

**STEM Advocacy versus Academic Freedom:
Dilemmas for an Epistemologically Diverse Psychology**

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The current APA “STEM” initiative is problematic for all non-mainstream psychologists as well as for any divisions representing alternative perspectives to the experimental model of psychological inquiry.

What is at stake here is not simply our identity - or should I say, identities - as psychologists. What is at stake is our academic freedom to teach psychology in a way that is consistent with our individual core values as well as with the identity we grew into through our own formation as psychologists. What is at stake is also our freedom to practice psychology in a way that is based upon our epistemologically diverse ways of assessing therapeutic efficacy. The STEM initiative is, indeed, a challenge to all of us who identify not first and foremost as experimental scientists, but rather as therapists, counselors, teachers, mentors, citizens, and cultural witnesses.

Part of the STEM initiative is an educational campaign aimed at elementary school children, to produce a new generation that makes no association between the word “psychologist” and such things as “psychotherapist”, or “qualitative

researcher”, or “humanitarian”, or “humanist”, or “psychoanalyst”, or (God forbid!) “philosopher”. It all comes down to a game of “impression management” to change the field of psychology into a STEM discipline by simply changing the way that people think about the word “psychology.” (One suggestion has been to add the term “science”, and call ourselves “psychological scientists” in a feeble effort “prime the pump” - so that on a Likert scale more folks will identify “psychological science” as “science” than they would identify “psychology” as science.)

This presenter will present some of the history of the STEM initiative, along with ramifications at various levels of professional identity and praxis. The ultimate question will be: how would psychology conceived as a STEM discipline change our way of thinking about ourselves and, more significantly, change the way we teach, practice, and dream of our possibilities?