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Gender jobs: Dilemmas of Gender Studies Education and Employability in Sweden

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Introduction

Over the last decade, the interaction between higher education and the labor market has become a hot topic in Sweden. This is due to the Bologna process and its aim to achieve a closer relationship between higher education curriculum and subsequent employment, often called “employability” (Knight & Yorke, 2003). This intervention needs to be read against the backdrop of the organization of the neo-liberal welfare state (Giddens, 1998; Rose, 1999), and as a consequence of what Slaughter and Leslie label “academic capitalism” which describes a situation in which research and higher education is governed by the market or market-like forces (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997: 8), and education is valued according to how employable the students are considered to be. The effects of this may be witnessed in particular in evaluations of higher education. When Gender Studies education — at both the undergraduate and master’s level — was evaluated by the Swedish council for higher education in 2007, the report stated that the subject’s links to career paths on the labor market were too weak (HSV, 2007). Furthermore, the efforts made by the universities to make Swedish Gender Studies education useful on the labor market were estimated to be limited. According to the report, employability for Gender Studies students needed to undergo serious discussion, both locally

at universities and on a national basis. For these reasons, the report calls for a systematic follow-up of where the students end up after graduation (HSV, 2007: 11). Similarly, the importance of Gender Studies education being practically useful on the labor market was highlighted in the subsequent evaluation conducted by the same Swedish council in 2012 (HSV, 2012). The directive from 2007 generated a number of university-specific reports based on surveys conducted by Gender Studies departments in several universities around Sweden of former Gender Studies students about their situation on the labor market (Åkesson, 2009; Goedecke, 2011; Brüllhof et al., 2007). The results indicated that former students were employed and mostly satisfied with their education in Gender Studies. At the same time, public debate in Sweden has been concerned with the quality of, and use-value of, higher education. Public actors such as journalists, NGOs, politicians, and scholars have debated whether students should be encouraged/allowed to study “un-useful” subjects, like art, philosophy, and gender, given that this would make them unavailable to work in areas where there is a shortage of personnel, to put it bluntly (Fölster, Kreicbergs & Sahlén 2011). To counter this discourse, and defend the humanities, some have argued that it *is useful*: in that it teaches the skill of critical thinking and the ability to analyze and handle complex social and cultural issues, which therefore improves society and culture (Ekström & Sörlin 2012; Forser & Karlsohn 2013).

Gender studies and employability

The discourse about who is employable and who has useful competence for the labor market is, however, not only dependent upon educational training but also shaped by ideas of gender and ethnicity (Orupabo, 2014).¹ Orupabo studied the transition of students from higher

¹ We asked the respondents of the survey how they defined their gender (female/male/both/other). We asked where they were born (Sweden/Nordic countries/EU/Outside of EU), where parent 1 and parent 2 were born (same options) and if parent 1 and parent 2 had an academic education. These questions, and the discussions in the focus groups, are the main foundation for our discussion of gender, class and ethnicity/race

education to the labor market in Norway and concludes that cultural stereotypes of ethnicity and gender are highly present in her informants' experiences of education and employment: their gender and ethnicity affect their positions on the labor market. The study concludes that being perceived as non-white, as well as having the "wrong" gender for the chosen profession – i.e. male nurse, female engineer – were disadvantages in getting hired (Orupabo, 2014: 293). Other feminist scholars researching career paths within academia in Sweden have come to similar conclusions: ethnicity and gender are factors affecting job opportunities and career paths (Mählck, 2012; 2013; de los Reyes, 2007) and, therefore, utilizing employability as an ideal can be critiqued in terms its effect on a global scale (Garsten & Jacobsson, 2004). Generally, these studies show that being a white male of the ethnic majority group is an advantage for employment, though in some cases being a white female of the ethnic majority group is almost as advantageous (ibid.). One such study about entering the labor market in Sweden, conducted by Berggren (2011) has taken into account the ways that issues such as class, gender, and nation affect former students' career paths. She concludes that class has a larger impact in the private sector and gender in the public sector: always benefitting middle and upper class backgrounds and men.

