

Toward the Development of an Integral Approach to Social Work: Implications for Human Behavior Theory and Research

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ABSTRACT. The social work profession has often struggled with how to achieve the conceptual unity and coherence sought in theory, practice, policy, and education. This struggle has often included paradigmatic debates that serve to articulate the broader metatheoretical backgrounds and systems (epistemic domains) from which we understand human behavior. Integralism represents an approach that can potentially transcend social work's dialectical dilemma inherent within the debates between modern and postmodern influences. By combining the epistemological insights and value awareness of the various schools of postmodernism with the methodological and conceptual achievements of modernism, and the partial truths and insights of premodernism, a transcendent or integral approach is conceptualized. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2004 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]*

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The social work profession has often struggled with the issue of conceptual unity in an effort to find coherence in theory, practice, policy, and education. This struggle has often included paradigmatic debates that serve to articulate the broader metatheoretical backgrounds and systems (epistemic domains) from which we understand human behavior (Fischer, 1981; Gordon, 1983; Heineman, 1981; Hudson, 1982; Karger, 1983; Ruckdeschel & Farris, 1981; Brekke, 1986; Weick, 1987). These debates often prove controversial as they involve passionately held differences in opinion, values, concepts, worldviews, and sense of purpose and professional identity (Hudson & Nurius, 1994). For the most part, the debates remain unresolved and opinions about their usefulness vary. For some, the debates have created an artificial and simplistic dichotomy that forces readers to choose between modern and postmodern paradigms (Atherton, 1993). Such either-or distinctions can only further polarize the profession (Klein & Bloom, 1994). For others, the unresolved debates have provided an opportunity for attempts at paradigmatic accommodation and reconceptualization of the philosophical perspective of social work (Dean & Fenby, 1989; Peile, 1988).

This essay intends to discuss the intellectual-historical context responsible for the rise of modern and postmodern paradigmatic debates found in the social work literature. Then an alternative to the debates, known as integralism, will be proposed as a potential philosophical perspective that softens recalcitrant dilemmas in theory and research by providing a map that situates a number of the theoretical trends and exponents in their relative ontological and epistemic domains.

BRIEF HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF PARADIGMATIC DEBATES FOUND IN SOCIAL WORK

Foucault (1977) is known for distinguishing those who find it possible to understand our current age through the categories inherited from the nineteenth century from those attempting to liberate themselves altogether from these conceptual frameworks (Wight, 1998). This distinction may very well apply to attempts at understanding the development of social work and its seemingly inherent disparity between the modern and postmodern temperaments that are reflected in

the foundation of social work and its struggle to develop a coherent conceptual framework and practice (Greene, 1999; Weick, 1987).

Premodernity refers to the era prior to the birth of science in 1600 AD. Medieval rationalism was the predominate means of organizing subjective experience via dogmatic religious and philosophic systems of thought that were sanctioned by the church. "Ranks, hierarchies and the "great chain of being" were all part of the divine order" (Howe, 1994, p. 513). Social work's origins certainly have premodern influences as evidenced by its association with the philanthropy movements' whose aims were to make the giving of relief to the poor a religious and spiritual endeavor (Addams, 1961). However, social work is more often considered a child of modernity, born from an era that embraced both the waning zeitgeist of the Renaissance and the burgeoning scientific revolution of the enlightenment (Weick, 1987).

The profession adopted ideas such as the inherent dignity and worth of the individual from humanism, which came to inform the profession's code of ethics, and fostered a commitment to values. Yet social work's interest in science and the scientific method moved the profession from its philanthropic/charity base into a world of inquiry promising to provide a scientific and systematic understanding of pauperism (Reid, 1995).

As social work grappled with criticisms that it lacked the status of a real profession (Flexner, 1915), the balance between knowledge and values was upset because social work increasingly looked for coherence in the concepts and methods of the natural sciences and medical model (Austin, 1983). This included an emphasis on psychoanalytic theory, particularly Freudian psychology, as a means of diagnosis and treatment of individuals (Greene, 1999). However, as psychoanalytic theory and its concept of the unconscious came to be seen as being beyond scientific scrutiny, social work practice became increasingly aligned with contemporary offshoots of psychoanalytic theory, such as ego psychology and object relations. These theories played an important role because they tilted the profession's focus toward an appreciation of the person-in-environment.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the base of practice and casework shifted from the once dominant medical model of psychiatry to a social sciences emphasis (Bloom & Fischer, 1982; Geismar & Wood, 1982; Peile & McCouat, 1997; Wakefield, 1996). In many ways, the focus of social work inquiry and practice increasingly became what could be accounted for by empirical analysis. As a result, the epistemic domain of values associated with the profession was usurped to a large degree by

the desire to be respected as a profession based on empirical methods (Haworth, 1984; Heineman, 1981; Pozatek, 1994; Weick, 1987).

