

**COLD HEARTS VERSUS BLEEDING HEARTS:
DISCIPLINARY DIFFERENCES IN
UNIVERSITY STUDENTS'
SOCIOPOLITICAL ORIENTATIONS**

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my account of my own research. To the best of my knowledge, it contains no material previously written or published by any other persons, except where noted in the text. This research has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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Abstract

The supposed liberalising effects of higher education have been documented since Newcomb's landmark Bennington study in the 1930s. However, other research has suggested that the effect of education on beliefs and values may differ between academic disciplines. The main mechanisms by which differing beliefs are believed to develop include the self-selection hypothesis (where students chose disciplines which match their pre-existing belief systems) and the socialisation hypothesis (where students are socialised into the worldview of the discipline through continued exposure). Three correlational design questionnaire studies were conducted. Study 1 and 2 featured 223 and 531 students, respectively, and Study 3 included 143 recent graduates of Murdoch University, from different academic disciplines (primarily commerce, psychology and the social sciences). Study 4 involved interviews with nine students who had switched between the three main fields of study. The quantitative results generally supported the self-selection hypothesis, although some participant accounts suggested possible accentuation effects (where pre-existing values were strengthened by university study). Future research should consider a longitudinal study, tracking students in different academic disciplines over the full-length of their degree. A cross-sectional community study would also be valuable, in determining whether large scale difference exist between the those with tertiary, compared to those with lower levels of education, and whether discipline differences persist following graduation (and whether this is linked to occupation). These findings have important implications for the way universities view themselves, in terms of shaping the minds of the next generation of leaders, and for disciplines, in terms of the types of students they attract and how they can best retain them. In conclusion, there are significant differences in the belief systems of students in different academic disciplines, although not as large as may be expected, and that this seems primarily due to self-selection, rather than socialisation or accentuation.

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I've heard many times that the process of doing a PhD is a lonely and isolating experience, however, I have not found that to be the case. From the very start I've felt like I was part of something larger, starting with my first office on campus (which admittedly contained 11 other people).

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