



# An Introduction to Integral Psychology

Elliott Ingersoll

This article explores how Integral Theory can serve the discipline of psychology in its current, parochial state by offering a framework for unification. While psychology has evolved as a science, the trend toward specialization has rendered it fragmented. Numerous efforts at unification have failed to draw the many specializations together. Until now, no unification theory has offered a sufficiently broad and deep framework to include all aspects of psychology. This paper offers a view of how Integral Theory can serve as a uniting framework for psychology as well as its individual disciplines.

## Introduction

It has been written that psychology has a long past but a short history (Kendler, 1987), with a subject matter that is as old as reflection (Robinson, 1995). The etymology of the word “psyche” refers to an animating force within human beings that has been defined as mind, soul, and spirit. These three concepts have perennially fascinated humanity and one result of this fascination is psychology. The broadest understanding of psychology draws from philosophical and scientific sources, but psychology proper (the academic discipline and the profession) is typically defined as “the scientific study of behavior and mental processes” (Coon, 2004). This particular definition of psychology was established in late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century contexts, when psychologists decided that the fledgling discipline would be best served if its basis in philosophy was minimized and its development as a science was maximized. While that focus did much to advance the discipline of psychology within academia, it drastically diminished focus on the most obvious psychological fact of human existence: the subjective sense of self (Boring, 1957).



While scientific psychology will be an important focus in the Integral Psychology Center at Integral Institute, we also embrace valid truth claims from psychology’s premodern and postmodern sources. It is in this embrace that the sense of self is rejoined with scientific exploration and postmodern critiques. “Integral” includes acknowledging psychological findings from premodern, modern, and postmodern sources: no one is 100% wrong 100% of the time. Therefore, all schools of thought have produced important, if *partial* truths. One way Integral Theory honors each of these truths is through the four-quadrant model seen below in figure 1. Note that the abbreviations refer to the quadrant they appear in (e.g., LL refers to the Lower-Left quadrant). These abbreviations will be used to refer to the quadrants for the remainder of this paper.

		INTERIOR	EXTERIOR
INDIVIDUAL	Emphasizes material about the individual's subjective feelings and experience of the world as well as their intentional aspects.	<b>UL</b>	<b>UR</b>
	Emphasizes material about the shared worldviews of groups the individual identifies with and mutual resonance.	<b>LL</b>	<b>LR</b>
COLLECTIVE			

Figure 1. The Four Quadrants of the Integral Model

The four quadrants represent interior and exterior perspectives of individuals and collectives. Each one of us experiences these four perspectives in our lives. They are reflected in our



language and in the specializations of psychology. For example, the subjective universe of individuals (UL quadrant) is represented in first-person language (“I feel energized”). While this is explored with subjects and clients in various specializations of psychology, it is also a characteristic of psychologists. The interiors of the collective are the realm of shared worldviews and understanding between individuals expressed in “We” language. Examples of this include a psychologist and client reaching an understanding of each other in the therapeutic process or when psychologists from different specializations are able to communicate about common constructs with shared understandings. Finally, the observable, measurable aspects of the individual and the collective are represented in “It,” or third-person language and exemplified in areas like behavior analysis and community psychology. This is the language of observation and measurement. Other resources in the Integral Psychology Center will explore more deeply the many dimensions of these quadrants, but for our purposes this introduction will suffice.

With these four quadrants, Integral Theory begins the knowledge quest *expecting* to find complementarity among various knowledge claims, while honoring the fact that particular research studies or specializations may have an emphasis in one quadrant. This is a unique and profound contribution of Integral Theory in that it integrates three faces of truth: what Plato referred to as the Good, the True, and the Beautiful. Each of these three faces of truth has its own validity claim. The True deals with objective affairs, is illustrated in the domain of empirical science, and is understood through objective measurement (e.g., the firing of a neuron lasts one to two milliseconds). The Good, which deals with cultural rightness or goodness, is illustrated in the domain of morals, and is understood through interpretive dialogue and agreement (e.g., in social psychology, physical attractiveness refers to a degree of physical beauty as defined by a particular culture). The Beautiful deals with subjective truthfulness, is illustrated in the domain of art, and is understood through sharing (and interpreting) one’s reflections (this is also the domain of clinical psychology where, with the psychologist’s help, clients seek to understand their own subjective universe; for example, their own personal experience of beauty). These



three areas were differentiated in the modern period when science broke free of religious and moral oversight. Integral Theory is the first approach to effectively bring them back together in a way that honors their unique perspectives but also sees them as complementary. The key here is to honor each of the three faces of truth without trying to reduce one to another (e.g. reduce science to morals or vice versa).

