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**Abstract**

The careers of women in German higher education are really careers which lead out of academe: women disappear on the route to the top. In order to track processes and structures which lead to this "academic mortality of females", this article views higher education as a social field with its own dynamic of development, differentiated according to subject cultures. At the centre of the exploration lie organisational structures, hierarchies, time allocation, customs, traditions, everyday practices and interaction in the scientific community. In order to gain insight into these, detailed interviews were carried out with aspiring academics, institute directors and professors, both at universities and at research institutes outside the orbit of universities; the use of time was studied, and ethnographic material was assembled, together with statistical data. This contribution focuses on the structural conditions of the academic career, on symbolic violence in direct interaction, on patterns of competitive behaviour in the scientific community and on the role of mentors. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)