Letter from the President
Suzanne Kirschner, Ed.D.
College of the Holy Cross

I am delighted to be serving as SQIP’s President this year. I have a deep sense of connection to this organization, not only because of my longstanding commitment to advancing the legitimacy and visibility of qualitative methodologies within psychology, but also because SQIP’s past and current leaders include a number of my teachers, colleagues and good friends. Since this is my first opportunity to make contact with many of you, I want to share what I find especially exciting and meaningful about SQIP, as well as what my hopes are as we continue to help it grow and flourish.

Many of us gravitate towards qualitative methodologies because they enable us to explore human experience and the meanings of social action in its lived contexts. They also afford systematic techniques for the discovery of patterns and dynamics of social life and subjectivity that are not discernible by other means. While such methods and modes of analysis have long been sanctioned within subfields of other social research disciplines, they have been less accepted within psychology. My own trajectory as a scholar and researcher illustrates this. When I entered graduate school in the 1980s with the intention of becoming a psychologist, I had to essentially design my own doctoral program in order to study qualitative methods and the theories of knowledge and philosophies of social science that authorize them.

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You have just experienced what some call the most profound event of their lives. After moments awash in a deep sense of universal oneness—a blissful, unifying harmony—your mind races with questions. Having returned to a normative state of consciousness you are simply left to wonder about the meaning of this phenomenon: “What just happened?” “Where did I go?” “Was I in the presence of God...?”

The historical record is rife with accounts of mystical experience. From St. Paul’s religious conversion on the road to Damascus and St. Birgitta of Sweden’s revelations to Fyodor Dostoevsky’s “unthinkable happiness” as the result of being “in perfect harmony with...the entire universe”; famous saints, mystics, and authors have experienced these transformative departures. Similar accounts also persist into modern times.

And while neurological and psychiatric studies have suggested seizures linked with temporal lobe epilepsy (TLE) as a potential source for mystical experience or “euphoric auras,” an interdisciplinary team in the United Kingdom is not only reexamining the role of TLE in producing mystical experience, but asking, “What is the meaning and significance of these experiences for those impacted?”

To better understand physiological origins of auras in patients with epilepsy and address more fully patients’ interpretations of these mystical experiences, psychologist Dr. Joseph Tennant of the Department of Clinical Neuroscience at the University of Cambridge, neurologist Dr. Sofia Eriksson, neurologist Rev. Dr. Alasdair Coles, and psychologist Rev. Dr. Joanna Collicutt are employing what Tennant describes as “solidly mixed methods.” Rev. Dr. Coles and Rev. Dr. Collicutt—in addition to their respective backgrounds in neurology and psychology—are ordained priests in the Church of England. Tennant says their religious backgrounds have proven enormously helpful in establishing coding that effectively captures religious themes as interpreted in euphoric aura.
Remarks on Psychobiography from William Todd Shultz
By Dr. James William Anderson, Ph.D.
Northwestern University

Arguably the most outstanding psychobiographer of our time, William Todd Schulz (who goes by the name Todd) took part in an interview with the journal, Clio’s Psyche. I was taken with a number of his comments and received permission from Todd and from the journal’s editor, Paul Elovitz, who was also the interviewer, to excerpt the interview in this column. The whole interview can be read at the journal’s web site: https://cliospsyche.org/

Todd’s three acclaimed books are: An Emergency in Slow Motion: The Inner Life of Diane Arbus; Tiny Terror: Why Truman Capote (Almost) Wrote Answered Prayers; and Torment Saint: The Life of Elliott Smith. He also edited The Handbook of Psychobiography, published by Oxford University Press. Professor of Psychology at Pacific University in Oregon, Todd earned his PhD in Psychology at the University of California, Davis, and Alan C. Elms was his dissertation chair.

Comments from William Todd Schultz:

I don’t think you can be taught how to do outstanding psychobiography. I’ve come to that conclusion through years of trying with my own students. The number one thing that good psychobiography requires is creative perception, an ability to notice things, the smallest, most marginal of details, plus a gift for connecting what had been disconnected. Even before that, it requires a talent for coming up with a fresh angle on a life, asking a question that hasn’t been asked before. A great example is Alan Elms and his chapter on why Elvis had such a hard time performing the song “Are You Lonesome Tonight.” People just have this kind of creative perception or they don’t. You can’t really show them how to be creative—and psychobiography is VERY creative. I find most psychobiography essays boring because nothing hatches. Nothing is illuminated. Nothing is revealed that wasn’t already known or guessed at.

You can’t really tell a person, “here is how you can be more illuminating.” It seems to be a gift, or if it’s not a gift, I just suck at teaching psychobiography.

I’ll say one more thing. The chances of you doing good psychobiographical work increase if you’ve got the theoretical cement. I was always a theory nut. From my college days I was obsessed with Freud, then I got into object relations, then R. D. Laing, then Henry Murray. I love the total lunacy of Melanie Klein, especially her focus on the death instinct. But then I also really deeply investigated modern personality science, what Dan McAdams refers to as the three levels of personality: traits, characteristic adaptations, and scripts. Theory knowledge helps with the shedding of light. My PhD is in personality, so I think that set me up really well for going in a psychobiographical direction.

People always ask me: what draws you to tortured artists? You seem so sane and normal? I never had any fabulous answer. I just wanted to do what I did. I just wanted to make things. The why part I set aside. I worked, and that was that.

I think you need to love your subject. Not blindly, but empathetically...The thing I’m most proud of in my work is my capacity to sympathize.

