I-O Psychology in Introductory Psychology Textbooks: A Survey of Authors

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Industrial-organizational (I-O) psychology has been in existence since the early 1900s but still remains shadowed behind other fields in psychology. Every year in the United States, roughly 1.5 million undergraduate students are exposed to the variety of psychology subfields (Cush & Buskist, 1997; Griggs, Jackson, Christopher, & Marek, 1999; Miller & Gentile, 1998) while enrolled in an introductory or general psychology course. These classes are composed of both psychology and nonpsychology majors who may change their major after taking this course (Buskist, Miller, Ecott, & Critchfield, 1999). Research suggests that introductory psychology is the only psychology course many of the nonmajors will complete (Buskist et al., 1999) because their core curriculum does not require psychology courses beyond the introductory level. Research has also shown that the general public lacks awareness of I-O (Gasser, Whitsett, Mosley, Sullivan, Rogers, & Tan, 1998). Therefore, it is essential to expose students to all subfields of psychology including the more neglected ones such as I-O.

Exposure to I-O in introductory psychology is also related to taking I-O classes (Maynard, Bachiochi, & Luna, 2002a) and pursuing graduate school in this field. However, these outcomes are contingent on information about I-O psychology being conveyed either in introductory psychology textbooks or class. If topics such as I-O are not included in textbooks, non-I-O-affiliated instructors may neglect the topic and never teach the material, thus “denying students access to the full breadth of psychology as well as omitting a field that is of interest to many” (Raley, Lucas, & Blazek, 2003, p. 63). Recent research has shown a growing interest in I-O psychology among undergraduate students (Bott, Stuhlmacher, & Powaser, 2006; Costanza & Kissamore, 2006). Neglecting I-O psychology may harm its reputation by indicating the subfield is not accepted or respected in the field (Herzog, 1986; Roig, Icochea, & Cuzzuzco, 1991) and prevents interested students from pursuing related research experience that enhances their application to graduate school.

Recent studies indicate that introductory psychology textbooks have undergone several changes over the years that include a decrease in number of textbooks (Maynard, Geberth, & Joseph, 2002b), an increase in solo authors, and an increase in mean number of pages (Raley et al., 2003). Although these changes provided a slight increase in percentage of pages that contain I-O material (Raley et al., 2003), the majority of introductory textbooks still devote

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little or no space to I-O (Carlson & Millard, 1984; Griggs et al., 1999; Maynard et al., 2002b; Raley et al., 2003), and it tends to be the least assigned topic by introductory instructors (Miller & Gentile, 1998). If instructors do not have an I-O background, the lack of content presented in introductory textbooks will make it difficult for them to prepare and present lectures focused on this field.

In an effort to increase public awareness of the field, SIOP has formed an ad-hoc committee (a subcommittee of the Scientific Affairs Committee) charged with encouraging introductory psychology textbook authors to include a chapter on I-O psychology in their textbook. In order to ensure the materials generated are incorporated, we sought information directly from the introductory psychology textbook authors on why they do not include more I-O psychology content in their current textbooks, how receptive they would be to incorporate more, and preferred formats for receiving such information.

**Method**

All authors of introductory psychology textbooks listed in the Society for the Teaching of Psychology’s (APA Division 2) 2005 *Compendium of Introductory Psychology Texts* were the target population for this study. The list was comprised of 56 full and brief version textbooks published between 2002 and 2005, with a total of 66 unique authors and coauthors. Current contact information for the authors was found through search engines on the Internet, as well as the author’s school and/or publisher’s Web site. Contact information for only 6 of the 66 authors was unattainable reducing the sample to 60.

The authors were sent an e-mail requesting they complete a 10-question Web-based anonymous survey about inclusion of I-O psychology content in their textbooks. One reminder was sent out half-way through the 3-week time period allotted. Four e-mails were undeliverable further reducing the potential sample to 56. Thirty authors (54%) responded to the survey.

**Results**

The authors were asked to report the current edition of their textbook. The mean edition number was 5.5 (SD = 2.8) with a range of 1–12. When asked in what format they currently include information about I-O in their textbook, the majority of the authors reported that they include information in some format with only three (10%) authors responding that they did not include any I-O information (see Table 1). Nine (30%) authors reported they integrate I-O content throughout the entire textbook. Ten (33%) authors include either a chapter, appendix, or supplement dedicated solely to the field, and an additional 10 (33%) include I-O in applied, Social, or motivation chapters. Thirteen (43%) authors include information about I-O as a discipline within psychology/as a career option. The eight (27%) authors who selected “other” reported I-O content is included in chapters on topics other than I-O, social, or motivation. Percentiles add up to more than 100% as authors were asked to check all that apply.
When asked for reasons why they do not include more I-O psychology information in current textbooks (again, authors were asked to check all that apply), the majority of the authors (16; 53%) reported believing an adequate amount of I-O information is already included, 10 (33%) authors indicated their editors/publishers believe an adequate amount is covered, 5 (17%) authors indicated I-O is not important enough relative to other information, and only 1 (3%) author checked students are generally not interested in I-O (see Table 2). Those who selected “other” for this question (9; 30%) listed reasons such as focusing on foundational knowledge, I-O does not fit well into a book organized by perspectives (e.g., psychodynamic, humanistic, etc.), the length of textbook and page limitations, and publishers have recommended leaving it out.

