. Outside the labour market, the welfare state might offer exit routes such as entry into regular education, maternity and sick leave, and different kinds of retirement. As these different exit routes from unemployment imply quite different life situations, we might also expect that they have a differential impact on the individual's mental well-being.

The article goes on to argue that the mental well-being outcome of an exit from unemployment to another status can be understood in terms of how the new status resolves the causes for low mental well-being in the unemployment situation. In line with reasoning from an agency perspective, it is suggested that economic problems and the restrictions on life course

predictability faced in the unemployment situation are central factors for the low mental well-being among the unemployed, and thus also for understanding the mental well-being impact of different exit routes from unemployment. The validity of this assumption, that the economic situation and life course predictability play a substantial role for unemployment's consequences for mental well-being, is tested in two hypotheses that both receive empirical support:

(1) The economic situation and the predictability of the life course (measured as informed expectations of exit from unemployment) are variables of great importance for structuring mental well-being among the unemployed.

(2) Upon re-employment, those with economic problems in the unemployment situation should have a greater increase in mental well-being than those without economic problems. Similarly, those with informed expectations about re-employment should have a lower increase in mental well-being than those who were not expecting re-employment.

Based on the extent to which different exit routes from unemployment could be expected to resolve the uncertainty and financial difficulties of the unemployment situation, three further hypotheses are deducted:

(1) Exit to paid labour increases mental well-being among the unemployed, but the increase in mental well-being is affected by the contractual situation. A permanent employment contract leads to a greater increase in mental well-being than do temporary contracts and self-employment.

(2) Exit to regular education increases mental well-being among the unemployed, but the type of education affects the degree of increase. University studies lead to a greater increase in mental well-being than do high school equivalence studies.

(3) Among those who exit unemployment for early retirement pension we will not find any substantially change in mental well-being, whereas among those who exit unemployment for sick leave we will find decreased mental well-being. Those who leave unemployment for maternity/paternity leave will show increased mental well-being.

Looking at the actual impact of the different exit routes on mental well-being, these hypotheses receive substantial support. As predicted, exit to paid labour increased mental well-being. The increase in mental well-being was, however, differentiated depending on the contractual situation. Exit to a

permanent employment contract meant a larger increase in mental well-being than exit to temporary employment contracts or self-employment. The differences in impact depending on the contractual situation are assumed to be caused by differences in degree of life course predictability among those in paid labour. Exit to university education led to an increase in mental well-being, whereas exit to high school equivalence studies did not. This could be due to the greater sense of control of the life course inherent in a university education. Exit from unemployment to sick leave status meant reduced mental well-being, whereas exit to the other medically-motivated exit route, early retirement pension, meant a non-significant increase in mental well-being. Here the presence of medical problems was thought to cause the additional deterioration in mental well-being. It was suggested that the permanent nature of exit to early retirement might counteract this, thus causing the differences found in the data. The conclusion might be premature, however, as exits to the two medically motivated status categories are probably dependent on very different medical conditions, which could also cause the differentiated impact of the exits. As expected, the final exit route from unemployment, exit to maternity/paternity leave, increased mental well-being.

Article 4. *Towards a sociological understanding of mental well-being among the unemployed – the role of economic and psychosocial factors*

Classic research on unemployment and mental well-being has focused on the psychological functions of employment. These functions are considered to be of equal importance for all unemployed. A critique of this perspective has been that it views the unemployed as passive and homogenous. Instead, an agency approach has been suggested, which focuses on the individual goals of the unemployed. This approach has, in turn, been criticised for not sufficiently accommodating the environmental constraints faced by the individual in the unemployment situation. Our article attempts to develop a flexible theoretical understanding of the relationship between unemployment and mental well-being that integrates both the structural restrictions of the unemployment situation and the agency of the individual. This is accomplished using the notion of a socially constructed identity coupled to the desire to fulfil roles and reach goals that are heavily influenced by the individual's position in society. We can talk about these roles and goals as the socially defined needs of the individual. If the individual's ability to meet the socially defined needs is hampered, it is assumed that mental well-being will suffer.