For Gender Studies, a discipline in which distribution of power is a main focus, promoting employability without critiquing the inherent bias toward privileged groups is problematic – especially in light of the aforementioned research. As such, the labor market and the idea of employability as such become the targets of feminist critique in the Nordic countries (Silius, 2005). It is essential for feminists to critique ideas of employability as arising from good, learned competences available for all, since employment processes clearly benefit some and not others, and moreover help to uphold power structures of, for example, class, gender, and

here. We were not allowed explicit questions about ethnicity/race or sexuality for legal reasons. We are aware of the limitations of the questions asked but believe that the discussions in the focus groups strengthen our analysis of the survey results.

ethnicity. In addition to this, the focus on employability and adapting higher education to the demands of the labor market also, as we shall see, conflicts with the systemic critical analysis of distributions of power at the heart of Gender Studies education. Critiquing contemporary discourse for the ways in which notions of competence, skills, and employability are used is therefore as important as understanding both the experiences Gender Studies students have of education and work against the backdrop of neoliberal governmentality, and the way in which these experiences are shaped by gender, race, class, and socio-politics.

This article thus advances two main themes: the critique of the current organization of education in relation to the labor market on the one hand, and the ways in which gender studies students experience education and work on the other. The aim of the article is to analyze the relationship of employability to Gender Studies in Sweden. This analysis is based on both a quantitative and qualitative study of the education and subsequent employment of Gender Studies students in Sweden, and through comparisons to a similar European study, keeping the concept of post-feminism and ideological dilemmas in mind. The questions posed are: Who is doing Gender Studies? And how do former students describe and assess their Gender Studies education and employment? With these questions as a backdrop we ask: How is discourse on employability and work expressed by former Swedish Gender Studies students?

The European Study

A large Europe-wide study, led by Griffin (2005a), investigated the post-educational employment of former Women's Studies (including Gender Studies and Feminist Studies)²

² We use the term Gender Studies when referring to our study because it is the name of the discipline in Sweden. Gender Studies, Women's Studies, and Feminist Studies are overlapping fields of research, which can be seen as distinct fields although sometimes they are simply different names for the same field. These terms are used when the authors referred to are using them. Further, feminist research is used as a term to describe all feminist research throughout disciplines.

students through surveys, and interviews. The aim was to understand the impact of Women's Studies education on: women's work in Europe, the relationship among Women's Studies, employment, and equal opportunities legislation, and the wider social impact that Women's Studies education has on women's lives. The project was called "Employment and Women's Studies: The Impact of Women's Studies Training on Women's Employment in Europe", and was conducted from 2001 to 2003 with empirical material collected in 2002. The study was funded by the European Union (EU), since understanding (and encouraging) women's employment is part of a general effort by the EU to increase employment in Europe. The focus of the study was on the labor market for Women's Studies students, and the impact of their education on their lives and employment. It should be noted that Sweden was not included among the participating countries, which were: Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Slovenia, Spain, and the UK (Griffin, 2005a: 12).

Both senior and junior scholars from these countries participated in the project resulting in analysis that was subsequently published as a report, a book, and several articles (Silius, 2011; Suárez, 2011; Schmidbour and Wischermann, 2011; Griffin, 2010). In what follows, we will briefly outline a selection of these publications in order to compare them to the study at hand. Silius (2005) analyzes the expectations, experiences, and outcomes of employment for Women's Studies students drawing on material from all nine countries. She concludes that Women's Studies students are more equipped to grapple with a changing and challenging labor market than other students (Silius, 2005: 138), even though they themselves do not realize it. Silius argues that four themes dominate the way students talk about their work and career: the theme of luck and chance, where success on the labor market is described as purely accidental; idealism, where education and work have a higher political purpose; realism, where work is needed to provide the means for everyday life; and careerism, where respondents voice a wish for achievement in employment (Silius, 2005: 132-135). These four

ways of understanding education and work co-exist with the ways European Women's Studies students discuss obtaining employment and pursuing a career after their education even though they point to dramatically different understandings of the labor market. Griffin (2005b: 108) argues that the institutionalization of Women's Studies in Europe has had a positive impact on women's employment in general and, for this reason, she celebrates the efforts of Women's Studies in Europe. Former students were found to work predominately in five different sectors: research and education, equal opportunity, civil society, journalism and information, and the social and health sector (Silius, 2005: 118). In an analysis of Women's Studies education as a practice in its own right, Griffin (2010: 247) concludes that the discipline has been successful within academia over the past decades in terms of finding an audience for its content and spreading its pedagogy and politics: both inside Women's Studies curricula, and as it has been mainstreamed into other humanities and social science disciplines. Women's Studies has, according to Griffin, changed European higher education.