Table 1
Format of I-O Content in Introductory Textbook

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In what format do you currently include information about industrial-organizational (I-O) psychology in the current edition of your textbook? (check all that apply)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information about I-O psychology as a discipline within psychology/career option</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information about I-O psychology is integrated throughout the entire textbook</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not currently include information about I-O psychology</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter on Applied/Social Psychology that includes I-O psychology</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter on I-O psychology</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter on Motivation that includes I-O psychology</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix on I-O psychology</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supplement on I-O psychology to be purchased separately</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. N = 30

When asked for reasons why they do not include more I-O psychology information in current textbooks (again, authors were asked to check all that apply), the majority of the authors (16; 53%) reported believing an adequate amount of I-O information is already included, 10 (33%) authors indicated their editors/publishers believe an adequate amount is covered, 5 (17%) authors indicated I-O is not important enough relative to other information, and only 1 (3%) author checked students are generally not interested in I-O (see Table 2). Those who selected “other” for this question (9; 30%) listed reasons such as focusing on foundational knowledge, I-O does not fit well into a book organized by perspectives (e.g., psychodynamic, humanistic, etc.), the length of textbook and page limitations, and publishers have recommended leaving it out.

Table 2
Why Authors Do Not Include More I-O Content

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Please check all the reasons why you do not include more information about I-O psychology in your current textbook</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I believe an adequate amount is covered</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My editor/publisher believes an adequate amount is covered. I am limited to a certain number of pages</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-O psychology is not important enough relative to the other information that receives more coverage in my textbook</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students are generally not interested in I-O psychology</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. N = 30
When asked if they would be willing to consider incorporating more I-O information into their textbook, 16 (53%) responded “yes,” 12 (40%) selected “maybe,” and only 2 (7%) selected “no.” When asked about their preferences for how to incorporate more I-O information, no authors checked “adopt ready-made materials generated by I-O expert,” eight (27%) checked “work in conjunction with an I-O expert to generate materials,” seven (23%) selected “seek assistance on their own,” and 11 (37%) selected “other” with the majority of responses stating that all or a combination of the given choices would suffice.

In response to a question asking which type of formatting/packaging approaches to ready-made I-O materials they would prefer, the majority of respondents (10, 33%) chose “1-page descriptions of current research findings on topics that correspond to mainstream intro chapters,” four (13%) chose “stand-alone textboxes of information that could be added to mainstream chapters,” one (3%) chose “a chapter outline on I-O psychology” and one chose “a chapter outline on applied psychology.” No one chose “a chapter on I-O psychology” or “a chapter on applied psychology.” Many authors expressed an interest in reviewing such information so that they could decide how much and in what format they could incorporate it, and one author indicated a desire to have an I-O expert review his/her text before the next revision.

If SIOP were to make available summaries of I-O research for each main area of psychology, eight (27%) respondents reported being “extremely likely” to use this information to incorporate more I-O content into their text, another six (20%) were “somewhat likely,” and five (17%) selected “uncertain.” Most important, no one selected “not at all likely.”

Respondents were provided an opportunity to write in any additional comments regarding the survey. Several indicated the importance of I-O topics and that introductory students value learning about the application of psychology and how it relates to real-world issues. Others presented problems such as time constraints instructors often face, I-O lectures not prepared, and motivating the unmotivated students with “pop psychology” that interests them.

**Discussion**

In conclusion, the majority of introductory psychology textbook authors believe they include I-O content in their textbooks and are receptive to including more. The majority of the authors would prefer to do so by reviewing brief descriptions (stand-alone textboxes or 1-page summaries) of current I-O research findings that would integrate well into mainstream introductory textbook chapters (e.g., learning, memory, emotion/motivation). Correspondingly, SIOP’s committee will pursue efforts to generate such materials. If you would be interested in contributing to these materials, please contact Stephanie Payne at scp@psyc.tamu.edu.
At the same time, there are a number of real-life situational constraints that prevent authors from including more I-O content into their textbooks including reviewers, editors, and publishers discouraging it; page limitations; and perceptions that I-O content does not integrate well into the format of the text, is less important, and students are not as interested in this topic. It seems that in addition to making it easier for introductory psychology authors to include more I-O content, we would also be well-served to educate editors/publishers about the field and why it is important to include I-O content in introductory psychology texts.

It is important to point out that our data represent the 30 authors who chose to respond to our brief survey about the inclusion of I-O psychology; thus, they do not represent the 26 authors who chose not to respond. There are a variety of possible reasons why they chose not to respond, and one of them may be the perception that I-O receives adequate coverage (whatever amount that may or may not be) in their text. It is also important to note that our data reflect the authors’ perceptions and beliefs rather than perhaps more objective coding of content that has been conducted in other studies (e.g., Raley et al., 2003).

In our efforts to increase the amount of I-O content conveyed in introductory psychology courses as an indirect effort to increase the general public’s awareness of our field, we also need to keep in mind other ways this information can be conveyed beyond inclusion in the introductory textbooks. For example, SIOP has developed a number of I-O psychology teaching modules for introductory psychology instructors to use (http://www.siop.org/Instruct/inGuide.aspx; see also Bachiochi & Major, 1999; Maynard et al., 2002a). We can easily remind our colleagues and graduate students who teach introductory psychology about these modules as well as other approaches for educating students about the various fields of psychology (e.g., introductory psychology student projects, see Maynard, Maynard, & Rowe, 2004). We could also offer to guest lecture in introductory classes and make information about I-O readily available to students via advising offices, Web pages, and bulletin boards.

References


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