Stories Wanted:
The Oral History Project

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There are lots of tasks for the SIOP historian; one of the most important and most pleasurable is the Oral History Project started by former historian Andrew Vinchur. The goal of this project is to conduct and record interviews of the aging members who have contributed to I-O psychology, capturing their thoughts and experiences in ways that might not be possible in traditional publication outlets.

The essence of oral history is providing an opportunity for people who took part in important historical events to document their thoughts and experiences in their everyday language and expressions. With oral histories, the only things needed to conduct them are a set of good questions, a tape recorder, and somebody willing to share their stories. The philosophy of oral histories has created significant headway in formal historical research. There now exists formal national and international organizations (Oral History Association and Oral History Society), a journal (*Oral History Review*), and many numerous regional and topical archives and centers dedicated to collecting oral histories in specific areas (e.g., the Rutgers Archives for World War II Oral Histories and the Walter B. Reuther Library Oral History Collection of United Auto Workers members).

Vinchur compiled a nice packet of information that makes it easy to conduct oral interviews. We have a protocol that can be used to guide the interview as well as sample questions that can be asked. Once oral histories have been completed, we take care of transcribing them. After transcribing them, the transcripts can be reviewed by the interviewer and interviewee for clarity and accuracy. Afterwards, the transcriptions of the completed interviews will be shipped to the Archives of the History of American Psychology at the University of Akron. Future researchers will be able to mine these interviews to better understand the functioning and nature of our field.

The history of I-O psychology has so far focused largely on the first generation of founding fathers (with some attention to the first female pioneers as well, see Koppes, 1997). There has been more historical research on articles on legendary figures such as Munsterberg, Bingham, and Scott (e.g., Landy, 1992, 1997) than other figures in the field. The second generation of applied psychologists has begun to receive some attention, with articles on
Kornhauser (Zickar, 2003), Moore (Farr & Tesluk, 1997), and Paterson (Baker, in press; see also, Koppes, in press). Clearly the history of I-O psychology transcends these few individuals. The goal of the Oral History Project is to collect raw material in the form of interviews so that future historians can better understand our field.

If you are interested in contributing to SIOP’s Oral History Project, please let me know. If you are interested in being interviewed or interviewing someone, send me an e-mail (mzickar@bgsu.edu). In addition, if you have suggestions on people to interview, I’d appreciate that as well. I would like to make a special plea to our retired practitioners. The history of the academic side of our occupation is much better documented compared to the practitioner side. We need oral histories of consulting and corporate psychologists to rectify the imbalance in the historical record.

References