In order to redress the above-mentioned trend, social work witnessed a renewed attempt in the 1970s and 1980s “to bring a generalist or holistic understanding of practice to the surface. Initial authors, such as Bartlett (1970), Goldstein (1973), Pincus and Minahan (1973), and Siporin (1975), used systems understandings and a values and skills approach in their holistic contributions” (Landon, 1995, p. 1102). The emphasis on systems balance was borrowed from systems theory, ecology, and cybernetics (Pinderhughes, 1995) and further refined by Germain and Gitterman’s (1976) ecological perspective.

For many social workers, the ecological perspective is indicative of contemporary social work practice, and offers a flexible and eclectic framework able to accommodate many of social work’s practice modalities (Germain & Gitterman, 1995; Greene, 1991; Wakefield, 1996). However, even though these models are indeed more holistic, they still are primarily empirical in that they emphasize the value-free and neutral-functional fit of the person-in-environment context (Atherton, 1993; Wakefield, 1996; Weick, 1987).

The Epistemological Turn

As a result of the aforementioned paradigmatic dilemma, some researchers believe that the last twenty to twenty-five years have represented a shift in focus from substantive to epistemological areas of social work theory (Peile & McCouat, 1997). Generally associated with postmodernism, its theories stress the intrinsic role that language, interpretation and meaning play in epistemology and ontology (Skinner, 1985).

Theories often attributed as postmodern include existential-phenomenology, social constructionism, hermeneutics, critical theory, feminist theory, and post-structuralism. Existential-phenomenology emphasizes that human behavior is rooted in consciousness. As a result, phenomenology unified various aspects of human behavior and provided a base for transactional analysis, existential psychology, Gestalt psychology, Rogerian client-centered therapy, depth psychology, Piaget’s genetic epistemology, and a variety of other humanistic schools of thought (Robbins et al., 1998). In social work, Taft (1933), Perlman (1979), and Krill (1978, 1986) have been identified as existential proponents as they emphasized naturalistic and ethnographic modes of practice and research that inductively derive understanding of human behavior from specific

cases rather than deductively derived from the notion of a universal meaning (Dean & Fenby, 1989).

A sociological phenomenology was proposed by Alfred Shutz, which provided useful perspectives and methods for social work because of its person-in-environment context of human interaction (Salner, 1984). Berger and Luckmann (1967) extended phenomenology's reach by integrating the individual and societal levels in their theory of social constructionism. Practice approaches being applied to social work based on these ideas have become especially popular and carry labels such as the strengths perspective, social constructionism, constructivism, narrative, and postmodernist practice (Bower & Nurius, 1993; Cushman, 1990; Franklin, 1995; Franklin & Nurius, 1996; Ingram, 1994; Robbins, Chatterjee, & Canda, 1998; Saleebey, 1994).

Hermeneutics generally refers to a branch of social theory that attempts to reconstruct and understand the meanings and values of humans' cultural "world space" (Wilber, 1995). Often the goal is to understand the implicit rules of a group or society by explicating the larger context within which it is embedded. Exponents include Geertz and Frake's use of ethnography and participant observation (Salner, 1984) as well as Kuhn's (1970) inquiries into the structures of scientific revolutions and Taylor's (1989) work into the relativist worldview of postmodernism. In social work, hermeneutics finds its influence via the conception of practice as a dialogic process, which involves interpretation of behavior based on grasping the client's entire network of meanings. This often involves the continual sorting out of a client's dislocated case narratives, and reworking them into some meaningful whole by means of alternate focus from the part to the whole and back again, yielding a circle of understanding (Whan, 1979). Other interventive approaches in social work, such as crisis intervention and some cognitive approaches, reflect hermeneutic methods as they rely on the interpretation of subjective meanings as a mediating factor in behavioral and emotional outcomes (Sherman, 1987).

