

Institutionen för pedagogik och specialpedagogik

Kön, kropp, begär och teknik
Passion och instrumentalitet på två tekniska
högskoleprogram

av

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AKADEMISK AVHANDLING

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Abstract

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This thesis addresses the co-production of gender and technology as articulated in two programs at a Swedish university of technology: Computer Science and Engineering (CSE) and Chemical Engineering (CE). It builds on the assumption that the articulation of gender in these programs relates to how technology is articulated. Research on gender and technology often investigates the ‘failure’ of linking women/femininity to technology. In this thesis I, instead, adopt a perspective inspired by queer theory and focus on norms that articulate masculinity with technology. Theoretically and methodologically, the study adopts a post-structural perspective primarily based on discourse theory, as developed by Laclau and Mouffe (1985/2008). I also draw on feminist technoscience research and on Butler’s (1988, 1990/2007, 1993) notion of gender, performativity, and the heterosexual matrix. Empirically, the thesis is based on ethnographic fieldwork and formal interviews with students. Considering the critique that research on gender and technology has failed to address sexuality, I emphasize explicitly the role of passion, desire, and heterosexuality in the production of connections between masculinity and technology. As the thesis title suggests, this focus on passion and desire for technology is combined with recognition of the role of instrumentality in higher technology education. In my analysis, I suggest that the formal education students receive fails, for various reasons, to subjectively engage many students. Consequently, students adopt an instrumental approach to their education, emphasizing the future exchange value of their formal degree, rather than subjective meaningfulness or the significance of the subject matter as such. I also argue that in failing to ‘recruit’ students, formal education can be considered as privileging the already-passionate student, whose interest in technology is not so easily derailed, even when encountering education that fails to engage subjectively. This ‘passionate student’ subject position is articulated primarily in the CSE program, mainly in informal, student cultural contexts. Here, I argue that technology, corporeality, desire, and embodied computer interest, are configured in a manner that derives intelligibility from the heterosexual matrix and contributes to the CSE program’s hetero-masculine connotations. On the other hand, the absence of the ‘passionate student’ subject position in the CE program, appears to contribute to this program’s relative gender inclusiveness.