Like the European study, the study upon which this article is based posed questions about Gender Studies education and employment, though in this case, only in Sweden. When conducting our study we also investigated students' motives for choosing Gender Studies, and their backgrounds in terms of gender, class, and birth place (Lundberg & Werner, 2014).

Unlike the European study, however, our sample does not presume that Gender Studies is relevant to women, or women's employment. Nor do we assume that all students identify as female, or that only women's work is affected by Gender Studies education. Rather, we aim to problematize the educational content and student population in terms of gender, class, and ethnicity.

The Swedish context

The discursive impact of the political, practical, and ideological employability directives outlined in the introduction, permeate higher education in ways that affect both teachers and students in Sweden today. And, these effects are curious if one considers that Gender Studies education aims to provide, at least in part, a feminist critique of culture and society, which includes employability discourse itself. This is particularly interesting given that Sweden is a country in which Gender Studies education is also highly institutionalized compared to other European countries (Silius, 2011) – there are numerous undergraduate and master’s degree programs, a large number of undergraduate students (Gender Studies is a popular choice among those just starting university), and several postgraduate programs. While Gender Studies research has been integrated into other disciplines, and feminist scholars are employed in a variety of disciplines, Gender Studies also has research environments in its own right at all major universities. In a fairly short time, the academic field of Gender Studies has gone from being an emerging academic area with a background in feminist politics, to becoming an integrated, institutionalized part of higher education in Sweden (Manns, 2009; Liinason, 2011; Lykke, 2009). And, this institutionalized version of Gender studies is supported by a gradually reinforced infrastructure of professors, senior and junior scholars, in addition to Ph. D., master’s, and undergraduate students. Scholars associated with Gender Studies hold positions of power in Swedish universities and major research funding bodies, and have as such become integrated into higher education. In addition to this, the Swedish Council for Higher Education (HSV, 2007; 2012) has evaluated Gender Studies and given it high marks for its quality of education. Hence, it is safe to say that Gender Studies education has acquired quite an established position in the educational system in Sweden. Furthermore, Gender Studies has adapted well to the academic turn to competition, auditing, and quantitative measurement (Edenheim and Rönnblom, 2014); scholars in Gender Studies are accomplished

at publishing, receiving grants, and the students are perceived as high achievers. Questions have been raised about what Gender Studies has done to succeed, what kind of curriculum it has, and which voices have been heard. Central texts have, for example, been analyzed and critiqued for what narratives of feminism are presented to students (Liinason, 2011).

Following this development, the status of Gender Studies in Sweden is often described in a twofold manner: on the one hand, the subject has been adopted increasingly into the institutional frameworks of Swedish academia (HSV, 2007; Manns, 2009; Rosenberg, 2013). On the other hand, the academic field remains strongly associated with its roots in feminist political activism and its criticism of the unequal conditions in society. Paradoxically, this latter critique can be applied back onto the first, given that it takes aim at the political system, the labor market, and the very academy in which Swedish Gender Studies is institutionalized.

Material, method and results

Our method consisted of combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews (in our case focus groups). This was inspired by the aforementioned European study, but it was also motivated both by the aim to understand the big picture and to find in-depth explanations and discursive patterns. Both the national survey and focus groups interviews were conducted in Sweden in 2012 and our findings include statistics on employment as well as conversations about Gender Studies education and experiences of looking for work among former Gender Studies students. Invitations to complete the surveys were sent to 1791 students and former students of Gender Studies living in Sweden – everyone who had a bachelor or master's degree in Gender Studies, in addition to everyone who took a first semester undergraduate course in Gender Studies in 2001, 2005 and 2011. Since it is not clear how many of our respondents had full degrees, we refer to them as students and former students, not graduates. We retrieved records from universities in order to be able to contact these individuals by mail.

