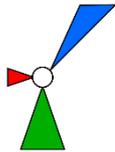


1660 AE1

bncdoc.id	FA6
bncdoc.author	Thomas, K
bncdoc.year	1990
bncdoc.title	Gender and subject in higher education.
bncdoc.info	Gender and subject in higher education. Sample containing about 37923 words from a book (domain: social science)
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<1660/c>	and the qualities embedded in our notions of ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’. 3 The
	Two Cultures Introduction This chapter will consider both the idea of an arts/science division and why it exists, and two specific subjects: physics and English. I shall argue that the question of ‘subject choice’ is not a neutral one and that individual school subjects can be seen to embody certain kinds of values. Further, the very notion that scholarship can be divided into two completely distinct areas, known as ‘arts’ and ‘science’, in itself implies a value judgement. To choose to study ‘arts’ rather than ‘science’ is to make a statement about the values one considers important. The idea that the two areas, arts and science, are more than simply subject groupings, is not a new one. C. P. Snow argued that practitioners of science and practitioners of the arts, inhabit two distinct cultures; scientists, for example, have ‘common attitudes, common approaches and assumptions’. More recently we have come to see that the concept of science or arts is a social construction; as Michael Young has argued: The whole ‘subject choice’ and ‘swing from science’ debate presupposes taking as ‘given’ the social definitions implicit in our commonsense distinction between ‘arts’ and ‘sciences’. What ‘does’ and ‘does not’ count as ‘science’ depends on the social meaning given to science, which will vary not only historically and cross-culturally but within societies and situationally. Most of us accept unquestioningly, for example, that philosophy, an arts subject, has more in common with history, another arts subject, than it has with physics, a science subject. Yet this distinction is a relatively recent one: Isaac Newton, for example, would not have distinguished so clearly between physics and philosophy. At the same time, this division is so entrenched in our education system that a student who wishes to cross the cultural boundary and study both areas is considered something of an oddity. In this chapter, I should like to look at some of the ‘social meanings’ we give to arts and science today. In the last chapter, we touched upon Bernstein’s ideas about ‘framing’ and ‘classification’. Bernstein argues that some school subjects have very tight definitions of knowledge, and clear boundary lines marking what is considered relevant ‘knowledge’ and what is either considered not relevant or as belonging to another subject. These subjects (which have ‘strong classification’) are also the subjects where hierarchical relationships between teacher and pupil are strongest: Strong frames reduce
<p>Key:</p> <p>Footprint ConEn1 Footprint ConEn2 Footprint ConEn3</p>	
	<p>the power of the pupil over what, when and how, he receives knowledge</p>
	<p>, and increase the teacher’s power in the pedagogical relationship The stronger the classification and the framing, the more the educational relationship tends to be hierarchical and ritualised, the educand seen as ignorant, with little status and few rights. These are things which one earns, rather like spurs, and are used for the purpose of encouraging and sustaining the motivation of pupils. Although this could in theory apply to any subject (history, for example, may, in certain circumstances be taught with strong classification and framing, or with weak classification and framing), it</p>

might also be seen as one of the central features of the arts/science divide. Bernstein also suggests that students are encouraged to make an identification with their chosen subject and to form a disdain for other forms of knowledge. The English education system is a narrowing down, rather than a broadening out: disciplines outside one's own are not looked upon as worthwhile or potentially interesting, but as completely outside one's own sphere of practice; subject specialization reveals 'difference from' rather than 'communality with'. This argument is partly illustrated by Becher (1981) who, in looking at the 'cultures' of various disciplines, found that academics showed a remarkable intolerance of each other's disciplines. Sociology, for example, was characterized by other academics as 'fragmented and pseudo-scientific, dubious in its methodology and 'open to ideological exploitation''. Physics was regarded as 'the extreme of pure science' but its practitioners were thought of as 'boffins living in Cloud-Cuckoo land'. Engineers were seen as 'dull, conservative, conformist and mercenary'. There was further division within each field; in physics, theoreticians were rated higher than experimentalists; in law, mere academic specialists were not as highly thought of as those who had practised the profession. Given that most academics - and, we shall assume students - have a strong sense of subject loyalty, we have now to ask: what are the qualities that attract students to their subjects? Subject choice Becher (1981) showed that academics have stereotyped ideas about their colleagues working in other fields. Indeed, most of us hold in our heads a stereotyped notion of 'the scientist' or 'the artist'. Yet it is at least arguable that different kinds of people are attracted into different kinds of subjects. Weinrich-Haste (1984), for example, in a study which examined the political values of undergraduates, found that sociologists, at one extreme, tended towards liberalism and radicalism, while engineers were the most politically and socially conservative of the groups she looked at. She also found some