This has everything to do with psychology, which spans the spectrum of the Good, the True, and the Beautiful. Psychologists explore subjective truth with clients in psychotherapy, shared values in social and gender psychology, and explore the impact of systems in industrial and organizational psychology. Much like the struggle of philosophers to differentiate art, morals, and science, psychologists have struggled to differentiate their specializations—even going so far as to move them out of the psychology department! Daniel Robinson (1995) wrote, “in its current form, psychology is so various, so partitioned into separate provinces, that the nonspecialist might pardonably conclude that there is no unified subject at all.” The lack of a unifying structure is one reason psychology is split into so many specializations. While psychology presents us with a collection of specializations, an Integral approach to psychology provides a vision to unite the brilliantly articulated findings of these specializations.

Table 1 outlines specializations recognized by a sampling of psychological associations, including the American Psychological Association, the Australian Psychological Society, the Belgian Psychological Society, the British Psychological Society, and the Canadian Psychological Association.



Addictions	Exercise and Sport Psychology	Psychoanalysis
Adult Development and Aging	Experimental Psychology	Psychological Study of Gay, Lesbian, & Bisexual Issues
Behavior Analysis	Family Psychology	Psychological Study of Men and Masculinity
Behavioral Neuroscience	Forensic Psychology	Psychological Study of Social Issues
Comparative Psychology	General Psychology	Psychologists in Independent Practice
Child, Youth, and Family Services	Group Psychology and Group Psychotherapy	Psychologists in Public Service
Clinical Child Psychology	Health Psychology	Psychology and the Arts
Clinical Hypnosis	History of Psychology	Psychology of Religion
Clinical Neuropsychology	Humanistic Psychology	Psychology of Women
Clinical Psychology	Industrial and Organizational Psychology	Psychopharmacology
Community Psychology	International Psychology	Psychotherapy
Consulting Psychology	Media Psychology	Rehabilitation Psychology
Consumer Psychology	Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities	Research, Evaluation, Measurement & Statistics
Counseling (Counseling) Psychology	Military Psychology	School Psychology
Developmental Psychology	Occupational Psychology	Substance Abuse
Disaster Recovery	Peace, Conflict, and Violence	Teaching of Psychology
Educational Psychology	Pediatric Psychology	Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology
Environmental Psychology	Personality and Social Psychology	
Ethnic Minority Psychology	Pharmacotherapy	

Table 1. Areas of Specialization in Psychology Recognized by Various Psychological Associations



What is Integral Psychology and how does it bring order to a discipline as diverse as the many specializations in table 1 indicate? One way to begin the discussion is to look at the primary emphases of some psychological specializations by quadrant as illustrated in figure 2. Keep in mind this is just a way to organize the primary emphases of the specializations and that each specialization *can be* an all-quadrant affair.

		INTERIOR	EXTERIOR
INDIVIDUAL	Psychoanalysis Psychotherapy Counseling Psychology	UL	UR
	Ethnic Minority Psychology Family Psychology Social Psychology	LL	LR
COLLECTIVE			

Figure 2. Psychological Specializations by Quadrant

This use of the quadrants gives us a sense of how we might bring together diverse schools of psychology to integrally research a particular question. For example, we might want to investigate the qualities of effective leaders to screen individuals for corporate executive positions. After operationalizing the phrase “effective leader,” we could explore the issue quadrant-by-quadrant. From the UL quadrant, specializations like psychotherapy and psychoanalysis might help us learn what motivates effective leaders and how they deal with



things like anger and self-doubt. From the UR quadrant, we might look at the behaviors and physiological characteristics of effective leaders (including levels of key hormones). From the LL quadrant, we could explore how effective leaders communicate with others and participate in building a moral (or immoral) corporate culture. Finally, from the LR quadrant, we might look at how effective leaders fit into the various systems one must deal with in the corporate setting (legal, fiscal, etc.). As noted, many specializations may focus in more than one quadrant. In our example of screening corporate executives, we may administer intelligence tests that explore the UL and UR quadrants, personality inventories that explore the UL and LL quadrants, and work simulations that draw elements from the UR, LL, and LR quadrants. In this sense, the Integral model frees us from parochial arguments about who has the best theory and allows us to experience of the deepest understanding possible.

