

Camilla Thunborg
Agnieszka Bron
Department of Education
Stockholm University

**“I’m not a blond Swedish woman “– Struggles with ethnicity and employability
on the Swedish labour market.**

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Abstract

This paper deals with issues of employability and the struggles mature students with another ethnical background than Swedish experience in becoming employable on the Swedish labour market. The paper takes its point of departure in the discourse of employability. The concept of employability means that the individual is responsible for gaining the right competencies needed on the labour market. This means that they also have to market themselves and their social, personal and cultural capital. Competencies like flexibility, adaptability, communicative skills etc. seem to be seen as general competencies for becoming employable. However, there seems to be a lack of studies discussing being the right person in relation to demographic variables such as age, gender, ethnicity and physical characteristics.

In this paper, we especially focus on the voices from mature students with another ethnical background than Swedish and their struggles in not being the right person for becoming employable.

The aim of this paper is thereby to understand the discourse of employability through the biographical experiences from mature students with another ethnical background than Swedish, studying to become HR employees. The paper deals with the following questions:

- What stereotypes do the students have about the right HR employee?
- What struggles do they express in becoming employable?
- What identities are formed in relation to these struggles?

The paper is based on biographical interviews with four mature students, having another ethnical background than Swedish, studying within the PAO-programme (A bachelor programme in Psychology, Sociology or Education within the area of Personnel, work and organisation) at Stockholm University. The PAO programme is expected to lead to positions in HR on the labour market, which makes it especially interesting as the graduates both are expected to have a good knowledge about the labour market in general but also are expected to work in positions that are responsible for recruitment.

Introduction

Employability, in its broadest sense means, according to Clarke (2008) a person's ability to find, retain and/or move between jobs. The recent decade the discourse of employability has gained much attention. A reason for this is claimed to be the shift from national towards a competitive global labour market where national governments are unable to guarantee employment (Brown et.al 2002). Among others, Fejes (2010) suggest that the discourse means a shift in responsibility from the labour market towards the individual. Rothwell & Rothwell (2016) as well as Williams (2016) draw the conclusion that too much attention has been given to employability on behalf of more important issues of employment and particularly concerning HE graduates. HE is seen to a large extent also as the means for enhancing the right competencies for individual to compete with on the labour market (Thunborg & Bron, in press). Employability research is concerned with analyses of international, European and national policy documents, national statistics, organisational level analyses concerning the matching the right competencies with required qualifications and individual analyses concerning both individual competencies and strategies for becoming employed (Nilsson, 2014). Concerning individual competencies required on the labour market Clarke et.al (2007) suggest that there are special types of competencies needed to become employable, that is not the same as doing a good job. In a conference paper (Thunborg & Bron, 2016A) we also draw the conclusion that HE graduates already in the second part of their studies starts to build strategies for getting the right competencies for getting a job, rather than focusing on being good students, despite the fact that both employers and HE staff value competencies required for handling work tasks. Obviously, there seems to be a paradox between getting the right competencies to get a job and to keep a job. This paper deals with issues of employability and the struggles mature students with another ethnical background than Swedish experience in becoming employable on the Swedish labour market. There is limited research concerning the employability of non-traditional graduates.

The aim of this paper is to understand the discourse of employability through the biographical experiences from mature students with another ethnical background than Swedish studying to become HR employees. The paper deals with the following questions:

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Previous research

This paper takes its point of departure in research on the transition from HE to working life in general, HR work in particular and in research about the employability of non-traditional students.

Most studies concerning the transition between HE and working life in Sweden are focusing on the different types of knowledge generated by different educational programmes in HE (Nyström et al., 2010; Reid et al., 2008; Johansson et al. 2007; Johansson et al., 2008; Nilsson & Nyström, 2013;

Johansson, 2008), the role of internship as a bridge between HE and working life (Ohlsson, 2009). Finally, different professions and professional identities have been studied in relation to different HE programmes (Nilsson, 2007; Axelsson, 2008; Nyström 2009; Lindberg 2012; Ohlsson 2009; Fransson, 2006; Löfgren Martinsson, 2008). Several of the studies suggest that the formation of a professional identity starts in HE but that the work practice seems to be most crucial for becoming a professional as it involves a 'reality check' that is as impossible to build into HE (Ohlsson 2009; Lindberg 2012).