Critical theory, originally coined by Max Horkheimer and advanced by Jurgen Habermas (Giddens, 1985), is generally characterized as a value-oriented approach that analyzes social life, questions every day assumptions and reflects on issues such as power, injustice, the nature of identity, and forms of agency and rationality (Depoy, Hartmann & Haslett, 1999). It has influenced social work primarily through its emancipatory goals of practice, such as empowerment and liberation. That is, it intends to abolish social injustice and reveal repressive interests hidden within forms of science. Obviously, forms of feminism have

originated out of this tradition, which looks to the failures of patriarchal society for the explanation of the dynamics of behavior, especially discrimination and forms of oppression as opposed to the theories of psychopathology. It has been a source of support for alternative research assumptions based on its concern with gender and often adopts methods such as action research, participatory research, critical inquiry, and participatory action research (Salner, 1984).

All of these postmodern theories have been evident at different times in the social work literature, and each has had a differential dominance and influence (Peile & McCouat, 1997). What they all share to some degree is an interest in looking toward alternatives to absolute determinism, positivism and empiricism.

Development of Extreme Relativism

Postmodern theories have provided the opportunity for critical, ecological, feminist, post-structural, and constructivist paradigms to make a theoretical and epistemological contribution to social work. However, a more extreme relativism has been identified, which seems to go beyond attempts at making room for the alternative paradigms by radically exaggerating postmodern precepts and trying to deconstruct or level science by denying the possibility of any sort of objective truth (Peile & McCouat, 1997).

It is one thing to argue that all perspectives need to be given consideration. However, it is entirely another matter to state that no perspective is better than any other because there is no means to determine the relative validity of different interpretations (Wakefield, 1995). This argument inevitably leads to a nihilistic standpoint that is antithetical to meaningful intellectual inquiry and self-referentially inconsistent and paradoxical (Peile & McCouat, 1997). If truth is merely constructed from consensus and there are no objectively true facts about cause and effect, then social work's claim to professional competence is merely arbitrary; having no objective validity, because the concept of help presupposes that social work practice can cause a benefit to the client. Yet we know that poverty, abuse, violence, mental illness, etc., are objective aspects in many of our client's problems, and thus preclude the total dissolution of objective truth (Wakefield, 1995). Thus, in an analogous move similar to the empiricist, the postmodern relativist usurps and reduces the objective epistemic domains to matters of meaning and belief. As a result, the concept of any independent reality loses its relevance and utility, lessening the respect for social work and its knowledge base

via those factions who wholeheartedly embrace the postmodern attack on objectivity.

Now that we have surveyed the development of social work within the context of its intellectual history, it can be seen that social work, like other disciplines, has been influenced by the premodern, modern, and postmodern categories of science and philosophy. However, at crucial junctures of development, different schools of social work and their related methods have stepped outside of its proper domain and attempted to operate as an absolute worldview. Wilber (1983) refers to this process of reductionism as a category error or an overreach of the domain's epistemic warrant, and Wakefield (1995) sees it as a philosophical error of confusing epistemology with ontology. Weick (1987) suggests that the effect of such reductionism is that the researcher frequently commits a type 3 or type 4 error; that is, either solving the wrong problem or solving a problem not worth solving. Here the domain of values gets reduced to the domain of empirical-sensory data or vice versa. As a result, both phenomena are treated alike and held to the same methods of verification. Consequently, the issue of method starts to dictate what questions can be asked in the first place. This can lead to more extreme cases, where entire domains of phenomena are denied existence altogether.

Weick (1987) suggests that the concept of a "category error" helps explain the dilemma that social work has struggled with over the years. As a result, there is a need for a creative approach that can potentially transcend social work's dialectical dilemma between modern and postmodern influences by combining the epistemological insights and value awareness of the various schools of postmodernism with the methodological and conceptual achievements of modernism, and the partial truths and insights of premodernism. Integralism is proposed as a potential philosophical context that starts to address this dilemma.

INTEGRALISM

The origins of integralism are found in the Indian philosophy of Sri Aurobindo and Haridas Chaudhuri. Similar in spirit to the German idealist notion of *Weltanschauung*, integralism is considered a comprehensive worldview. It critically evaluates the fundamental concepts of ethics, science and religion with the intent of integrating the highest cultural values of the East and West (Chaudhuri & Spiegelberg, 1960).

