

Contradictory Values in Doctoral Education: A study of Gender Composition in Disciplines in Swedish Academia

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Abstract

Contradictory values in the Swedish doctoral education system are analyzed through an interview and survey study of different academic disciplines: female-dominated, mixed and male-dominated ones. The focus is directed towards how the different disciplines conduct the process of application and selection in doctoral education. Special attention is given to values regarding doctoral ideals, what a successful thesis should be like, how gender balance or imbalance is explained, and how activities aiming at gender equality are carried out. In the findings some specific patterns showing gendered discipline cultures in relation to doctoral education are apparent. The analysis shows an unclear or ambivalent view on gender and gender equality work in doctoral education. In many of the issues investigated, essentialist views on gender emerge and a focus on gender differences is evident. The implicit assumption, unveiled by the study, is that men and women are different and contribute to the discipline in disparate ways. The effectiveness of gender-specific doctoral strategies and the extent to which gender equality work is viewed as a support strategy for women only, is discussed.

Keywords: higher education, doctoral education, values, gender equality, academic discipline