In research, concerning Human resource, work seems to have emerged from administrative personnel management to HR strategic work. However, in practice there still is a divide between strategic and administrative work tasks (Ulrich & Dulebohn, 2015). There are also an ongoing negotiation between different stakeholders concerning the legitimacy for HR work in organisations and society (Berglund, 2002). One conclusion is thereby that there is no consensus regarding the kind of competencies needed for work within the HR sector.

Finally, there is a lack of research concerning the employability of non-traditional students after HE: As Clarke (2008) claims many studies show that little attention is paid to 'demographic variables such as age, gender, material status, ethnicity and family responsibilities or physical characteristics in studies of employability (ibid. p. 267). This paper is part of an ongoing project about the employability of non-traditional graduates (EMPLOY), with a specific aim to understand and enhance the employability of non-traditional graduates after HE. In a previous article from the project (Osman & Thunborg, submitted) we focused on current recruitment practices in relation to social inclusion and exclusion at the Swedish labour market. In the article, we identify four different recruitment practices from the narratives of HR experts; the informal, the pragmatic, the standardised and the strategic. In the article, we suggest that the different recruitment practices have a large impact on the employment of non-traditional graduates and that there is no best practice for recruitment with regard to social inclusion. In another article (Thunborg & Bron, submitted) we found that students 'that learn to play the game and follow the right path' by getting the right work experiences seem to get employment easier than those who do not. This means a disadvantage for students who have difficulties in getting "the right" type of work, for example students with family responsibilities. To be too qualified is also seen as a disadvantage in the recruitment process.

In this paper, we are concerned with the formation of identity in the transition between HE (Higher Education) and working life for mature students with another ethnical background than Swedish within the sector of HR (Human Resource) work.

Theoretical framework

This paper is concerned with students' formation of identity in the transition between HE and working life. The concept of identity relates to how students see themselves in relation to others, but also how they interpret how others see them. It also includes general categories such as ethnicity, gender, class as well as being a student and a professional, having attitude to the vocation etc., that are used as ways of defining oneself in relation to others (Thunborg, 1999; 2016). In this paper, two types of identity formation are focused, both the formation of identities in relation to the student's own biography including a construction of being a mature student with another ethnical background as well as the formation of a professional identity in becoming a HR employee.

We define the concept of identity with inspiration from Goffman (1959) as actors' ways of presenting themselves in relation and with reference to others (Sahlin-Andersson, 1994; Thunborg, 1999; 2016), claiming that an actor could refer to a person, a group or a group representative. As Goffman (1959) suggests these presentations could be both 'expressions given' i.e. deliberate ways of presenting

oneself in a certain situation and 'expressions given off' i.e. gestures and more unintended ways of expressing oneself. Strauss (1993) claims that the main aspect of an actor is someone acting or presenting oneself. In this paper it is important to distinguish between personal and collective identities, where personal identities refer to how individuals view themselves and are seen by others in contrast to how different collectives such as groups share conceptions and presentations of being part of a group as a shared 'we' in relation to 'them' or 'the others' (Thunborg, 2016). As the paper focuses on how mature students with another ethnical background than Swedish form stereotypes about the 'right' HR employee, their struggles in belonging to a student group also have an impact on the struggles they face in becoming employable by not seeing themselves as one of them, and how they form their identities in relation to that. However, it also focuses on how these students form professional identities as HR workers, even if being outsiders in relation to the stereotypes.

