



This is not you

...and to all scholars, really. You are not an explorer.

Now that the academic year is over and I'm finally getting the time to write, I've been looking through scholarly abstracts. In literally dozens of them, the author says that he or she is "exploring" a particular issue or topic. What's wrong with that? It serves as a substitute for a well-stated thesis. The point of explorers isn't that they are exploring something: it's that they have *found* something.

This hardly implies a particular scholarly approach: you can be a positivist social scientist, a traditional doctrinalist, a critical race theorist using narrative. All of these methods, properly used, can yield insights. But the point is what we learn, not the scholar's journey for its own sake, as valuable as that may be to the author.

A couple of years ago, I was on the UCLAW appointments committee and called a reference about a rookie job candidate. The reference was lukewarm (which I hope the candidate knew!), but was so for an important reason. The reference explained that the candidate was still "writing *about* things" instead of framing interesting questions and trying to answer them.

Let's leave it to T.S. Eliot, who famously wrote in *Little Gidding*:

We shall not cease from exploration

And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time

After your exploration, make sure you know something!

That is all.