As employment is a central societal institution, it can be seen as a potentially very important resource for meeting socially defined needs. In this case, unemployment will restrict the ability to meet socially defined needs and will thus lead to decreased mental well-being. Socially defined needs could, however, be expected to differ and employment would probably only be an important resource for fulfilling some of them. There may also be alternative resources that can meet the same socially defined needs. This means that unemployment and reemployment will have different impacts on mental well-being depending on the extent to which the unemployment situation restricts the individual's ability to meet the socially defined needs. From the perspective of socially defined needs, we can also better understand individual changes in mental well-being during unemployment. It is possible that the individual can identify new resources for meeting the socially defined needs, or reinterpret their identity by redefining their needs such that the available resources can better meet them.

To explain the variable relationship between unemployment and mental well-being, we must thus look at the ways in which employment functions as a resource for satisfying people's socially defined needs. Drawing on previous unemployment research, the article delineates two main dimensions of the possible rewards of employment. The first dimension stresses the need for a social identity, or a role, in a society where employment is the norm, something we could call the psychosocial need for employment. The second dimension focuses on the economic need for employment in a society where employment is the main source of economic resources. The article assumes that we should be able to explain a large part of the variation in unemployment's consequences for mental well-being with a model that incorporates these two dimensions.

The article investigates the validity of this Psychosocial and Economic Need for employment model (the PEN-model) by empirically testing the following cross-sectional and longitudinal hypotheses on a large group of unemployed initially interviewed at the beginning of 1996 and re-interviewed at the end of 1997.

(1) The economic and psychosocial need for employment largely structure mental well-being among the unemployed. Those unemployed who have a greater psychosocial need for employment will have lower mental well-being than those with less psychosocial and economic need for a paying job.

(2) The economic and psychosocial need for employment steer mental well-being upon re-entering employment. Those with greater economic and psychosocial need for employment will show greater improvement in mental well-being than those with less need.

(3) Individuals who manage to adapt, economically and psychosocially, to the unemployment situation will improve their mental well-being, whereas those who do not will remain stable.

In the empirical investigation, all three hypotheses receive support. The conclusion is drawn that the PEN-model has strong predictive power for explaining variable consequences of unemployment for mental well-being as well as individual change in mental well-being during unemployment. It is further suggested that, although the PEN-model has been developed as a tool for understanding variable mental well-being consequences of unemployment, it could also be a useful tool for analysing other aspects of unemployment such as job search behaviour. This has been indicated in other studies from the Long-term Unemployment Project.

Article 5. *State intervention and mental well-being among the unemployed*

Although the relationship between unemployment and poor mental well-being has long been an area of interest within behavioural science, the role and possibilities of state intervention for mediating this relationship have not been thoroughly investigated. This despite the fact that the unemployed have been the targets of government policies that aim to improve, and are assumed to have a very real impact on, their life situations. Perhaps nowhere in the world is the question of state intervention's effects on the unemployed's mental well-being as relevant as in Sweden, as Swedish labour market policy can be characterised as particularly interventionist in the unemployment situation. Sweden combines relatively generous passive economic assistance for the unemployed with active labour market policy designed to activate and increase the competitiveness of the unemployed. This article investigates how passive economic assistance and active labour market policy measures affect mental well-being among unemployed in Sweden. Two variously generous unemployment benefit systems, the more generous income replacement Unemployment Benefits and the less generous flat rate Cash Unemployment Benefits, as well as involvement in three different types of active labour market policy measures, 'activation', 'vocational training' and 'workplace participation', are studied.

In cross-sectional analyses of the structuration of mental well-being at the time of the initial interview, it was found that those with access to Unem-

ployment Benefits, but not those with access to Cash Unemployment Benefits, had significantly better mental well-being than those with no unemployment-related economic assistance. The significantly better mental well-being among recipients of Unemployment Benefits disappeared when controlling for the economic situation, indicating that it is the better economic situation in this group that causes better mental well-being. This pattern of relationships was repeated when looking at the structuration of mental well-being for those still unemployed at the time of the second interview. The only difference was that the magnitude of the difference in mental well-being appeared to be larger this time. Among the active labour market policy measures, the vocational training type of measure was not found to structure mental well-being among the unemployed at either interview. Those involved in the activation type of measure were found to have significantly better mental well-being than openly unemployed at the time of the first interview but not at the time of the second. Unemployed involved in the workplace participation type of measure were found to have significantly better mental well-being than openly unemployed at both interviews. The analysis of the reemployed revealed no differences in current mental well-being depending on previous access to economic assistance for the unemployed, nor involvement in active labour market policy measures. This indicates that the differences in mental well-being present in the analyses of the unemployed are particular to the unemployment situation.