Mead's (1934) understanding about the formation of the 'self' could be taken as a point of departure for suggesting how identities in the transition between HE and working life are formed. Mead (1934) means that the self consists of an acting 'I' and socialised 'me' that develops through the human ability to see oneself both as a subject and an object at the same time. In this process, a person's acting (presentation) towards others makes the person see him/herself as well as the presentations from the perspective of the other helps to form a 'me'. From this interactive process, an attitude towards the world in general is formed, which means general categories or conceptions and probably even stereotypes in what Mead calls the 'generalised other'. The self is thereby only accessible through the social interaction with others, intersubjectively, and in this process, the expectations in form of attitudes and values are shaped and internalised as the generalised other (Bron, 2002). Through the ability to view oneself as both subject and object, struggles between the view of their own presentations and the interpretations of others ways of looking at them occur. In this paper, we try to identify these struggles through the narratives of mature students with another ethnical background than Swedish. Those struggles are both related to the students' stories about how they see themselves in relation to 'the others' and how they categorise 'the right HR employee in general', forming themselves as the outsiders. Finally, both these aspects of identity are part of their identity as becoming HR employees, holding a professional identity.

Methodological considerations

This paper is based on biographical interviews with four mature students with another ethnical background than Swedish studied at the PAO-programme at Stockholm University. The PAO programme is a Bachelor programme in Education, Psychology or Sociology within the area of Human Resource Management. There are several programmes like that in Sweden, but the one in Stockholm is considered the most theoretical one.

The four students were interviewed twice, once during their final year of their studies, once a year later, after graduation. In the paper, the students are called Alexandra, Anastasija, Clare and Guadalupe.

The biographical interviews were analysed in different steps. First, the first interviews were analysed from identifying their struggles in relation to their studies and worries about their future work. Second, we analysed the second interviews in relation to their struggles and strategies in getting a job after graduation. Finally, we analysed both interviews together in accordance to three research questions focusing how the students presented themselves as different from the 'normal' students, confident that they would have more difficulties in getting employment. This made us find categories in how they described the 'normal' student here defined as stereotypes, and categorised the struggles they felt with

not being 'normal', and finally, what identities they formed in being 'not normal' graduates on the labour market.

The Students' narratives

In this section, we present the stories from the four students, Alexandra, Anastasija, Clare and Guadalupe.

Alexandra

At the first interview Alexandra is 32-years-old. She came to Sweden nearly a decade ago with her husband who got a job at an international company. They both come from another EU-country. In Sweden, she was looking both for a job and for opportunities to study. She started studying Swedish as a second language, then continued learning it on a higher level and took vocational courses to become an enrolled nurse. That gave her an opportunity to work in the health care system with elderly people, and while doing that she learnt to speak Swedish even better. Nevertheless, she felt that working, as a caregiver for the elderly was not meaningful enough to her, as she wanted to do something more demanding and important. In the University catalogue, she found information about the PAO programme, which seemed to suit her perfectly well. It lasted only three years and gave her a chance of working with HR issues. She could also chose psychology, an additional discipline she studied in her country of origin and liked it a lot. Before the transition from HE to the labour market she was very uncertain whether she could get a job at all. The competition was enormous, and as she was a foreigner, it made her situation especially difficult. She applied for about 40 different jobs with no success. Alexandra was certain that it had to do with her age and with being a foreigner. The recruitment companies that had recruited many of her study mates did not give her applications any attention. She thought that the recruitment companies were full of young Swedish women, ten years younger than she was, and working as gatekeepers for the same people as themselves. Therefore, she felt that those kinds of typical first junior jobs were unavailable for people like herself. She talked about discrimination, not only because of age, but also because of her name and lack of perfect Swedish. Eventually however, she was employed in a company that had many different nationalities and where her skills in different languages were seen as an advantage.