Another reason that psychology is so dispersed as a discipline is because it is filled with what Jerome Kegan (1989) called “unstable ideas.” These are concepts and ideas that tend to be subjective, variable, and that do not refer to fixed realities. Ideas like emotion, cognition, and maturation depend on how a researcher operationalizes them and gathers evidence to explore them. The Integral model offers a solution by exploring these “unstable ideas” through each of the quadrants. Consider for example theories of emotional arousal. Figure 3 places some variables related to emotional arousal in the four quadrants.



	INTERIOR	EXTERIOR
INDIVIDUAL	Interpretation <b>UL</b>	Physiological Variables <b>UR</b>
COLLECTIVE	Cultural Context <b>LL</b>	Social Setting <b>LR</b>

Figure 3. Variables of Emotional Arousal by Quadrant

In the UL quadrant, interpretation plays an important role in emotional arousal. Whether responding internally to another person’s facial expressions or your own level of physiological arousal, felt-experience is one important component to emotion. In the UR quadrant, physiological variables like autonomic nervous system activation are key factors in emotional arousal. In the LL quadrant, the cultural context must be taken into account, such as Western countries linking positive feelings to prizing individuality, whereas Eastern countries often link positive feelings with one’s relation to a valued group. In the LR quadrant, social setting plays a role in emotional arousal evidenced by totally different emotional responses to the same stimulus in different settings. Integral Psychology would state that all four perspectives on emotion are important and simply four irreducible perspectives on the same event.

Thus from the position of Integral Psychology, you do not have to choose between the James-Lange theory of emotion (bodily arousal creates fear) and Schacter’s cognitive theory of emotion (when aroused we interpret our feelings and apply a label to the arousal). In Integral Psychology both theories are correct and both contribute to our understanding of emotion.





## A Broader, Deeper Agenda

Many researchers have taken on the task of creating coherence among psychology's subspecialties. Arthur Staats' (1999) "Psychological Behaviorism" and Sternberg & Grigorenko's (2001) "Unified Psychology" are two examples of such attempts. While these noble efforts have focused more on unifying the science of psychology (the modern aspects), they nonetheless provide rich resources for our Integral endeavor. Forthcoming resources in the Integral Psychology Center will more closely examine the work of these pioneering researchers. Unlike previous efforts to unify the field, Integral Psychology is equipped to assist each specialization to be as integrally informed as possible and to bring premodern and postmodern psychologies back into the discipline.

One way Integral Psychology does this is with what Wilber calls the "AQAL" (pronounced "ah-qwul") approach. This acronym stands for "all-quadrants, all-levels, all-lines, all-states, and all-types." While it is beyond the scope of this introductory paper to fully explore each of these elements, a general introduction to them is important for understanding the depth and breadth of possibilities in Integral Psychology. I have already introduced the idea of "all-quadrants"—the four quadrants detailed above in the context of Integral Psychology. The "all-levels" aspect of Integral includes an understanding of the full range of levels of development throughout the human life span. The "all-lines" aspect includes accounting for as many developmental lines as possible. "All-states" includes embracing the various states of human consciousness and "all-types" includes types like gender as well as psychological types such as those in the five-factor model of personality. As this brief introduction to AQAL illustrates, Integral Psychology is truly a comprehensive framework, one with the capacity for embracing the disparate strands of psychological specializations.

A final aspect of Integral Psychology's broader, deeper agenda has to do with including premodern and postmodern psychologies. With the focus on modern approaches to psychology



in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, valuable knowledge from these sources was excluded. In the West, the philosophical roots of psychology reach to the Hellenic Age and, according to some sources, back to the Seventh Century B.C.E., when Psamtik I of Egypt conducted an experiment to see if children isolated from all language from birth would spontaneously speak Egyptian (they didn't). In Eastern cultures, psychological exploration is a hallmark of Hinduism, the various yogas, and Buddhism. As Wilber points out, these premodern sources offer us profound psychological wisdom but must be integrated with modern and postmodern sources so that the interiors (consciousness) are understood as differentiated from and complementary to exteriors (matter).