The evidence from the cross-sectional analyses is, however, not sufficient to allow conclusions to be drawn about causal effects of state intervention on mental well-being among the unemployed. In order to do this, longitudinal analyses are required. This is accomplished through two analyses that follow the development of mental well-being among reemployed, and among those who were openly unemployed at the time of the initial interview and remained in unemployment at the time of the second interview. In the analysis of the reemployed, it is found that, as compared to openly unemployed and unemployed lacking access to economic assistance, those with access to Unemployment Benefits and those involved in the workplace participation type of measure have significantly less improvement in their mental well-being when they become reemployed. This difference in positive impact of reemployment on mental well-being disappears when controlling for the level of mental well-being in the unemployment situation. The analysis of continuously unemployed revealed that individuals moving from open unemployment to involvement in a workplace participation type of measure had a significant improvement in mental well-being as compared with individuals remaining in open unemployment. It was further found, in line with the evidence from the cross-sectional analyses, that the difference in mental well-being between unemployed with access to Unemployment

Benefits and unemployed lacking access to unemployment-related economic assistance was significantly increased when unemployment was prolonged. This increased difference was mainly caused by an increased level of psychological distress among individuals lacking access to Unemployment Benefits.

The article concludes that, regarding economic assistance for the unemployed in Sweden, there is no positive effect of the low flat rate Cash Unemployment Benefits system on mental well-being. Access to the more generous income replacement Unemployment Benefits system does, on the other hand, very clearly diminish the negative impact of unemployment on mental well-being. Moreover, access to Unemployment Benefits seems to have the additional effect of protecting against the further deterioration of mental well-being when unemployment is prolonged that is otherwise suffered. These positive effects of Unemployment Benefits are interpreted as an effect of reduced economic need for employment in the unemployment situation. Unemployment Benefits mediate the economic stress caused by unemployment and prevent further economic marginalisation when unemployment is prolonged. Regarding the mental well-being consequences of active labour market policy, the article concludes that there is no positive mental well-being effect of involvement in the activation or the vocational training type of measures, whereas there is a positive effect on mental well-being of involvement in the workplace participation type of measure. This positive effect is interpreted as a result of the characteristics of this type of active labour market policy measure. The inclusion into a regular workplace, and the increased sense of control over the life situation associated with a measure that the individuals create themselves by finding a suitable employer who is willing to take them on, are suggested as explanations.

The experience of unemployment in Sweden

The introductory exposition on the development of unemployment in Sweden concluded that the labour market developments of the 1990s brought with them an entirely new unemployment situation. From being an unemployment success story, Sweden was thrust, during the course of two years, into a European normality with apparent high and persistent unemployment. During the 1990s, an unprecedented number of Swedes from broad segments of the labour market had unemployment experiences, and the duration of these experiences tended to last longer than before. The problematic labour market situation essentially remains at the onset of the 21-century, although the last few years have brought with them a positive development of unemployment not generally predicted. With this knowledge

it is not surprising that unemployment became a central issue in the Swedish political debate. This as an economic challenge for an extensive welfare state such as Sweden, but perhaps even more importantly as a social problem directly affecting hundreds of thousands of individuals. The question is, however, whether unemployment actually is a social problem. In the public debate on unemployment, two very different pictures were presented. One picture, that could be labelled the 'discourse of misery', viewed the unemployment experience as very negative indeed. From this perspective, employment was seen as central for self-realisation and a precondition for participation in society. Unemployment thus becomes a very destructive experience for the individuals struck, due to the psychosocial value attached to employment. The other picture, that could be labelled 'the discourse of morality', instead viewed employment as a necessary evil that brings little satisfaction to those who participate in it. Thus, outside of possible negative effects on income (which are minimised by the welfare state), unemployment means very little to those who are struck by it. These two discourses on what the experience of unemployment means for the unemployed in Sweden are, however, normative postulated truths not based on scientific foundations.

This thesis has tried to move beyond the postulated truths of what the experience of unemployment means and the reasons for this. Instead the thesis has taken an empirical approach both to investigating the consequences of unemployment for individual well-being, and to developing an understanding of the reasons for this relationship. What do the results of this thesis tell us about the implications of unemployment experiences in Sweden? In line with previous international and Swedish research on the consequences of unemployment for mental well-being, the present findings largely support the assumptions made within the 'discourse of misery'. This is to say that there is no doubt that unemployment is generally a distressing experience. Longitudinal data used in the thesis show that people who are unemployed and become reemployed show significant improvements in their mental well-being, as compared with people who remain in unemployment.