Ken Wilber has further developed and transformed the theory of integralism. Similar to social work, its more contemporary foundations drew from diverse philosophical traditions with the intent of not excluding any aspect of human experience from inquiry (Tyson, 1995). Integralism shares with social work a belief in the development of human potential within the context of increasingly complex, interactive, social, cultural, and physical environments along with a focus on the unique positive qualities, strengths, and resiliency of humans to cope with and transform suffering, oppression, and their environments (Rothberg, 1996).

In its contemporary form, integralism aims to advance a reliable and valid worldview that honors various methods and fields of knowledge across premodern, modern, and postmodern eras, by showing how their partial truths are related. It sets out to provide a coherent integration of numerous fields of human knowledge, not as a mere eclecticism, but in a systematic and methodical manner. Such a view is considered to be dynamic, dialectical, constructive and postmodern. Integralism per se has not been expounded in the social work literature. However, its influence has indirectly been evident through the application of transpersonal theory to social work practice and education. The authors who have introduced transpersonal ideas into social work include Canda (1991, 1996), Cowley (1993, 1996), Derezotes and Evans (1995), and Robbins, Chatterjee and Canda (1998).

Methodology of Integralism

The first step of Wilber's method of inquiry involves an "experimental metaphysics" or phenomenological analysis of the truth claims from over 200 diverse fields of human knowledge. By taking these truth claims at face value, bracketing any attempts at reductionism, and then backing them "up to a level of abstraction at which the various conflicting approaches actually agree with one another" (Crittenden, 1997, p. 99), a foundation for the potential interrelation of the branches of knowledge is achieved. It is not on the level of specific details, but what Wilber calls orienting generalizations (OGs) or sturdy conclusions.

Similar to mapping the human genome (human genome project), Wilber's inquiry (human consciousness project) has mapped over 200 hierarchies to date. Examples include hierarchies from the natural sciences that take the form of the progression from atoms to molecules to cells to organisms. This is the standard hierarchy of modern evolutionary science and is represented by the upper right quadrant in Figure 1.

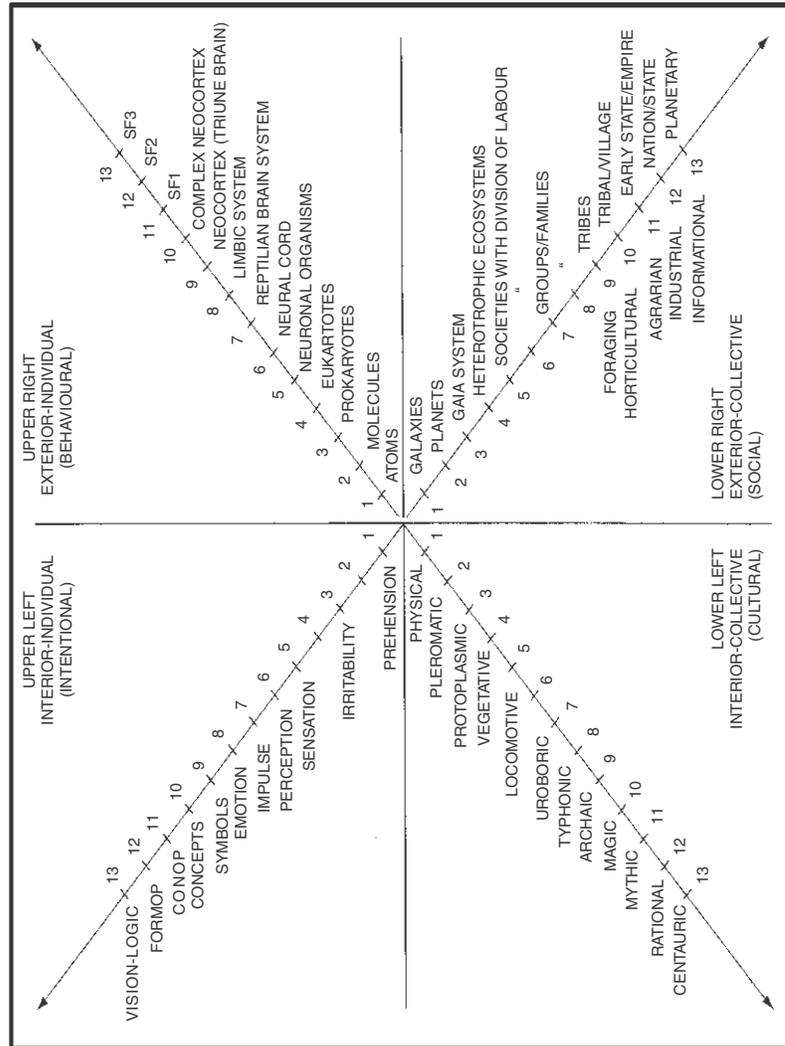
Other examples include cognitive hierarchies from developmental psychology such as the progression from sensation to perception to impulse to image to symbol to concept to rule, which is represented by the upper left quadrant in Figure 1 (Wilber, 1999).