With assistance from a national reference group of Gender Studies scholars, and a researcher in the field of statistical methodology, we constructed a survey focusing on four areas: the respondents' background, education, work, and personal life. The survey was tested by way of a pilot study consisting of a small, strategically selected group of former Gender Studies students in early 2012. Their answers and feedback helped us improve the questionnaire in terms of content, questions posed, and question order. The pilot study resulted in a survey containing 66 questions – yes/no, multiple-choice, and a few open answer questions – divided into the four areas. 34%, 606 respondents, filled out the online survey using the tool SurveyMonkey. They were invited by postcard to complete the survey – sent out first to all 1791 students and former students, and a month later, to all those that had not responded after the first postcard. The postcard contained a code in order to both protect their anonymity and to ensure that each person could only fill out the survey once. The non-response group was rather large, which is not uncommon in contemporary surveys. There was nothing in the gender, age, or geographical balance of the responses that indicated that respondents were not representative of the group of subjects invited to participate.

In summer and autumn of 2012 the quantitative part of the study was followed by qualitative focus-group interviews. We conducted three focus-group interviews, with 4-6 participants in each, in the three regions where most of the respondents lived: Stockholm, Göteborg, and Malmö/Lund. Participants were recruited from the list of respondents who indicated interest in being interviewed at the end of their completed surveys. The aim of the focus groups was to map tendencies in talk among the students and former students, and to ask questions with the intent to deepen the analysis of some contradicting results from the survey. One such contradiction regards the high level of employment among survey respondents, which, like the European study, seems to be at odds with the low level of expectation of finding employment among respondents. The study concluded that most of the respondents identified

as women, were of a Swedish background (born in Sweden, with parents born in Sweden), and, strikingly, respondents from educated, middle class homes were overrepresented with respect to Sweden's population. Most of the respondents (93%) had conducted higher education studies in other areas in addition to their Gender Studies education, mainly in social science and humanities subjects. They were happy with their education in Gender Studies – 97% thought the Gender Studies courses they had taken were good or very good – and the rate of unemployment was low, 3%.

Post-feminism and ideological dilemmas as analytical tools

In order to understand the results of our study we turn to academic work concerned with the post-feminist condition and ideological dilemmas. McRobbie (2009) has defined post-feminism as a condition in (Western) society shaped by feminist struggle. Today women are, according to McRobbie, understood as; able to work, as agents with capacity, who can also be depicted as agents in popular culture and seen as taking part in politics and economy. The post-feminist condition is a result of feminist political struggles, both within state apparatuses and by activists. But ideas about individual women's abilities are, within post-feminist culture, often used to deny the continued need for feminism or joint feminist struggle (McRobbie 2009). In order to be perceived as able subjects, and to be valued within society, women need to denounce their need for feminism, according to McRobbie. Because feminist politics implies, within this logic, that they are not already individuals who possess the characteristics and abilities that society, culture, and the labor market need. Thus post-feminism does not advocate the political struggle for equality. On the other hand, it is not simply another anti-feminist formulation; rather it celebrates feminism as a political movement of the past. Post-feminism in this definition tends to overlook global inequalities of gender, class, and race (Gill & Scharff, 2011), and instead regards contemporary women as individuals with potential to enter the work force (Powers, 2009). The individual, able woman

in post-feminist thought is often white, western, and middle-class and, as a figure, she seems to prove that there is no longer an inequality between the sexes – simply in virtue of the fact that she can succeed. Neoliberal ideology can, on this level, be said to work in sync with post-feminism (Fraser, 2009). Furthermore, post-feminism is not intersectional in its understanding of power inequalities and, therefore, does not account for the ways in which increases in poverty affect women in European countries and elsewhere. The other theoretical starting point, Billig's (1988) concept "ideological dilemmas" is used to understand post-feminist conditions. Billig argues that an ideological dilemma occurs when a certain aspect of a person/group's core ideas is in conflict with another aspect of their core values or everyday practices. According to Billig, ideological dilemmas pinpoint conflicts of interest in contemporary society (ibid.). In feminist politics, and feminist research, the aspiration of individual freedom often presents such a dilemma when it finds itself at odds with the political goals of a group.