Such a conclusion does not mean, however, that there is no need to revise how the unemployment experience is viewed in the 'discourse of misery'. The thesis shows that there is, first, a need to view unemployment's consequences for mental well-being as more complex than a dyadic relationship between the statuses of employment and unemployment. The dichotomy – where unemployment represents misery and employment would represent, if not the opposite of misery then at least the absence of misery – must be further developed so as to take into account more of the possible variations in status available both on the labour market and outside the labour market.

That there, for instance, are differences between jobs and contractual situations that have a bearing on the well-being of the employed individual is something that would seem quite obvious to any work-life researcher. In line with this reasoning, the thesis showed that the contractual situation of the employment position had a significant impact on the mental well-being outcome of unemployment exits. Exit from unemployment to temporary employment contracts had a clear positive impact on mental well-being, but the positive impact on mental well-being was significantly greater for exits from unemployment to permanent employment contracts. Similarly, there were varied mental well-being outcomes of unemployment exits to welfare state financed statuses such as education. Exits to university education had a significant positive impact on mental well-being, whereas exits to high school equivalence studies did not.

Second, in addition to this need for a more nuanced understanding of the experience of unemployment in a complex contemporary society, the thesis also points out the need to view the status of unemployment as less static than a 'discourse of misery' perspective would allow. Regarding movements into and out of unemployment as moves between two static statuses probably represents the experiences of such labour market movements (or movements to and from the labour market) rather poorly. Instead, movements to and from unemployment should be understood as more of a process. Being employed and knowing that you soon will become unemployed is probably quite a different experience than being employed and not having this knowledge. Similarly, unemployed individuals who know they will soon enter employment face a very different situation than that of unemployed individuals who have no such knowledge. These kinds of expectations might mean that employed individuals who are to become unemployed largely share the experience of the unemployed, while unemployed individuals who are about to re-enter employment largely share the experience of the employed. Findings in the thesis showing positive effects on mental well-being among the unemployed – such as the life course predictability brought about by being in line for a job or waiting for old age retirement – support this more processual perspective on movements to and from unemployment.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the thesis shows that there is a need to revise the perception of the experience of unemployment as the same very destructive experience for all unemployed. This despite findings showing that unemployment generally tends to be a negative experience. The evidence compiled in the thesis suggests that there does not seem to be one single experience of unemployment, such as the social death assumed in the 'discourse of misery'. Instead, it appears as if there is variation in the impact of unemployment on mental well-being within the unemployment group. We

should, thus, not talk about the experience of unemployment, but rather about varying unemployment experiences. The detrimental experience of unemployment is in reality represented by a continuum ranging from unemployment having no impact on mental well-being to unemployment representing the absolute misery assumed within the 'discourse of misery'. Assuming an equal psychosocial need for employment leading to negative consequences of unemployment on mental well-being, as is done within the 'discourse of misery', is thus clearly wrong.

This is not to say that the psychosocial need for employment is unimportant for understanding the experience of unemployment, quite the contrary. The thesis shows that the psychosocial need for employment is a central factor for understanding why there is a relationship between unemployment and mental well-being. In a society where paid labour is an institution that is the norm for large parts of the population, employment will be of psychosocial significance as assumed within the 'discourse of misery'. Given this, involuntary unemployment will have a negative impact on mental well-being due to the psychosocial need for employment. The thing is, however, that although unemployment generally has psychosocial significance for the unemployed, there is variation in the degree of significance depending on the unemployed individual's life situation. The psychosocial need for employment is not uniformly strong across the entire unemployment group, and the thesis shows that the variation in psychosocial need for employment has an impact on the mental well-being impact of unemployment. Unemployment has a more detrimental impact on mental well-being for individuals with a strong psychosocial need for employment than for those with a weak psychosocial need for employment. The experience of unemployment is, thus, structured according to a variable psychosocial need for employment.

