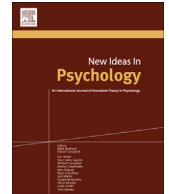




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# The academic psychologist as a convener of information: Implications for the scholarship of integration and (online) teaching



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## A B S T R A C T

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Historically, the role of the academic psychologist has been fairly set. It has been general practice to emphasize the importance and role of empirical research within the history of psychology. As a means to convey information derived from this source, academic psychologists (like most other academics) have relied on the traditional method of face-to-face communication when teaching students. These means and methods still have considerable relevance and importance to the general field of psychology even though, as discussed in this paper, they have noticeable limitations. This paper aims to stimulate thinking about how and why academic psychology does not need to be rigidly bound by these traditions. In doing so, an alternative role for the academic psychologist is proposed, as a convener of information employing the scholarship of integration. Several examples of how integrative scholarship can be achieved and undertaken in psychology are presented along with a consideration of how the scholarship of integration advances psychological science and the teaching of it.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. The scholarship of integration defined and its relevance for psychology

In his landmark book, *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*, noted education scholar Ernest Boyer (1990) outlined four key means of showcasing scholarship in the academy: discovery, integration, application, and teaching. In Boyer's framework, traditional empirical research generally falls under the rubric of the scholarship of discovery. Arguably the least understood, developed, and appreciated of the four is the scholarship of integration (Braxton, Luckey, & Helland, 2002). Boyer summed up the scholarship of integration this way:

In proposing the *scholarship of integration*, we underscore the need for scholars who give meaning to isolated facts, putting them in perspective. By integration, we mean making connections across the disciplines, placing the specialties in larger context, illuminating data in a revealing way, often educating nonspecialists too...[W]hat we mean is serious, disciplined work that seeks to interpret, draw together, and bring new insight to bear on original research...The scholarship of integration also means interpretation, fitting one's own research—or the research of others—into larger intellectual patterns. Such efforts are increasingly essential since specialization, without broader perspective, risks pedantry. The distinction we are drawing here between “discovery” and “integration” can be best understood, by the questions posed. Those engaged in discovery ask, “What is to be known, what is yet to be found?” Those engaged in integration ask, “What do the findings mean?” (1990, pp. 18–19).

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Mainstream psychology has long valued the role of theories as building blocks for scientific research. Work on theories is relevant to both the scholarship of both discovery and integration. However, if the field of psychology is to be charged with finding answers to various empirical questions, the scholarship of integration offers many such clues. While some have argued that the scholarship of integration offers a more formal, concrete means of rewarding scholars who are not conducting empirical research (e.g., [Braxton, 2011](#)), [Boyer \(1990\)](#) himself felt that integration was very closely connected to traditional empirical research, or what he termed the scholarship of discovery. An influential article in the 1998 *American Psychologist* authored by The Society for the Teaching of Psychology's Task Force on Defining Scholarship in Psychology, featuring lead author [Diane Halpern](#), argued for the value of scholarship of integration to psychology because it allowed for a creative synthesis of knowledge.

### 1.2. Select examples of integration-based scholarship in psychology: from Milgram to the psychology of loss

The notion that disparate academic fields, such as psychology and political science (e.g., [Simon, 1985](#)), can have an effective dialog to consider and solve problems affecting each of their respective fields is not particularly novel. It has been claimed that many of the tremendous advances in recent decades in brain research have been the product of interdisciplinary efforts (e.g., [Pellmar & Eisenberg, 2000](#)). To some degree, any such multi- or cross-disciplinary research is integrative. However, integration-based scholarship need not conform to traditional empirical research where variables are explicitly manipulated and measured as prescribed by experimental methods. In fact, it might be surprising to note that the scholarship of integration already has a rich history within psychology—even if the authors did not explicitly acknowledge their works as such.

Stanley Milgram was one of psychology's truly looming figures whose obedience to authority studies remain foundational to social psychology. While Milgram's obedience studies did utilize the collection of raw data (albeit with more observational rather than experimental means), [Blass \(2004\)](#) makes it explicit that Milgram aimed to illustrate psychological processes at work that contributed to the heinous atrocities committed during the Holocaust. Indeed, consistent with [Boyer's \(1990\)](#) approach, it is often essential to take a larger—and sometimes multi-disciplinary—perspective on certain issues or phenomena. For instance, a social psychologist who studies obedience or genocide is surely enriched by examining historical acts of destructive obedience and genocide such as the Holocaust (e.g., [Staub, 1989](#)). Conversely, the work of a Holocaust historian is likely enhanced by considering and consulting psychological research on obedience and genocide (e.g., [Solkoff, 2001](#)). Sometimes questions posed in the field of psychology (or related areas) can be more fully understood and appreciated by branching out to more disparate fields of inquiry, even to non-academic sources of material. Existential psychiatrist Victor [Frankl \(1959\)](#) authored the masterpiece *Man's Search for Meaning*, in which he documented what it was like to live through

imprisonment in a Nazi concentration camp from a psychological perspective. Frankl's work, which should be classified as integrative scholarship, raised further questions about the importance of finding meaning in life, even under the most horrific of circumstances.

In order to explore how individuals may attempt to find meaning in life (or any other issue for that matter) psychologists may find it helpful to venture into works outside of psychology. Film provides just one example of how psychologists can utilize and study popular culture and media images as a means of conveying broader psychological themes. The dark comedy *A Serious Man*, an Academy-award nominated film directed by Joel and Ethan Coen, projects the possibility that striving to have a clear and absolute understanding of the larger meaning of life (and why some suffer in life) may be an absurd exercise from the start ([Cohen, 2012](#)). As such, this film could be used as an example to showcase media portrayals of how individuals sometimes struggle to find meaning—and how difficult this search may be.

Returning to Milgram, he is also known for some other creative field studies, such as an innovative investigation in which the number of confederates who were purposefully staring at a given building on a busy street in New York City was systematically varied, producing was a very strong positive association between the number of confederates looking at the building and the number of passersby who stopped to look themselves ([Milgram, Bickman, & Berkowitz, 1969](#)). Integrative scholarship in psychology should also seek to draw innovative connections with phenomena where the scholar attempts to establish and describe the nature and rationale of these connections. For instance, Internet memes signify an important and interesting trend in cyberpsychology. Internet memes can represent some sort of message or symbol (e.g., in pictures or “viral” videos) that conveys some aspect of the self or a personally felt attitude ([Shifman, 2011](#)). Much as [Milgram et al. \(1969\)](#) showcased the power of social and emotional contagion processes, we can use their findings to suggest how and why in online contexts, we may transmit memes based on either personal preference for a given idea or stimuli or a perceived social pressure to further the transmission (e.g., [Sampson, 2012](#)). Drawing, proposing, and explaining such connections is very much part of integrative scholarship. One might suppose that the [Milgram et al. \(1969\)](#) field study has very little to do with the very contemporary matter of the nature of Internet memes. However, by engaging in integrative scholarship, we are looking to draw meaningful connections between pieces of information that might initially seem disconnected.

Milgram authored some integrative pieces of scholarship that did not feature the collection or analysis of data in the traditional sense. For instance, in a prominent *Science* article ([Milgram, 1970](#)), he offered an analysis of the psychological experience of urban life. A significant portion of this piece made use of the existing academic literature (much as would be found in a review); however, he also cleverly incorporated various fragments of information from academic and non-academic sources (such as periodicals) along with accounts and other personal observations in order to make his case for the uniqueness of city

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