Anastasija

Anastasija has an international background, having come to Sweden from an EU-country. She has a close connection to both Sweden and her "other country". Anastasija grew up in Sweden and went to school here. When the family moved back to the other country, she had problems with the new language and deliberately wanted to forget how to speak Swedish in order not to be seen as a stranger. She returned to Sweden eight years ago as an adult, and started to learn the language again from the beginning. For Anastasija it was obvious that she was going to study at the HE level. During her studies, Anastasija discussed the relation between different student groups claiming that younger students, especially women started to form their professional identity already during their studies. This was articulated both in the way they were dressed as well their behaviour, in comparison to younger students in HR who were dressed alike. As being older, she could find her student mates in the same age, but she also claimed that she was like a bridge between younger and adult students and between students with foreign origins and Swedes. She thought it was because she was good at the Swedish language and culture. She considered younger Swedish students as very homogenous, and having difficulty in opening up to other people. She thought that was wrong, especially if one wanted to become a good HR worker where it is important to understand other people and cultures. Although she was afraid that she might not be able to become employed, Anastasija got a good job after HE and a few short term contracts within two different labour unions. She did not experience any discrimination

and was surprised that her employers did value her competencies, while not being interested in her background as a non-Swede.

Guadalupe

Guadalupe came to Sweden with her mother, sister and two brothers as refugees from South America. She was only 15, when her son was born. She was 28 when she started her last year of her PAO programme at Sociology studies. Before she settled down in Stockholm, she had moved flats a lot. Nowadays she lives in a tiny apartment and says that it seems too small. She is not quite successful in her studies, partly because of a chronic illness, which allows her to be dispensed from some assignments, and partly because of being a single mother. Guadalupe does not feel very well among her study peers, as she considers herself as isolated and lonely. She talks about different study groups and thinks that she does not belong to any of them because of discrimination.

She is aware of her intellectual capacity but is not sure that she can get a job in the HR profession, as her Swedish is not good enough. She is certain she will not get one and therefore does not dare to apply even for one. She might instead continue her studies and get a Master degree. She thinks a Master degree would give her the status that she lacks.

Clare

Clare came to Sweden seven years ago when she was 41, from one of EU-countries where English is a main language. She has a Swedish husband and a little son to take care of. Clare has degree in Law and in Psychology, and 20 years' experience as a lawyer. When coming to Sweden already being married to a Swede she did not expect any difficulties to find a job in her own profession. She started with learning the language already in her country, and continued it in Sweden. However, after a couple of years she realised that getting a job in her own profession was just a dream. She needed to change her career to be able to work. Clare chose the PAO-programme after talking to a career and study councillor at the University. She was a very good student who wanted to learn as much as she could, taking into consideration both the language and the content. Thus, she studied full time, not like other students who had part-time jobs, in order to compete on the labour market. Nevertheless, she was aware that because of her age there could be problems in finding a job. She actually applied for the part-time HR assistant job, and did very well at the interview, but eventually was rejected as being overqualified. She applied for the 15 credits Internship Course after graduation, which is provided in connection to PAO-programme, to find an internship place. Unfortunately, she was unable to find a company which would want to accept her. Thus, before and after the summer 2016 she was applying for sixty HR jobs, but was not even invited for the interview. Then she started to look for other kinds of jobs and in the late autumn she was successful and became employed at the state Insurance Agency, first by taking a six week course with them, and then she would be able to work provisionally for half a year later to be employed permanently as an administrator. Her Swedish university education obviously helped her to find a job, but it did not have anything to do with her HR competencies. However, she was very happy that after such a struggle she was finally able to get a job, and start a new life and career. She was very critical about the labour market in Sweden and the recruitment process.

Stereotypes of the 'right HR employee'

In their stories, the four students describe stereotypes concerning the 'right HR employee'. Young Swedish women seem to be a stereotype for both the HR student and the HR employee. Guadalupe gives rise to the issue that most HR students are Swedes and that it is hard to be a foreigner even starting a programme like this:

...And then there are not many immigrants who can come in in this kind of programme, the majority are actually Swedish. So, I had to be a little bit proud with myself, I have not lived many years in Sweden, I have been ill, I have had it very tough, and yet I was able to take me here, so I try, I, laugh, still... (Guadelupe).