The post-feminist condition has taken part in shaping a labor market for feminists and gender scholars through policies shaped by feminist politics, such as gender mainstreaming, which provides jobs for former students and activists. This is particularly true in Sweden, where equality laws and policies require administrators, i.e. a new group of specialists, to monitor and uphold them. Gender equality can also be displayed as a profitable strategy for companies that promote women in the general work force (Larner, 2000). In the following, we will describe and analyze the ways in which Gender Studies students are affected by the post-feminist condition, and how because of this, they inadvertently give voice to a set of ideological dilemmas.

Critical feminist theory versus labor market skills

As described above, most of the respondents to the survey are employed and, furthermore, 62% of them work solely or partly in a job that they consider related to Gender Studies. At the same time, the labor market connection in their Gender Studies education was rated low – 73% of respondents thought work-related questions were not addressed properly during their Gender Studies education. The content of their Gender Studies education in general was rated high: 97% thought the education they received was good or very good. We found these results intriguing. The respondents valued their education, but they did not believe that it was related to the labor market. Despite this, they found jobs post-degree – the majority of which concern gender issues in some way. A majority also found Gender Studies knowledge useful in relation to their professional tasks. In order to understand this contradictory picture, we initiated discussions in the focus groups about the move from higher education to employment and the value of Gender Studies knowledge. The participants in all focus groups spoke about critical thinking, analytical abilities, and “feminist lenses” as three skills important for everyone in culture and society today. They described their Gender Studies education as teaching them these skills, but not the skills that could land them a job. Rather, they talked about Gender Studies as providing them with a new way to understand the world. Participants in two different groups put it like this:

Doing Gender Studies, it was a milestone. It opened up a universe, just like when I learned about atoms and molecules in junior high school.

It was as if I received a large set of keys that I really needed.

Hemmings (2012) has described Feminist Studies and Gender Studies in terms of “affective engagement.” Most of the survey respondents commenced their Gender Studies education based on their own personal interest in feminism, gender, and equality. When answering a

multiple choice question where respondents got to rate fifteen different reasons for starting their Gender Studies education, “interest in feminism” was the most popular response – by contrast, “to improve chances on the labor market” was the least popular. Here, the idealism mapped by Silius (2005) is highly present in the Swedish material. A large number of the survey respondents (57%) also had done volunteer work, for example, in NGO’s or political/activist organizations. The passion for political issues was evident as a motivation and an end goal of the respondents’ education. In the focus groups, participants discussed the end goal: to change an unjust society.

When the participants in the focus groups talked about their Gender Studies education, they were overall very happy, which is not to say they were uncritical. The participants in the groups praised the high standards and theoretical challenges as rewarding aspects of their studies. However, simultaneously, they sharply critiqued the elitism they saw as thriving among students and teachers. They also expressed a longing for a recognizable job title after finishing their degree, and they voiced a need for a specific identity on the labor market – something that they did not think they would gain from doing Gender Studies. On the contrary, in the survey, the respondents thought the university was unable to properly explain the kinds of careers they could have, what skills they would possess, or how to “market” themselves as employable. While at times this was said in a joking manner – as participants seemed well aware of the critique of market ideals and neoliberal discourse taught in Gender Studies – they also expressed real fears about being unemployed. One participant described it like this:

The labor market is structured around a number of categories, and with a background in Gender Studies you don’t qualify for any of them.

This participant and others were longing for a more visible career path. One participant even wistfully said “Imagine what it would be like to be a dentist,” illustrating a profession that everybody could recognize and a category where it would be easy to determine how one’s education could fit. The other participants laughed, recognizing the difficulty themselves. However, this longing for an unproblematic position on the labor market co-existed with a love for Gender Studies as a subject that focuses on complex, critical studies of culture and society. Here, we see the way in which idealism and realism about education and work conflict (Silius 2005). In terms of how they found their first job after the degree, participants often described it as a series of lucky events – in line with Silius’ (2005) results, themes of luck and chance were present in their stories. But there were also more strategic and career-oriented reasons for studying: one participant talked about returning to university after having worked in theater, intentionally in order to study gender – in other words, as a conscious career choice. But in regard to how they were first employed, participants in all groups failed to attribute their success on the labor market to their Gender Studies education or knowledge. In the survey, getting a first job after finishing their studies was mainly ascribed to contacts, previous employment during their education, answering job advertisements, and contacting employers individually. Hence, employment did not occur to the informants due to gender studies education, but rather *in spite* of it. Participants in one focus group discussed at length their worries about the ways in which their background in Gender Studies and feminism would affect their chances when applying for work, or when being assessed by employers. One person said:

