

Epistemic identity and undergraduate students' understandings of psychology

Epistemic identity refers to dispositional ways of knowing and beliefs about the nature of knowledge that characterize an individual or group. The epistemic phases and positions that inform an understanding of psychology contribute greatly to its role and acceptance in higher education and general society. The aim of this study is to (a) explore the epistemic dimension of students' understandings of psychology and (b) initiate a broader discussion on the value and facilitation of students' epistemological identity and development in relation to the nature of their domains of study. Specifically, a sample of 104 undergraduate psychology students across four year-level cohorts was surveyed in relation to 20 bi-polar constructs to determine students' epistemic identity. Data were analysed for cohort, age and gender differences between dichotomous and dialogical epistemologies. A significant difference in epistemic identity was observed across all four year-level cohorts, $F(12,297) = 3.8$, $p = .00$; Wilks Lambda = .63; $\eta^2 = .14$, which suggests that as students progress through their education so to does their epistemic identity progress to more sophisticated ways of knowing. Across all year levels, there was a significant gender effect for the absolutist epistemic identity $F(1, 102) = 5.33$, $p = .023$. Male students were more likely to agree with one construct within a binary and disagree with the other. The discussion considers the implications of these results for the accommodation and development of epistemic identity in an undergraduate psychology degree.