However, concluding that there is not one experience of unemployment, but instead a differentiated experience depending on the psychosocial need for employment, is not enough. Paradoxically, the thesis shows that the 'discourse of morality' has a point that is important for understanding the (varied) negative effects of unemployment on mental well-being that the 'discourse of misery' neglects, that is, the economic need for employment. Although both discourses see the economic consequences of unemployment as relatively unproblematic for the individual due to the functioning of the welfare state, the 'discourse of morality' at least points out the centrality of economic motivation for participation in employment. The findings in the thesis indicate that, despite the functioning of the welfare state, there is no reason to neglect this function of employment. There still exists a very strong connection between unemployment and economic problems, as the study on youth unemployment and economic marginalisation has shown. In

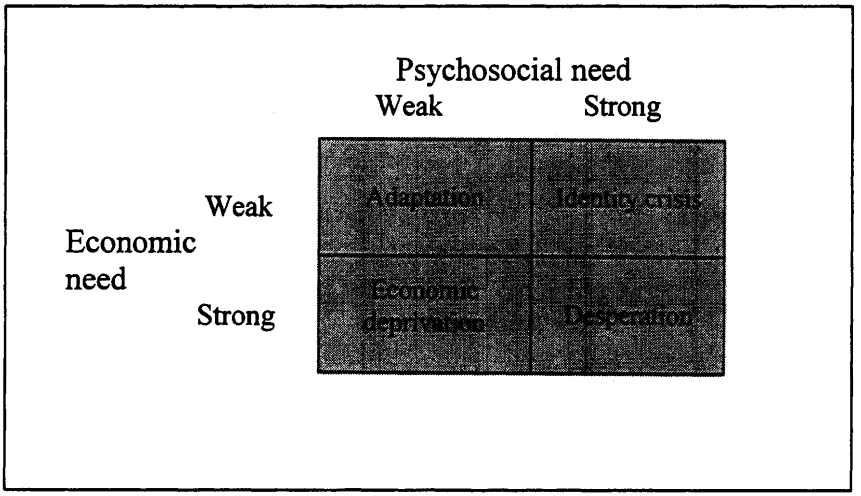
fact, it turns out that only very few youths suffer from economic marginalisation that is not related to labour market problems. That this relationship is not only valid for youths is confirmed by other studies revealing the broad significance of unemployment for economic problems and poverty (see for instance Salonen 1992, Halleröd 1995, Whelan 1996). The scope of the economic problems faced by unemployed today is, of course, quite different compared to what unemployed faced during the great depression. Deprivation today is not absolute in the sense that it threatens the physical maintenance of the individual, but rather a form of deprivation that is relative in relation to the level of consumption of other individuals in society. That deprivation is relative does not, however, make it less real for the individuals who face it. As the thesis shows in the study on nest-leaving, the economic consequences of unemployment can have very real repercussions for the ability to participate in society's normal life patterns.

In line with this, the thesis shows clearly that the economic need for employment is a central factor for understanding the negative impact of unemployment on mental well-being. The economic need for employment is, however, differentiated among the unemployed due to factors such as level of expenditure pressure and access to alternative income sources. The thesis shows that those unemployed who have a high economic need for employment have a significantly lower mental well-being during unemployment and a significantly larger improvement in mental well-being upon re-entering employment than do unemployed with a lower economic need for employment. The economic need for employment is, thus, a central factor for understanding both the negative impact of unemployment on mental well-being in general, and for understanding the differentiated impact of unemployment on mental well-being. Obviously the welfare state has not eradicated the economic need for employment among the unemployed. This is not to say that welfare state transfers are unimportant for mediating the experience of unemployment. The thesis clearly shows that the Swedish unemployment benefit system, which is relatively generous and covers most unemployed, is of great importance for the level of mental well-being and for preventing a further deterioration of mental well-being when unemployment is prolonged.

The picture of the experience of unemployment that the thesis arrives at is thus more complex than the simplified pictures presented in the two discourses. There is not, as assumed in the 'discourse of misery' and the 'discourse of morality', one experience (or non-experience) of unemployment. The experience of unemployment is not either an experience that is determined by the presence or absence of one factor, be it as in the 'discourse of misery' the psychosocial need for employment, or as in the

'discourse of morality' the economic need for employment. Instead the thesis show that there are variations in the experience of unemployment, and these variations are largely dependent on variations in the unemployment group in relation to both psychosocial and economic need for employment. These varied experiences of unemployment depending on the level of psychosocial and economic need for employment can be summarised as in Figure 2 (see also Nordenmark 1999).