What each hierarchy has in common is a holonic structure. This is to say that the elements of the hierarchies are composed of wholes that are part of other wholes (e.g., a whole atom is part of a whole molecule, which is part of a whole cell, which is part of a whole organism, and so on, but an organism is not a part of a cell which is not a part of a molecule, etc.). These hierarchies, or what Wilber refers to as holarchies, represent a series of nests within nests, each expressing an asymmetrical increase of holistic embrace indefinitely (i.e., the great nest of being). To say that reality is holonic is to say that it is contextual, with each holon representing a systems level and transcending, but including, its predecessor in an irreversible fashion (Wilber, 1998). Holarchies are “an ordering of increasingly complex, sophisticated, and comprehensive structures of consciousness and social organization” (Robbins et al., 1998, p. 373). They are not represented by rigid one-way rankings that repress and oppress lower holons. That some types of hierarchies can be misused to repress or oppress condemns the misuse. However, it does not condemn all hierarchies and value rankings as inherently oppressive and marginalizing. As a result, Wilber has proposed the possible postmodern preservation of the premodern insight referred to as the great chain of being. The great chain is translated into contemporary language as represented by parallel stages of micro and macro development.

The second step of an integral method takes all of these orienting generalizations or holarchies and arranges them into four major quadrants of mutually interrelated networks as seen in Figure 1. Each quadrant represents either an interior or exterior aspect of a collective or individual holon. The two right quadrants represent empirical phenomena of objective and interobjective realities.

In psychology this is classical behaviorism, and more recently, cognitive behaviorism (cognitive structures are granted reality only to the extent they manifest in observable behavior). In sociology, this is classical positivism . . . but also the extremely influential structural-functionalism and systems theory (from Talcott Parsons to Niklas Luhmann to Jeffrey Alexander), where cultural productions are taken to be significant to the extent that they are aspects of an objective social action system. (Wilber, 1997, p. 5)

FIGURE 1



The two left quadrants represent interpretive phenomena of subjective and intersubjective realities or holons. Wilber refers to works of some of the modern developmental psychologists such as Maslow, Piaget, Kohlberg, Gilligan, and Loevinger as representing some of the hierarchical contours of the individual-interior-subjective epistemological domain often referred to as consciousness (Wilber, 1998). Wilber refers to works of some of the modern philosophers and sociologists such as Gebser, Heard, Neumann, Bellah, Habermas, Geertz and so on as representing those who have tracked the collective-interior-intersubjective epistemological domain of cultural evolution (Wilber, 1998).

As can be seen, all holons have an interpretive as well as objective component. This configuration further differentiates distinctions between normativism and empiricism by including individual and collective dimensions as well as interiors and exteriors of each. Each quadrant represents a different epistemological domain and is necessarily correlated with the others and represents, according to Wilber, the ontological aspects or features across which human's multiple lines of development proceed. Because both of these approaches, the exterior and the interior, the objectivist and the subjectivist, have continued to find application in approximately all schools of knowledge, Wilber considers them both as profoundly significant and necessary to any system of inquiry or human behavior theory. What is needed is a model complex enough to accommodate the essentials of each school. Figure 2 represents some of the major schools and pioneering theorists of each quadrant.

The third step of Wilber's integral method is the development of a critical theory of theories.

Once Wilber has the overall scheme that incorporates the greatest number of OGs, he then uses that scheme to criticize the partiality of narrower approaches, even though he has included the basic OGs from those approaches. He criticizes not their truths but their partial nature. (Crittenden, 1997, p.12)

As a result, truths that span the premodern and postmodern eras that include human behavior theories from the great chain of being to empiricism to constructivism to relativism are included in the overall scheme. However, we dismiss any theory's claim to be the sole arbiter of truth. Thus, there are no whole truths from the vantage point of a single epistemological domain (Price, 1954).