Guadelupe also claims that her peer students are so talented and good, and thinks she is not like them:

.... sometimes I see oh they are so talented, they are so smart my peers who are studying PAO with me, as I usually intended to think, or I tend to think and what smart they are, and how good they are, and I who cannot be like them, and I who cannot (Guadelupe)

Anastasija views younger female students as dressed the same and behaving the same, forming a very homogenous culture with difficulties to open up for other people. She describes them as typical young Swedish women in jeans and jackets pretending to work already in HR departments:

In my class there are very many, a big part of the class, who are young girls, and they are so very elegant, so you understand, dress code is elegant but simple, yet it looks as a lot of jackets, a lot of jeans, very elegant. It's a fashion lesson absolutely that's it, that's it, you should be elegant, you should, but also discreet in a Swedish way, as we Swedes... (Anastasija)

... but I mean young girls who have a pretty similar background in fact, and just the like wants to hang out with the like, and I feel they are not so open, to someone who appears a little different, not speak so well or behaves otherwise, breaking patterns e.g. only with clothes, and it's enough... (Anastasija)

I feel I was lucky, and I'm very grateful because they accepted me, to feel like part of the conversation, the whole class, but I think I got to work for it, yes, I really got to prove that I'm kind of normal or like the others that I'm not sticking out... (Anastasija)

... We (mature students) experience that they are younger, they do not have much work experience and they may want to prove something more through their clothes. So there are very many younger, so to speak, younger girls who have not worked but still come to school (university) as if they would come to work with nice clothes or on a job interview, really with a jacket on... (Anastasija)

Alexandra also refer to young Swedish women and claim that they when starting to work in junior jobs seem to become gatekeepers for people like themselves, discriminating other types of graduates.

...but on the other hand, there were not so many people who listened to my applications when I started eh, when I was looking for a job, and I'm sure it depends on that I do not have a Swedish name, because I searched for such jobs that I had a qualification, so I did not seek anything else but these which required PAO programme, junior services, those who did not require a few years of experience that I did not have, but they did not contact me. And that's just the big question about if outreaching in the civil service sector is really good? Or not? Then maybe the different companies would like to have people of different backgrounds, etc., but because they outsource the recruitment department quite often, then there are young Swedish girls who are in recruitment positions who may think I'm too old, because I am 10 years older than most people who come from the university (Alexandra)

Clare is not stereotyping her student mates or the HR employee but is instead talking about the labour market in Sweden as being narrow minded and closed for people that are not really seen as the 'normal ones', not having the right networks and being old and changing their careers:

... eh, I think market places is extremely closed for people who you know first of all they need networks eh despite that this course highlights you know competencies, it's not competencies you now, there is the ages between 32 and 42, there is your employability that Sweden hires. And, I know that I passed that ... I can work and have more to give, there is somebody who is 32 and has less experiences than me. Eh I eh, you just know you

can be down the pail on the older side, you know, particularly trying to start a new career and again it is contradictory information they can get, as I could see that one wants encourage people to change careers. (Clare)

Going through the narratives of the four mature students, they tend to stereotype the ‘normal’ students at the PAO programme as young Swedish, talented women, with a firm dress code in jeans and jackets, pretending to work, forming a way of behaving that the ‘other students’ view as very homogenous. They also seen this as a process that continues in working life as many of these students seem to become gatekeepers into the labour market.

Struggles in the transition between HE and the labour market

The four students describe different struggles in getting a job after the PAO-programme. The struggles seem to be related to being non-traditional, older, not ethnical Swede or not having the ‘right’ networks. Language appears to be one of the crucial issue for Alexandra, Anastasija and Guadelupe. Already during her studies Alexandra struggled with not being a native Swede, wanting to be perfect at Swedish:

When I think about my study, I am nervous all the time, as I am unsure of how to express myself as good as I would like to, this brings continuously anxiety, it is difficult to talk in front of others, and it seems that I am another person when I speak my mother tongue. (Alexandra)

Guadelupe also talks about her lack of language skills in Swedish, that is problematic in her studies, and she views the others as much more talented:

... but it may also have been because of the language, you cannot display your skills, yh, just the same way as one would do if one is Swedish, or do... But, so sometimes I tend to say ... but then I think, well but you have such problems, and then you could study more so, you might be on the same level or even better? (Guadelupe)

Anastasija is struggling with her ethnic identity through her studies. She feels half Swede – half the ethnicity from her other country and are anxious not to speak the language or to know about the Swedish society:

I couldn't think of living here without being able to function as all the others, to be a part of society, in such language is very important for me. (Anastasija)

Already during her studies, she feels like the one that is building a bridge between students with another ethnical background than Swedish and the Swedish students:

... Another interesting thing, that I think, just in my class, is that we are three people who are from a different background than Swedish. And I ended up somewhere in between, I must say, I am the one who is perceived as Swedish, actually, and my friends think I'm Swedish, they think that I'm speaking good not hear my accent, as Swedish... (Anastasija)

Despite this feeling of bridging in her studies, Anastasija is anxious of not being able to get a job as she has Swedish as her second language and because of being older:

Everything goes quickly. There is only one-year left that makes me anxious. I am nearly out of my mind. I think it will be very difficult, I do not know what I can say, but I talked to my classmates and some of them think it will be very nice to get a job, while I think it will be very tough. I am scared, as I do not know how it is going to be like.... This relates to different issues, in some way because I have Swedish as a second language, I am probably frightened, how, and who my employers will be, what kind of attitude are they going to have towards me. ...

partly because I am a little older – laughing – I am 38, but I think that everybody has different point of departure, different lives, so will be in my case too, so I am scared, I am scared really. (Anastasija)

Before the transition to the labour market, Alexandra struggled with how she should get a job because of being too old and not a native Swede. She refers to information about the statistics concerning labour market issues and feels like being down the list:

During our studies, we have read many reports and statistics about who is the most searched on the labour market, and who has the best chance of a getting a job, and I'm pretty down on the list, I'm an immigrant, which is visible in my name, this is not so good. I am a woman, not so good either, I'm over thirty, so I can soon have a child, not so good, I have no experience of the HR profession here in Sweden, not anywhere, either, so there is also a disadvantage, and I'm not Swedish, then ok name one thing, but I'm not real fluent in Swedish, either, and all of that scares the employer, and that's what I wanted to switch back. (Alexandra)

Alexandra also meets difficulties in getting a job. She applies for over 40 junior jobs without succeeding. However, when she finally gets a job, it is required to be skilled in different languages which means that she is more competent for the job than most of her former student mates.

Then I met an employment agent and he was very nice and helpfulhe thought I would get work pretty soon as I finished the HR programme, and as I speak some languages, and so on, so he did not think there will be any major problem. Anyway, I was worried of course, as I was afraid of the discrimination on the labor market. I already started thinking about changing my name maybe, because I do not have Swedish surname, but it was not necessary. I applied for some jobs (without any reaction), but from this company they called me back shortly, within a week it was ... because they needed a recruiter who speaks Swedish and English, and another language. That company is active in the construction industry, and in construction business, there are very many who have a foreign background, and then it is very big advantage that we in the office speak several different languages. (Alexandra)

Finally, for Clare she is really struggling with getting a job. She thinks this is because she had a position as a lawyer in her a former job, and is seen as being too qualified for getting a junior HR position:

I met with HR for a proper formal interview for one hour in Swedish, which was a great experience, that I thought went extremely well, eh a bit exaggerates if it was just for the student role, I thought but in any event, I got to know that I was overqualified. So I realised I am not fitting the profile for being HR assistant. ... To some extent I'm maybe have a psychic problem thinking can I go into a very junior assistant role, eh working for people that are much younger... I think, it would be more as a problem for people employing me if they could see me in this role. I was just straight and annoyed in terms who you are that I am overqualified, not because I had this role, but because I never had this role before. I do have experience because I am older, but I am not overqualified. So I am, I realise at that point that I probably ... there is not point to get extra job for a little of experience if it also will be difficult in terms of family life, I would struggle. My husband, his job is such that he couldn't really be able to take this kind of commitment to be out, or leave a job, I guess in this stage eh, of course he is very supportive and if I have, you know... (Clare)

Four identity types formed in the transition between HE and working life.