Figure 2. The PEN-model, Psychosocial and Economic Need for employment (see also Nordenmark 1999



The unemployment experience looks very different within the unemployment group, as the model in Figure 2 indicates. Those unemployed who have both a weak psychosocial and a weak economic need for employment should not perceive the status of unemployment as problematic. This group represents individuals for whom the role as employed is not central to their identity and who have access to sufficient economic resources from sources other than paid labour. They belong to the only group of unemployed for whom the experience of unemployment should be unproblematic, and their unemployment experience could be labelled as adaptation to the unemployment situation. Another group of unemployed are those who, like individuals in the adaptation group, manage to maintain sufficient economic resources, but for whom the role as employed is still very important for a positive self-image. This group, which has a weak economic, but a strong psychosocial need for employment, can be described as having an unemployment experience characterised by identity crisis. For a third group, which has only a weak psychosocial need for employment, but does not manage to maintain

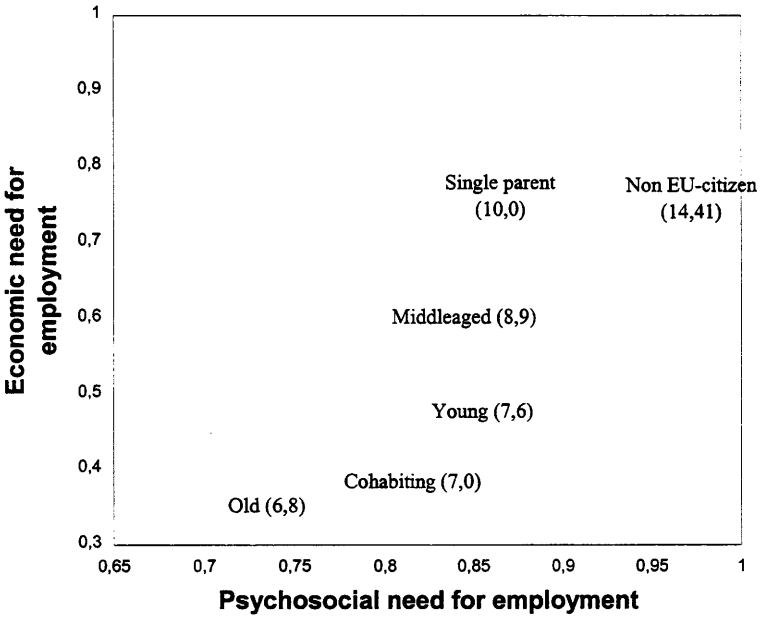
satisfactory economic resources as unemployed, the unemployment experience is characterised by economic deprivation. The unemployment group with the most problematic unemployment experience is finally those who have both a strong psychosocial and a strong economic need for employment. For these unemployed individuals, for whom employment plays a central role in their identity and who in the unemployment situation also face economic difficulties, the unemployment experience becomes one of desperation.

That the unemployment experience varies in the unemployment group according to the PEN-model does not mean, of course, that the unemployed are equally distributed among the cells in the model. Applying a model similar to PEN to LUP-data, Åberg finds, in yet unpublished analyses, that the unemployed are very unevenly distributed between the cells. He uses a dichotomy between those with great economic difficulty vis-à-vis those who do not have great economic difficulties on the economic need dimension. On the dimension of psychosocial need, he uses a dichotomy between those who agree that getting a job is important for at least one of the following psychosocial reasons: to achieve a desirable level of status, to be able to participate in collective purposes, to have something meaningful to do, vis-à-vis those who do not agree with any of these statements. Using this operationalisation, 11 % of unemployed belong to the adaptation group, 10 % belong to the economic deprivation group, 40% belong to the identity crisis group and 39% belong to the desperation group. The operationalisation of what constitutes strong and weak psychosocial need for employment could of course be discussed, as it might be seen as favouring a definition of need as strong. Other more detailed analyses of the psychosocial need for employment among the unemployed carried out on the LUP data set indicate that it is very strong (Nordenmark 1999), and the proportion defined as having a strong psychosocial need for employment by Åberg corresponds well to these findings.