The greatest limitation with the modern (scientific) focus in psychology is the mistaken belief that only the exteriors (the things you can measure) are real. Given this erroneous premise, the only logical conclusion is that interiors (like consciousness) are merely side effects of exteriors (like highly evolved brains). Integral Psychology is equally interested in how interiors and exteriors develop and how they unfold in individuals and collectives. The value of postmodern psychologies is to correct the modern, scientific error and note that human beings as objects of information are also subjects in communion. Postmodern psychologies combat modernity's excessive focus on exteriors by emphasizing interpretation, multicultural psychology, and the understanding that strict empiricism is only one tool for exploring the secrets of mind and behavior. Postmodernism has its limits too though, and while it has been effective in challenging scientific hubris, by itself it is no more equipped than science to explain all aspects of psychology.

Integral Psychology honors each of these approaches (premodern, modern, and postmodern) in a complementary embrace that is sorely needed in psychology. Instead of further fragmentation (e.g., psychologists moving their specialties out of the psychology department), Integral Psychology creates a place for all specializations without reducing some to others (reducing data



from consciousness studies to neural activity). This is the broadest, deepest agenda possible, and the discipline of psychology deserves no less.

### **Transforming the Psychologist**

An Integral approach to “doing” psychology is itself a vehicle for the transformation of the psychologist, from narrow identification as a player in “zero-sum games” (where being right means someone else must be wrong) to an information broker capable of synthesizing diverse findings across the specializations and from fields outside of psychology. The possibility of such a psychologist is a recent development since only now do we have access to all recorded psychological wisdom. This allows us to explore new questions that could not be asked until now. To ask the questions, however, requires that we transcend parochial boundaries.

There is an old saying that “there is no fight like a church fight.” In academia it might be said, “there is no fight like a turf fight.” To truly practice Integral Psychology requires first and foremost a shift in perspective on the part of the psychologist or the student of psychology. One of the main topics of any Integral approach is human transformation. Psychology is a vast resource for knowledge about how human beings transform. Hypotheses about transformation may come from social learning theory, insight-learning theory, or cognitive behavioral theory, and they may all have some piece of the truth. Viewing findings and theories as complementary rather than competing is an indicator of an Integral Psychologist.

Those of us trained in the current academy know its strengths and pitfalls. We most certainly know that academia trains students to be specialists. Robinson (1997) stated that there has not been a comprehensive psychology since Aristotle. Pioneers who have attempted to unify psychology have not been met with open arms. They are criticized, or worse, ignored. As Staats (1999) noted, “specialists do not even read broad works that go beyond their fields... what unification really means is including developments that are opposed by or unknown to the



specialist or partisan of any school, and that includes most psychologists.” This may be true but at the same time there is more enthusiasm than ever for taking up the task. Even in the face of indifference, many psychologists and students are hungry for an approach that honors the depth and breadth of the discipline they love and redirects the current fragmentation toward unification.

This is another way of saying that Integral Psychology holds the potential to create a new type of psychologist and a new way to study psychology. Research studies can be designed from a four-quadrant perspective, and the field itself can be drawn into the AQAL framework of Integral Theory. A new type of psychologist may require a new academic environment. Imagine dissertation committees that are as diverse as they are cooperative. Such an academic environment would be even more efficient in drawing in large grants, which to date, are the only motivation for cross-disciplinary work. The Integral Psychology Center has the potential to be part of an evolutionary unfolding. The Integral framework provides the structure for a revolution in the human educational experience, a leap into the future with hundreds of years of groundwork acting as a springboard. That is the leap we are taking at Integral Psychology. We invite you to join us.



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ELLIOTT INGERSOLL is Professor of counseling at Cleveland State University and chair of the Department of Counseling, Administration, Supervision, and Adult Learning. He is licensed as a psychologist and a Professional Clinical Counselor in the state of Ohio. His books and journal publications center on psychopharmacology, mental health treatment, and the role of spirituality in counseling and psychotherapy. He has authored or co-authored four books and over two dozen journal articles and book chapters. Although they have yet to make the Billboard charts, his songs on psychotropic medications have been well-reviewed locally. He lives in Kent, OH with his wife Jennifer, son Brady, and daughter Kaitlyn.