Four different identities are formed in being a mature student with another ethnical background in relation to become an HR employee. We call them 'the lonely not even dare to apply for a job student', 'the overqualified graduate', 'the perfect match' and 'the bridge builder'.

The lonely not even dare to apply for a job student

Guadelupe is the student that feels lonely and not even dare to apply for a job. She talks about different study groups and thinks that she does not belong to any of them because of discrimination, she feels lonely and

No, I do not dare! (Job-hunting) ... because I know they will say no, no. Well my peers are so good, why should someone want to hire me where there are several PAO (students), you know. So I dare not, to seek (a job). (Guadelupe)

This makes her think that it is of no use to even apply for a job. She thereby thinks she is better off with staying as a student, and try to get a master degree. She knows it is going to be difficult but she also thinks that she will be more qualified and thereby ably to get higher status on the labour market.

The overqualified graduate

Clare forms her identity as being over qualified and thereby not wanted in the HR sector. She knows that she is qualified as an HR worker but has found out through her interview that she is seen as unemployable within the sector because of her previous experience as a lawyer. Eventually, she ends up in the public social sector, working with social insurance issues where she finally is seen as employable.

...while they should stop, but these are recruitment companies that are part of the problem produce, you know the recruitment, recruiters who are at PAO course, so I, should be a part of the problem in that kind of employment eh. I am not sure what's happened, I think there is, you know, they don't taking any critical approach of candidates they try to find, for the writing these possible eh profiles, you know, they are missing a lot of good load of candidates, but this again it's eh, you know, the employment market in Sweden is very different, because it's again people have been paid, I can see why there are no people with experience, because they need to pay them more then these with no experiences, the wages gap is so small, therefore if you reach an employer, you know, I mean, it makes sense that you look in a kind of structure behind the way that it works in Sweden. So, you know, I mean, I understood all of that, but cannot make any better, but anyway I, (and) now I am at Försäkringskassan (Social Insurance Office) and I die (laughing both) no, I just it works. I am dead nervous about my language, you know speaking Swedish to people on the telephone, it really needs to happen. I became a lot more eh it's not that it is a problem, I know, at the moment its very much open plan, so if it is quite I don't want to pick a phone so everybody can listen to me, so therefore eh, I mean, suppose I'm little bit concerned that eh may be those, my future bosses eh. I don't know, no but I like ... it's good, ... (Clare)

Being overqualified as Clare with a degree in law and 20 years of experiences as a lawyer, a degree in Psychology and a degree from the PAO-programme, does not seem to make her employable in the HR sector, but all her degrees probably made her employable in the Social Insurance Office.

The perfect match

The perfect match means forming an identity formed for being right for the job, and becoming the right HR employee, but within a field where she is more qualified than the 'normal one'- For Alexandra the experience of getting a HR work in an international company, means forming herself being a perfect match.

...And it's good oh, it just takes time, so I think I've found right, so really, really ah, ... here's, how to say that, if you have a mother tongue other than Swedish, it's no disadvantage, and you're welcome Indeed, we have quite a few different ethnicities here in the office, we speak several different languages (Alexandra)

... it went pretty fast that I learned how one can do interviews in a good way, and after a while I felt there were no challenges anymore. I could references, I knew what to ask, and there was no problem to interview someone even if it was in English or in my native language. (Alexandra)

The bridge builder

Anastasija already as a student saw herself as partly Swedish, so it seems she did not have any problem with getting an ordinary position within the HR sector after her studies.