In presenting the picture of the unemployment experience in Sweden provided by the PEN-model, it is also important to acknowledge that, on the individual level, the experience of unemployment is somewhat more flexible than what a permanent categorisation into one of the cells would entail. On the individual level, it is possible to find access to new sources of economic resources as well as to reinterpret one's identity and identify new roles and goals better suited to a positive self-image when unemployment is prolonged. The thesis shows that individuals who adapt in this way to the unemployment situation improve their mental well-being, whereas those who do not remain stable. Such changes on the individual level imply, of course, a changed experience of the unemployment situation and can be

described as movements between the cells in the PEN-model. On the other hand, the flexibility of the unemployment experience should not be over-emphasised. The roles and goals of the unemployed that have a bearing on the psychosocial need for employment are no doubt social constructs and thus heavily influenced by an individual's social position. Similarly, access to and level of need for economic resources will be dependent on the social position of the unemployed. This means that the possibility for the individual to change the unemployment experience is limited. The influence of social position on the unemployment experience can be exemplified by Figure 3. In Figure 3, the economic and psychosocial need for employment[1] connected

Figure 3. The Psychosocial and Economic Need for employment by some social characteristics (GHQ-scores in brackets)



with a number of strategically selected social characteristics is graphically presented along with the level of mental well-being coupled with respective

[1] The level of economic need for employment has been measured by looking at how difficult it is for the unemployed to make ends meet on a four-tiered scale from great difficulties to no difficulties. The level of psychosocial need for employment has been measured by the Work Involvement Scale, which is an attitudinal scale varying from 0-20, designed to measure the level of non-financial employment commitment (see appendix for further description). These measures have then been standardised so as to vary from 0 to 1, enabling the level of psycho-social and economic need for the strategically selected social characteristics to be described as co-ordinates in a system of co-ordinates.

characteristic (in brackets). Here, mental well-being is measured by the GHQ scale where lower scores represent better well-being and higher scores represent poorer well-being; the GHQ-scale is further presented in the appendix. Data are from the 1996 wave of the LUP data set.

What is evident in Figure 3 is that the life situation of the unemployed in relation to factors other than unemployment does have a very strong impact on the unemployment experience. Taking age as an example, we see that Old unemployed (here 50+ years) combine a weak economic need for employment with a relatively weak psychosocial need for employment, and the middle aged (here 30-50 years) combine a strong economic need for employment with a strong psychosocial need for employment. The young unemployed (here –30 years) have an economic need for employment falling between that of the middle aged and the old, but a psychosocial need for employment as strong as that of the middle aged. That different age groups are distributed in this way in relation to the two dimensions of need for employment is perhaps not so surprising. Older unemployed have access to more economic resources while they probably have a lower expenditure pressure, with mortgages paid and the children already having left the parental home. The middle aged, on the other hand, are most likely in a life situation where they, with less economic resources, have to deal with the expenditure pressure that mortgages and children imply. An explanation of the young unemployed's position is that they have fewer economic resources than the old unemployed and lower expenditure pressure than the middle-aged unemployed. On the dimension of psychosocial need for employment, the strong need of the young and the middle aged can probably be understood through the centrality of paid work at these ages. Young and middle aged, able bodied individuals who do not participate in paid labour stand out, as compared to older unemployed who are closer to retirement both in the sense of their circle of acquaintances and as an actual alternative for the individual. That the different life situations in relation these two dimensions actually are reflected in how unemployment is experienced is evident in the level of mental well-being among unemployed in the different age groups. The middle aged, who face a problematic situation on both dimensions, have the lowest mental well-being, the young, who face a somewhat less problematic economic situation are in the middle, and the old, who face the least problematic situation on both dimensions, have the best mental well-being. In Figure 3, two further examples of how social position affects the experience of unemployment are included. These are type of household, which has its impact on the unemployment experience mainly through the economic need for employment, and the social characteristic of being a non-EU citizen, which is included because it is the most extreme factor on both dimensions of need for employment found in the LUP data set. As can be

seen from both examples, the position in relation to the economic and psychosocial need corresponds very well with the level of mental well-being, showing that social position is indeed important for how unemployment is experienced.

