COMMENTARY

Reflection and reflexivity in I-O psychology: A graduate student's perspective

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Introduction

In the focal article, Hyland (2023) writes, "my hope is that this article will spark a collective conversation about the role that reflection and reflexivity can play in our field" (pp. 5–6). As three current graduate students in an I-O psychology PhD program, we want to extend this discussion of reflection and reflexivity into a call to action for ourselves and our fellow I-O graduate students to play an active role in generating this necessary change. According to SIOP's Income and Employment report (2020), 45% of I-O graduates pursue a career in academia, whereas 56% of I-O graduates pursue an applied career. Therefore, graduate school is the ideal time to foster the relationship between academic and applied scholars, and integrate the ideal reflection and reflexivity skills that all I-O scholars should possess in order to best address the identity crisis of I-O Psychology. In this commentary, we highlight the personal, epistemological, and disciplinary questions Hyland asks I-O psychologists to consider from the lens of a graduate student so that reflection and reflexivity occurs from the beginning of where an I-O psychologist's career begins.

1. How does your positionality affect your science and practice?

For graduate students to understand how our personal ideologies and background may affect the way in which we practice research, we believe an important first step is reflecting on the privileges that have put us in this position. The privilege of conducting and implementing research is not granted to everyone, yet it can affect everyone. Currently, there are an estimated 3.32 billion people employed worldwide (Clark, 2022), compared to the 9,100 active SIOP members (SIOP, 2021). Determining how our positionality guides our science and practice can help us decenter ourselves from our work and ensure that our work is not driven by our subjective worldview. To assist us in reflecting on this question, we suggest that, in our time in graduate school, students develop and regularly review and adjust a positionality statement. This statement would serve to keep students vigilant of their positionality while reflecting on how it influences their work. We believe this active reflection will produce more holistic future scholars and assist in expanding the scope of current research to better help the communities we claim to serve and finding common ground to resolve the field's current identity crisis.

2. What paradigmatic assumptions guide your work?

Graduate school is often a time wherein students test the boundaries of the field to which they are assimilating, and they may draw on their existing identities to guide the processes through

which they choose to conduct research (Cilesiz & Greckhamer, 2022). In this process, students should also reflect, early and periodically, in their graduate career on what their purpose is in graduate school. Are they there to maintain or disrupt order within the program or within their area of research? To reflect on the paradigmatic assumptions that guide student's work so early in their career can help them discover and establish their purpose while building on their understanding of the field of I-O currently and how they hope to contribute to it in the future.

3. What philosophy of science do you subscribe to?

Researchers and practitioners in the field tend to claim one side of the I-O coin over the other. The false dichotomy between the I versus the O side restricts our science and thinking in ways of which we are often unaware. Although we may produce topics productive to both sides, our philosophy of science impacts the "why" of our research. For example, why are we interested in turnover? Is it because we want to understand how organizations can minimize costs associated with it? Or do we want to examine it in relation to employee well-being? The side we subscribe to guides our research and practice and by viewing them as separate we hinder our advancement of the field. This is especially salient for incoming graduate students who are still finding their way and often feel as if their interests must fall into one or the other. It is important then, that graduate students reflect on why they find one side more appealing than the other. By consciously acknowledging where our research interests lie in relation to the I versus O debate, we can question our "why" and build our understanding of I-O psychology to contribute to the field as a whole.

4. Is our research too reductionistic?

As emerging I-O scholars, it is important to not fall into the trap Hyland points out of being too reductionistic in our research. Workplaces are complex, more so now than ever; so, as we transcend through graduate school, we must consider a multitude of explanations for what occurs within the workplace. We believe graduate school is the perfect time to adopt a holistic approach as we explore and learn through trial and error the complex workings of organizations. We must challenge the status quo and explore the literature for ourselves on why certain phenomena occur so we can fully understand the complexity of I-O psychology, promote a holistic perspective, and minimize the chance of adopting a narrow mindset. In addition, we believe one area in which we must not fall victim to reductionism is cross-culturally. In our graduate program, we have many international students who continually point out that what works in a western workplace would be drastically different in an eastern workplace. As graduate students, we should keep cross-cultural implications on the forefront of our mind early on in our careers. This may present some challenges as cross-cultural research is less readily accessible for many graduate students; still, keeping this idea in mind will allow graduate students to capitalize on the opportunity when it presents itself. Doing so can ensure that our research is more applicable to a greater range of organizations as companies continually become more globalized.