FIGURE 2. Broad Sciences and Exponents of the Four Quadrants

Interior Attributes Interpretive Hermeneutic Consciousness	Exterior Attributes Monological Empirical, positivistic Form
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sigmund Freud • C.G. Jung • Jean Piaget • Maslow Kohlberg • Gilligan Loevinger • Heidegger, Gadamer, Schleiermacher • Plotinus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • B.F. Skinner • John Watson • John Locke • Positivism • Empiricism • Behaviorism • Cognitive Behaviorsim • Physics, Biology, Neurology
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thomas Kuhn • Wilhelm Dilthey • Habermas • Max Weber • Peter Berger • Charles Taylor • Neumann • Bellah Geertz 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systems Theory • Ecological Perspective • Talcott Parsons • Auguste Comte • Karl Marx • Structural Functionalism • Social Work as Social Science

CRITICISMS

Integralism’s inclusion of a hierarchical epistemology and ontology based on the perennial philosophy and the Great Chain of Being theories is often at the center of criticism around Wilber’s theory and method (Rothberg, 1986). Any conceptualization of hierarchical structure can lend itself to the devaluation and possible oppression of holons ranked as “lower” (Frager, 1989). However, the use of hierarchical structures to dominate and oppress speaks to their misuse and limitations when carried to extremes, not to the nature of hierarchies themselves.

Schneider (1987) had led the existential-phenomenological critique that Wilber’s theory “divines” (higher) mystic states rather than humanizing them. Such a view sees transpersonal theory as a flight into fantasy as a means of escaping the angst associated with human mortality. Odajnyk (1993) critiques Wilber’s system as being biased toward Western values and assumptions based on Hegelian dialectics. For example, integralism relies too heavily on conventional development theorists to explain components of personal development (Robbins et al., 1998).

Finally, empirical and behavioral scientists reject the possibility of consciousness independent of the context of brain and body. All phenomenological or clinical reports of transpersonal experiences and higher states of consciousness are considered illusory and nonscientific.

Even if such states did exist, they are not practically achievable or useful to the social problems with which social work concerns itself.

IMPLICATIONS FOR HUMAN BEHAVIOR THEORY

The use of human behavior theory should be understood within the context of the history of scientific thought. That history suggests that the social work profession has moved from a position of little practice theory to many theoretical approaches that intersect and develop along basic ontological levels, developmental lines and epistemologies (Greene, 1999). This ongoing development of human behavior theory presents a challenge when deciding which theory to apply. This is due not only to the enormous range of theories available but also to the often-conflicting nature of the associated levels and modes of abstraction from which they operate.

The integral approach to human behavior theory is based on the assumption that each of the schools has something irreplaceably important to offer, and thus what is required is a general model sophisticated enough to embrace and preserve every legitimate aspect of each of them (Wilber, 1997b). This obviously must start out by operating on a highly abstract level in order to accommodate the systems within systems.

Rather than approaching these theories from an eclectic perspective, integralism takes up these major theoretical approaches and associates them with their respective levels and quadrants. All four quadrants mutually interact and are embedded in each other. Thus, all are required in order to understand human behavior, development, and pathology. As a result, an integral approach attempts to address as many facets of the quadrants as is pragmatically feasible in any given case. In doing so, the integral approach continues to reshape the context of the person-in-environment configuration by providing a full-spectrum master template of the developmental space from which humans grow, function, and interact among themselves and their environments. However, practitioners must maintain a broad range of domain-specific theories that apply to human behavior, as the target of intervention is not an abstract interactive field but the intentional and behavioral aspects of our individual, cultural, social, spiritual, and political lives. An integral approach does not offer a new theory of intervention per se but a means of integrating the modern and postmodern paradigms that inform the clinical and macro dimensions of human behavior theory and social work practice.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH IN HUMAN BEHAVIOR

An integral approach to research in human behavior must also take into account the contextual nature of many of the different theories and paradigms that intersect across the biological, physical, psychological, sociocultural, spiritual, economic, political, and historical arenas. Each theory and paradigm has a different type of truth or validity claim as well as different types of knowledge with different types of evidence based upon its associated quadrant. What ties them together is that the validation procedures share a common equation or structure: injunction, apprehension, and a confirmation.