I remember having discussions with my friends; should I put this [Gender Studies] on my CV or not? /.../ How can I promote my knowledge; “Look, I took this course in Gender Studies, it made me euphoric”? [Laughter]. Now, I find the knowledge I acquired extremely useful, but back then, I was quite anxious.

The results paint a complex picture in which Gender Studies knowledge is seen as good and useful, however, not always appreciated or safe on the labor market as a labor skill. Yet, Gender Studies education was described as something they used in their jobs. 64% conveyed that they used the knowledge they acquired through their studies in their everyday work life – a dilemma well-illustrated in the quote above. We understand this as a clash between two discourses: a dilemma in which the participants’ ways of assessing and appreciating their education in Gender Studies, and their wish to fulfill the expectations of the labor market in order to land a job, do not seem compatible. From a critical perspective they learned by studying Gender Studies, they could not see themselves simultaneously as feminist critical subjects and employable on the labor market, which they obviously were. They were worried about not getting work because of the association of gender studies with feminist political perspectives on society but, at the same time, they were self-aware, reflecting about wanting to succeed in the very labor market they critiqued. Despite the fact that so few were unemployed, and many worked in the areas for which they were educated, the group participants did not feel safe on the labor market, and Gender Studies education was even perceived as an obstacle to their finding employment. As a result, former students often found themselves self-censoring with respect to their degrees. Discussing job interviews, one person said:

Sometimes, I simply shut up about my background in Gender Studies.

While the themes of realism, idealism, luck and chance, and career aspirations (Silius 2005) were, thus, all present in the focus groups, idealism and luck and chance were predominant. The idealism may have been significant for the Swedish Gender Studies students since many of them were politically active prior to their studies. Although themes of luck and chance are likely to feature in a large number of social science and humanities students’ descriptions of finding jobs (excluding, of course, students with job titles like psychologist, social worker,

etc.), luck and chance stood out in our focus group interviews. This indicates that former Gender Studies students had little expectations of finding work in a labor market they perceived as at odds with, even hostile to, Gender Studies. Furthermore, the knowledge about the extent to which Gender Studies has become institutionalized does not seem to have reached the labor market with respect to job titles. According to Silius (2011) the answer to the question “Is gender studies a profession?” is “No.” She argues that many former Gender Studies students create their own jobs, implying a very specific form of professionalism where they bring not only knowledge of what to do but also how to shape organizations and businesses in order to be able to do it. The former students in our study found that the knowledge from Gender Studies was useful, and there was work to be done, regardless of whether Gender Studies can be called a profession or not.

The subjects of Gender Studies education

Swedish born women-identified students, with Swedish born parents and middle class backgrounds, were over-represented (in relation to the Swedish population in general) among the respondents to the survey and the participants in the focus groups. Previous research on students in social science and humanities (Berggren 2006) has also shown an over-representation of Swedish born students with middle class backgrounds. Since Gender Studies curricula is centered around inequalities in society – often based on intersections between gender, sexuality, ethnicity/race, class, and more – the over-representation of some groups, both among teachers and students, presents a particular problem for the Gender Studies classrooms. In the focus groups, the participants critically discussed the experiences of class and ethnicity/race in particular. Here are some examples of what they said in different groups:

I've never felt so reminded of my working class background [as in Gender Studies].

In my undergraduate course, it wasn't completely white or completely middle class. But there was still such a dominance.

When I think back, the first semester was more inclusive [...] But the higher up you get, the narrower the group of people is.

