Chapter 3
Legitimizing Integral Theory in Academia:
Demonstrating the Effectiveness of Integral Theory Through Its Application in Research

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ABSTRACT

This chapter is based on the analysis of experiences of graduate students and professors using Integral Theory (IT) as transdisciplinary research framework, at a Western Canadian mainstream university. The traditional disciplinary orthodoxies, which had presented a formidable challenge to the acceptance of IT in mainstream academia, are briefly described. For example, not having a single disciplinary home, Integral academics do not fit into the traditional roles and their associated benefits. This applies both to professors and to graduate students. Integral students must continue to defend their research and professors must defend Integral teaching. Nevertheless, research is strengthened by an Integral worldview and a more complex understanding of the world. The chapter concludes with a specific discussion of how IT is employed to investigate multiple contexts of complex problems.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter stems from my experience of supervising, to successful completion, 17 doctoral theses (both EdD and PhD) based on Integral Theory. As such, I am writing this chapter for potential researchers, particularly those, who may be situated in mainstream academia, and who are considering using Integral Theory in their research design and/or analysis. The description of Integral Theory and, specifically AQAL, which is offered in this chapter, could therefore be more accurately considered as an *interpretation* from a researcher, for researchers "doing Integral on the ground." Unlike the many highly theoretical analyses and critiques of AQAL that are available in Integral publications, this chapter takes a very practical, applied approach to conducting Integral research within the disciplinary confines of mainstream academia.

Background: Challenges to the Use of Integral Theory in the Traditional Academic Disciplinary Context

A brief account of the current context of mainstream universities is provided to explain the cautious and conservative reception of Integral Theory as a legitimate research framework.

Driven by neoliberal algorithmic governmentality, Western universities currently find themselves locked into public competition with each other. Big data, targets and research funding are some of the key elements in this academic race. In response, universities have been sacrificing creativity for efficiency, curiosity for strategy, and streamlining their research agendas toward a few research goals with strategically high probability of gaining research funding. In this climate, working with currently acclaimed research methodologies is strategically more conducive to winning the race, than trying out new strategies that have little or no track record.

While this chapter is based on experiences from one university, where Integral research has been given some opportunity to grow in one Faculty, I have had conversations with colleagues from numerous other Canadian universities to check my perceptions, and similar views were noted with respect to the importance of strategically positioned research and strong track record. Furthermore, having graduated 17 doctoral students whose thesis research was based on Integral Theory, I had 17 opportunities to witness the deep reservations that external examiners - scholars from top Canadian universities - expressed about transdisciplinary research and Integral Methodological Pluralism, particularly at the doctoral student level.

Specifically, I have observed two sources of resistance to the use of Integral Theory, and they appear to be related to the nature of the graduate programs themselves. At the doctoral level, the resistance of supervisors and examiners centers around traditional definitions of disciplines, ontologies and epistemologies. A doctoral student is generally expected to choose one discipline/ontology/epistemology and base their thesis research on it. Ontological pluralism is still mistrusted by traditional academics. Methodological pluralism is discouraged on the basis that it is difficult for one student to carry out, and even more difficult to defend.

At the master's level, particularly in the course based programs with capstone research projects, there is a learned tendency to follow templates and to follow closely the generally accepted dogma reproduced in research textbooks. The idea of trying out, or even trying to understand, a new research approach that is not covered in the traditional textbooks, tends to be seen as threatening and therefore is generally resisted by the students.

Beyond the graduate students' program-related challenges, there are also challenges to both professors and students in terms of their suitability or eligibility for research funding, which is still defined by disciplinary boundaries. Since they have no disciplinary home, they have a questionable academic identity within the organization, which often puts them at a disadvantage for research funding. This has direct implication for track record: no track record – no funding; no funding-no track record.

Brief History of Disciplinary Orthodoxies in the Academic Context

Before even addressing the issue of methodological pluralism, it is useful to delve ever so briefly into the context of the rise and fall of the dominance of popular ontologies, and the impact this has had on the classification of types of methodologies.

In the dim past, the first ontology was characterized as the Subjective ontology – "the world is what I perceive, the truth is subjective." This was the *only* ontology in its day, and the work of the great clas-

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