5. Is our approach to statistical analysis outdated?

Developing knowledge in statistical analyses is a foundational skill of graduate school. We spend multiple semesters ensuring we are prepared to efficiently and accurately run data analysis in our research. As Hyland points out, we heavily rely on null hypothesis significance testing (NHST). If there are weaknesses associated with NHST and scholars are calling for alternative statistical analyses to be added, graduate school is the perfect time to develop these skills. Although this call to action is slightly more difficult to achieve on our own, we should approach faculty with the idea of creating a broad tool kit of statistical analyses in order to not be reliant on (NHST) when we graduate. We understand faculty may not be able to dedicate significant time to teaching new statistical methods, but we should ask for workshops and resources to develop these

skills. Graduate students can then come back and share what they've learned with peers and faculty. Not only will this expand our research capabilities, but as mentioned in the introduction, I-O PhD programs are preparing both academic scholars and practitioners. A tool kit of statistical analysis skills will benefit all parties.

6. Is the law of the instrument narrowing our methodological choices?

In line with Question 5, graduate school is the ideal time for future I-O scholars to experiment with diverse research methods. Graduate school is a time in which we are immersed in a safe and low-stakes environment where we can try different approaches to research compared to being in a faculty role or in an organizational setting where there is more assumed risk involved. Therefore, we should use this time to explore the various ways in which a mixed-method approach could be advantageous. As graduate students, learning a broader range of methods contributes to new knowledge, present and future, that can benefit everyone. By doing this with the support of our faculty, we hope to broaden our historically reductionist approach as we prepare to be the next generation of scholars. Ideally, this would trickle down as current graduate students find themselves in teaching positions, and in 10 years we can see a change.

7. How has our field been shaped by sociohistorical forces?

It is important to keep up with current workplace trends based on what has been accepted and developed over time with demands from society. Every year, SIOP provides a valuable reference, the Top 10 Work Trends (2022). This is a crucial resource for graduate students as it allows us to consider how to handle the major issues that concern scientists. As I-O graduate students, these trends can be explored, reflected on, and integrated into our own courses and research. The COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, has sparked a new phase of exploration into topics such as remote work and its impact, which were ranked Numbers 1 and 3 in 2022 (SIOP, 2022), and the empirical research from the previous 3 years has served as the basis for future changes to the workplace. In order to better comprehend recent trends, driven by viewpoints on public health and social well-being, a variety of approaches and research questions across changes in the workplace have been gathered (Shoss, 2021). I-O graduate students have learned that we need to be resilient to the quickly changing workplace to absorb societal phenomena, devise gaps between literature and real-world situations, and explore implications through empirical research combined with inherited and emerging methodologies and theories. Keeping an eye on trends and maintaining an open mindset will reflect historical needs and develop an identity as an I-O psychologist.

8. Who do we serve?

Although I-O psychology uses methodologies and ideas that apply to a variety of levels in the workplace including individuals, groups, and organizations, the gatekeeper who meets with scientists and practitioners is limited to business executives and leaders in the organizations. Therefore, before deciding who we hope to serve, I-O graduate students should gain research experience with employees at all levels of an organization. Also, it is challenging for I-O graduate students to truly understand who the research is for and who we serve because there are limited opportunities for graduate students to interact with employees in the workplace, such as those who took part in surveys or interviews. Therefore, it is essential to practice analyzing the same phenomenon at various levels and through different points of view while considering the implications of our research for each level. In order to prevent the benefits of the research from only affecting select individuals, I-O graduate students should practice understanding workplace phenomena comprehensively and exhaustively.

9. What future do we envision?

Historically, novel theories and approaches have been developed due to social and political upheavals (e.g., scientific management; Taylor, 1911). The phenomena that I-O graduate students currently face will lead to the development of innovative solutions that a stable situation cannot bring. As I-O graduate students, we will study how to utilize historical approaches and research to comprehend contemporary phenomena, influence change, and contribute to the development of fresh perspectives based on existing ones. This is possible by interacting with the social environment and integrating creative efforts that only I-O graduate students are capable of (e.g., interdisciplinary research with various fields of research, data collection using state-of-arts technologies, etc.). In other words, as I-O graduate students, we should see these complex circumstances and rapid changes as an opportunity for development of theories that contribute to society as researchers and practitioners after graduation.

Conclusions

In his focal article, Hyland discusses the need for reflection and reflexivity in both our I-O research and practice. This change can occur from the ground up, starting with the future I-O scholars of our field. We are not suggesting that these changes will be easy as there may be challenges along the way—as is the case with any change effort. Although graduate students have limited time and resources, we must actively contribute to both the changing nature of I-O psychology and the reflection and reflexivity conversation to be responsible stewards of the field. Therefore, our call to graduate students is to keep an open mind, come into graduate school ready to engage in reflection and reflexivity, and have a growth mindset in adopting different approaches to practice and research. Thereby promoting flexibility and dynamism that the field needs to advance and make a positive impact on the field of I-O psychology.

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