We were not surprised by the representations of gender, class, and ethnicity/race in the group responding to the survey and taking part in the focus groups, given our combined experiences with teaching Gender Studies in Sweden. As McRobbie (2009) claims: the success story of feminism (and, we argue, Gender Studies) are success stories of women who are mainly white and middle class (ibid.). The respondent who commented that she had never felt more reminded of her working class background, also discussed the theoretically challenging, elitist environment of Gender Studies. She argued that “getting it fast,” reading difficult texts, and holding one’s own in intellectual discussions where cultural capital was presumed were integral to fitting in in Gender Studies. Students who did not feel that they belonged quit, she said, mostly before the end of the first semester. At the same time, many of the focus group participants testified that the Gender Studies curriculum attempted to include everyone, and demystified university structures by, for example, introducing the purpose of the seminar or explaining how to write an essay, and that this was done in a way they had not experienced in other academic disciplines. Even though the focus group participants emphasized the importance of, among other topics, queer theory, black feminism, and post-colonial feminism to their Gender Studies education, they also highlighted the fact that the students and teachers were mainly white, middle class, and women-identified. Any academic discipline is shaped by the positions the students and teachers hold, the issues that engage them, the questions they pose, and their orientations (Ahmed, 2012). We would, therefore, argue that the positions, and orientations in Gender Studies are of interest – not only theoretically, but also practically – for

example, in the recruitment of students and faculty, in addition to how teaching and learning are shaped.

The demographics of the survey's respondents, and the experiences of focus group participants, indicates that Gender Studies is dominated by Swedish, middle class women (females assigned female at birth). This puts the results of the study concerning employment into perspective, since middle class, Swedish-born women with higher education generally have a low unemployment rate in Sweden. So while respondents to the survey and participants in the focus groups were worried about not being employed, statistically they had little reason for concern. When they did not see themselves as employable because of their feminist ideology and critique of inequalities, as discussed in the previous section, they did not take their background or cultural capital into consideration. Being an able female subject on the labor market requires a skill set marked by both class and gender (McRobbie, 2009), so the dilemma of former Gender Studies students is that while they are feminists that want to be employed on a labor market that does not conform with their ideologies, they also have the cultural capital to be employed on that market. The fact that they are extremely worried about finding employment as feminists and gender studies students, and at the same time are successful in doing so is striking. Adding the fact that the majority of the informants belong to a group where rates of unemployment are low, the situation points to the ways in which feminism and gender studies, in the student's understanding, seems to be totally out of sync with the contemporary labor market.

Conclusions

The results of the Swedish study of gender students can be used to argue for (mainly) two very different things. First, students and former students of Gender Studies seem to be needed on the labor market: they are employed and use their Gender Studies knowledge and skills,

and some form of “gender expert” job description seems to be increasing in popularity. At the same time, the participants in our study worry a great deal about their chances on the labor market as a result of their Gender Studies education. Ultimately, the high employability of the former students presents an ideological dilemma: they come to work within, and strive to be employed and paid by, the very apparatuses that Gender Studies critique. In their discussions about studies and work, this dilemma is present throughout: they want to get a good job, a job with a proper title, and at the same time they want to change the world and the very (capitalist) logics and mechanisms they strive to work within. We would argue that this dilemma is enabled by the professionalization and institutionalization (Silius 2011) of Gender Studies in Sweden.

Second, Gender Studies as a discipline is attracting Swedish-born, middle class women that, because of the cultural capital they already possess, are likely to succeed in pursuing a career in Sweden. This makes the anxiousness among respondents and participants even more interesting. While they are finding work, employable, and possess cultural capital and specialized skills, they are still very anxious about not being employed. How can this be understood? As a group, they have influenced the labor market in a new direction, where Gender Studies skills are professionalized. On the other hand, this is happening in a time and place where the labor market is significantly influenced by neoliberal discourse – the very discourse critiqued by many Gender Studies scholars for its participation in creating inequality and marginalization on a global scale. A Gender Studies critique is perceived as powerful by the former students, powerful enough to be an obstacle to their ability to get a job – some of them are not sure if they should even mention Gender Studies on their resumes. However, their fear should be understood as existing in a context where feminist issues are widely discussed, both by those in favor and those who violently oppose feminism. Gender Studies’ relation to the labor market, and the ideological dilemmas expressed in the study

pose new questions: How can Gender Studies, through former students, have an impact on the labor market and neoliberal politics without losing its unique critique? And, further, how can Gender Studies include a wider group of students?

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