It worked out and it worked out in a strange but amazing way; Now, as I said, I work as a labor law specialist but also as a coach. ... I'm there to support a lawyer because I'm not a lawyer, but I'm HR-and so I coach (trade union) members, I do workplace visits, and help e.g. solve conflicts (Anastasija)

Anastasija already during her studies saw herself as a bridge builder between students with different background and showed an understanding towards differences, even if she struggled herself with being perfect in Swedish and knowing the Swedish culture. As being seen almost as a Swede she has no difficulties in getting the 'normal' jobs as a 'normal HR employee. However she form her HR employee identity as a bridge builder with a possibility of bridging between different positions.

Discussion

This paper deals with issues of the employability from the perspectives of mature students with another ethnical background than Swedish studying at the PAO-programme at Stockholm University. Despite having the same exam from the educational programme, they seem to have had different experiences for getting employment:

Alexandra and Anastasija form the two identities directly connected to HR profession. Alexandra that before the transition was convinced that she would have difficulties in getting a job also has to apply for over 40 jobs without succeeding. The employment that she gained is however the 'perfect match' where she really thinks that she is of use as the company specifically required her because of her skills in different languages something the 'normal' students lack. Anastasija sees herself already during the studies as a bridge between the 'normals' and the 'outsiders' as she present herself as half Swede and half having another ethnical identity. She is also the one who points out that others see her as a Swede as she speaks perfect Swedish. She thereby becomes a 'normal HR employee after all'. Clare forms an identity as the overqualified, that no matter what she tries to do, she cannot get a job within the HR sector, as she is confident that others see her as a threat. She ends up in another profession, in another work. Finally, Guadelupe does not even apply for a job as she is convinced she will not get it. She thereby continues to form her identity as an outsider student apart from at the labour market.

Turning to the concept of identity defined as how actors present themselves in relation and with reference to others, we suggest that the students present themselves differently in relation to their own biographies but also form both identities as being outsiders in relation to the 'normal' students and stereotypes about these students.

The 'stereotypes' of the 'normal HR students' as that it is a homogenous group, consisting of young Swedish women with a specific dress code in jeans and jackets and peculiar/special behaviour and language pretending to already be 'HR employees'. The 'normal' students are also seen as an exclusive group to which most of them do not belong. Before the transition, the students also have an attitude towards the labour market as being discriminating. This approach is for some of them based on statistical data and for some as previous personal experiences. One of the students thinks that the strong formation of the HR identity during the studies also tend to be reproduced on the labour market, where the 'exclusive group' of the 'normal' students tend to become gatekeepers at the labour market,

recruiting people like themselves. Thereby, they also have experienced discrimination already during their studies, which is reproduced outside.

The struggles that the students express seem to be related to having another ethnical background, visible mostly through the lack of perfect Swedish. The language appears to be one of the main differentiated categories distinguishing them from the 'others'. Age seems to be another important one. The lack of social networks a third. To be 'older than 35' with a non-Swedish ethnical background, not being able to speak perfect Swedish, and lacking certain networks are seen as disadvantages, both during the studies, as well as before and through the transition to the labour market. Not because of doing badly in their studies but because of being 'outsiders'.

The four students form themselves as 'outsiders' in different ways, which seems to have an impact on their possibilities to get employment. We have described four different identity types formed in the transition, two of them related to becoming an HR employee, two others related to stay as outsiders in relation to the HR profession. The perfect match and the bridge builder that both get jobs within the HR sector, and the lonely, not even dare to apply for a job student, and finally the overqualified student that does not get a job within the HR sector. A question that could be asked is if the stereotypes of the HR employee is too narrow to include mature students with another ethnical background or if it is the mature students, having another ethnical background that should try to fit in better.

One conclusion of this paper is, however, that the stereotype of the right HR employee is reproduced as a Swedish female dominating profession, where junior positions should be upheld by younger, less experienced people, rather than people with a long life experience coming from other parts of the world. This also seems to be a hidden curriculum already during the studies. To become employable in the HR sector, you need to gain the right competencies which means to be 'as normal, as Swedish, as young and as female as possible'.

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