The importance of social position for the experience of unemployment has, along with the possibility of individual change in relation to the unemployment experience, quite an important implication. When we, using the PEN-model, created a picture of the experience of unemployment in Sweden, this picture with its distribution of experiences was relatively contemporary. It showed the distribution of unemployment experiences in the mid to late 1990s, with a relatively normalised unemployment group in a particular institutional and ideological setting. The role of social position and the possibility of individual change in relation to the experience of unemployment tell us that this picture is not a given, but is open to social change. Such change could be the effect of processes and events of several types. Value change regarding the role of paid work in general or for specific groups, or drastic changes in the unemployed's access to economic resources, could, for instance, change the picture of how unemployment is experienced in Sweden. A change in the composition of the unemployment group due to labour market processes is another factor that could lead to changes in the distribution of unemployment experiences. In the economic upturn, selection processes on the labour market, whereby the more attractive unemployed leave the unemployment group, can lead to the unemployment group becoming increasingly different from those in employment (the reverse development as compared to the situation in the beginning of the 1990s when the process entailed a normalisation of the unemployment group). This new unemployment group, which would be more 'different' from the employed than is currently the case, might hold different values and have a different level of access to economic resources. Another possibility for change is that we end up in a situation where processes of individual change affect the structuration of unemployment experiences for the entire unemployment group. An example of such a possible process could be a situation in which high persistent unemployment was practically and politically accepted, in the sense that large parts of the unemployment group were regarded as unemployable and thus given up on. Under such circumstances, it would be very destructive indeed for the unemployed not to adapt to the situation and reinterpret their situation and identity.

This means that, given different circumstances, the experience of unemployment in Sweden could have been quite different from what was found in the thesis. It also means that it can be affected by changing circumstances in the future. Such insights indicate several ways in which the thesis work could be

extended. One desirable approach would be to continue to follow the group of individuals in the LUP data set during phases of the business cycle different from those existing when the original data set was constructed. In connection with such a continuation, it would also be desirable to complement the original sample with a new sample representative of the current unemployment group. Another interesting extension, which would also address questions about the role of context and labour market development for the experience of unemployment, would be comparative analyses based on longitudinal data. A comparison of the experience of unemployment across different countries would allow for an analysis of how national context structures the experience of unemployment. This both from the perspective of the general psychosocial and economic need for employment, and from the perspective of differential labour market and unemployment developments.

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Appendix: The GHQ-scale and the WIS-scale

In order to measure mental well-being, the thesis uses a Likert scale version of the GHQ-12, adapted to the telephone survey. The general health questionnaire has been used as an instrument for detecting people with diagnosable psychiatric disorder (Goldberg 1972), but is here used as an indicator of the level of psychological distress. The Likert version of the scale has been widely used in similar studies relating to the labour market (see for instance Burchell 1994, Ensminger & Celentano 1990, Gershuny, 1994, Harding & Sewel 1992, Stafford et al. 1980, Warr & Jackson 1987) and has previously been shown to have a high degree of reliability and validity (Banks et al. 1980). The scale is based on a battery of twelve statements, presented in Table 1, concerning general health and the experience of day-to-day activities. The responses to the twelve statements are then summarised in an index varying from 0 to 36, where a higher score indicates poorer mental health.

Table 1. Statements used in the GHQ-scale and in the WIS-scale

General Health Questionnaire (GHQ)	*Work Involvement Scale (WIS)*
-You have lost much sleep over worry	-Having a job is very important to you
-You feel that you are playing a useful part in things	-Even if you won a great deal of money you would continue to work
-You feel capable of making decisions about things	
-You feel constantly under strain	-You hate to be unemployed
-You feel that you could not overcome your difficulties	-You quickly get very bored if you have no work to do
-You are able to concentrate on whatever you are doing	-The most important things that happen to you involve work
-You are able to face up to your problems	
-You feel unhappy and depressed	
-You have been losing confidence in yourself	
-You are thinking of yourself as a worthless person	
-You feel reasonably happy, all things considered	
-You are able to enjoy your normal day-to-day activities	

To measure the psychosocial need for a job, the Work Involvement Scale is used. The WIS-scale has been developed by Warr, Cook and Wall (1979) and, in the version used in the thesis, consists of five statements about how important, in very broad terms, employment is for the unemployed (the statements are presented in Table 1). The answers have been summarised into an additive index that varies from 0 to 20; the higher the score, the

higher the work involvement. The scale measures in what sense paid work, in general, is a central part of life. A high score on the WIS-scale indicates that employment is important because it provides a social status and identity (Nordenmark, 1998). In light of this, WIS can be seen as a rough measurement of the psychosocial need for employment, in which high scores indicate high psychosocial need for employment and low scores indicate the opposite.