Validity Claims

Each of the quadrants is relegated by its own method of validating truth and collecting data and evidence. Wilber has given a brief summary of this as shown in Figure 3. The upper right quadrant represents the modern scientific-empirical worldview. Truth is synonymous with such terms as correspondence, representation, and proposition. In propositional truth, a statement is valid if it matches a specific fact or objective state of affairs and is generally expressed in “it” language. Epistemologically, this represents what is sometimes referred to as the correspondence theory of truth.

In the upper left quadrant, a statement is valid if it authentically expresses a subjective reality. The validity criterion is not correspondence with objective observables but subjective truthfulness and sincerity ascertained through dialogue and interpretation. The approach is intersubjective and is often represented by “I” language (Wilber, 1997).

In the Lower Right quadrant of interobjective realities, the validity claim is concerned with how individual holons fit together into interlocking systems; truth in this quadrant concerns the elucidation of the networks of mutually reciprocal systems within systems of complex interaction. The validity claim, in other words, is grounded in interobjective fit, or simply *functional fit*. In the Lower Left quadrant, on the other hand, we are concerned not simply with how objects fit together in physical space, but how subjects fit together in cultural space. The validity claim here concerns the way that my subjective consciousness fits with your subjective consciousness, and how we together decide upon those cultural practices that allow us to inhabit the same cultural

FIGURE 3. Validity Claims of the Four Quadrant Model

	INTERIOR LEFT HAND PATHS	EXTERIOR RIGHT HAND PATHS
INDIVIDUAL	<i>SUBJECTIVE</i> <i>truthfulness</i> sincerity integrity trustworthiness (“I”)	<i>OBJECTIVE</i> <i>truth</i> correspondence representation propositional (“it”)
COLLECTIVE	(“we”) <i>justice</i> cultural fit mutual understanding rightness INTERSUBJECTIVE	(“it”) <i>functional fit</i> systems theory web structural-functionalism social systems mesh INTEROBJECTIVE

space. The validity claim, in other words, concerns the *appropriateness* or *justness* of our statements and actions (ethics in the broadest sense). Not just, is it true, but is it good, right, appropriate, just? And if you and I are to inhabit the same cultural space, we must implicitly or explicitly ask and to some degree answer those intersubjective questions. We must find ways, not simply to access objective truth or subjective truthfulness, but to reach *mutual understanding* in shared intersubjective space (Wilber, 1997, p. 7-8).

Elements of Knowledge Acquisition

Wilber points out that each validity claim of authentic knowledge shares a common equation or structure. This consists of three elements: an injunction, an apprehension, and a confirmation. The injunction is similar to Kuhn’s (1970) concept of an exemplar, experiment, or paradigm. One example Wilber gives of an injunction is if you want to know about the nucleus of a cell, you must learn histological techniques and then view them under a microscope (Wilber, 1997). The practice or injunction (i.e., staining cells and looking through the microscope) brings forth an actual data domain (i.e., particular experience, apprehension or evidence). This data domain (i.e., apprehension) is the second element

of valid knowledge acquisition. Others who have competence in the first two elements of knowledge authentication must then test this data. In other words, a community of adequate interpreters must test the falsifiability of the data. The important point here is that the fallible criteria of genuine knowledge is not only applicable to empirical knowledge but to interpretive knowledge as well as spiritual knowledge.

All three of these elements of genuine knowledge accumulation ground the four general epistemological domains of intentionality, behavior, culture, and society (i.e., the four quadrants). Thus, epistemological pluralism sanctions our inquiry for truthfulness, truth, justness, and functional fit, each of which proceeds by the method of injunction, data, and confirmation. The knowledge claims of integralism are, like any other valid epistemological claims, anchored in experiment, direct experience, data accumulation, and consensus. Multiple ways of knowing exist, and no one-way or epistemological domain is inherently superior to any other for generating knowledge about human behavior and experience. From this perspective, integralism as a conceptual framework is heuristic.

However, an integral methodology requires the concurrent phenomenological tracing of the various levels and lines (holons) in each quadrant and then identifying their correlations without reducing anyone to the other. This refers to the non-reductionistic simultracking of all quadrants (Wilber, 1997). This expands approaches to research and epistemology that include phenomenological and empirical as well as qualitative and quantitative methods. Such a conceptualization helps social work reach a more sophisticated level of transdisciplinary and transcultural theoretical inquiry, drawing on concepts from many different cultures and traditions (Canda, 1991). The result is a social work approach to inquiry that relies on both methodological and epistemological pluralism, a nonrestrictive stance toward the variables suitable for inquiry and a conception of research that actualizes values.

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