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And, early in my academic career, I found that multi-disciplinary venues offered the most hospitable fit for the kind of research and teaching to which I was committed. For example, in order to use ethnographic and interpretive methods to explore how mental health professionals were responding to the advent of various changes glossed as “managed care,” I found collaborators in the Department of Social Medicine at Harvard Medical School. At around the same time, I was teaching cultural psychology and supervising students’ research projects, most of them exploring psychological questions with the use of various qualitative methods. But I was not doing this in a psychology department: I was the “resident psychologist” in a multi-disciplinary, social research/theory department. When I subsequently got a tenure-track job in a psychology department where I could teach my areas of interest and expertise, and openly pursue the kinds of research projects I wanted to do, I was well aware of how lucky I was to have such a position.

I’m happy to say that in the two decades since then, there has been a significant increase in the visibility, status and development of qualitative methods within psychology. I want to highlight three aspects of our members’ work, which I think have been particularly effective for our pursuit of these goals. The first aspect is the promotion of the legitimacy of qualitative methodologies in psychology. The founding and evolution of SQIP as a section of APA Division 5, the flourishing of our APA journal (which recently added an extra issue per year and doubled the number of pages) under the stewardship of Ruthellen Josselson, and our dynamic annual conferences, are all signs of this welcome progress, as well as catalysts for its acceleration. Among the many excellent publications on qualitative methods, I note two recent high-profile articles produced by SQIP and APA Task Forces (Levitt et al., 2017; Levitt et al., 2018*), which explicate qualitative inquiry’s underlying methodological rationales and provide guidelines for research design and evaluation, while also affirming the plurality of qualitative methodologies and methods, along with the potential for creative and innovative approaches to transform our understanding of psychological phenomena. Psychologists have always been concerned with methodology as a means of affirming their discipline’s status and legitimacy as a rigorous approach to acquiring knowledge. I am hopeful that these articles, along with other ongoing projects, are exposing a much wider audience to the logics, rigor and appropriateness of qualitative methods for psychological inquiry.

A second valuable strand of the work of SQIP is its generativity. I’ve been impressed by the many ways SQIP’s officers and members have sought to foster the intellectual and professional development of emerging researchers. I hope you will check out our website for information about our Tasks Forces and Committees, Consultancies and other resources. Our Graduate Student Committee Chair, Zenobia Morrill, has been pursuing several other initiatives, including Google and Facebook groups for students. Please send Zenobia information about opportunities that students would find interesting and useful (Zenobia.morrill001@umb.edu). She and our Early Career Representative, Chris Head, are also organizing a webinar series of interviews with distinguished researchers.

Third, SQIP provides a community for us. At the very successful 2018 SQIP conference at Duquesne, I was struck not only by the conference program’s embarrassment of methodological and substantive riches, but also by the atmosphere of warmth, vitality and fellowship. If you are like me, you find it heartening and stimulating to be surrounded by colleagues who not only share a desire to advance qualitative inquiry, but also contribute diverse perspectives on key methodological issues.
Tennant reported that early qualitative investigations reveal themes of “a greater sense of empathy and openness” among patients in the project, but was careful to clarify that these findings could also be attributable to patients’ sense of alienation in having had “strange” or “weird” experiences and not the experiences, themselves.

Indeed, Tennant noted that only 19 percent of those with TLE have experienced euphoric auras—highlighting the rarity of mystical experiences even among those with TLE. He explained that the majority of TLE patients experience more “typical” auras that manifest in déjà vu, hallucinations, and/or overwhelming fear. And while Tennant said the data does suggest a link between TLE and euphoric auras in light of the fact that only eight percent of those with other forms of epilepsy experience euphoric auras, he emphasized that all findings are “very preliminary.”

The project team has arrived at early correlational findings by combing existing literature, reviewing a database of over 800 patient records, and gathering data from project participants at four field sites. Tennant shared that review of the database to identify patients with TLE has proven difficult given the nature and purpose of clinicians’ sparse reports.

“Records in the database include neurologists’ reports about whether to proceed with surgery in epilepsy patients,” said Tennant. “We are usually working from reports that reference ‘unusual auras,’ or a patient’s ‘sense of fear.’” For Tennant, limited notes on the nature of auras are unsurprising and largely understandable given a clinician’s goals. “The neurologist’s primary concerns are seizure freedoms and medication levels and compliance,” said Tennant. “The doctor sometimes has as little as five minutes during an annual visit to address these concerns to ensure safety. Side effects are no joke; it’s not pleasant. They aren’t worried about rich description of auras.”

Tennant said that a note about “unusual auras” or “sense of fear” often puts him on the trail of a potential TLE patient, and with baseline indicia of TLE provided in clinician notes, a deeper dive into the record can reveal a richer description of auras from the patient’s family.

With a suggested link between TLE and euphoric auras emerging, the question becomes, “To what (or to whom) do TLE patients attribute auras of mystical experience?” Does a patient see their experience as an episode associated with temporal lobe activity, or is there a religious component attached to euphoric auras? To trace factors that influence the meaning ascribed auras, the project team employs quantitative measures in their field study in the form of five scales of predisposition to spirituality and a “religious control” group. The scales are used in conjunction with a survey completed by patients. Patients also participate in an extensive interview that addresses content of euphoric auras, what they believe the cause of these auras to be, and whether they would be averse to experiencing auras again. Patient data is then measured against the religious control group—seven people in their second year of training for the Anglican priesthood with no history of neurological disorders. This control group is predisposed to ascribe religious meaning to mystical experience, and its members were required to recount a transformative religious experience as criterion for admission into the theological program. Tennant said early data shows that TLE patients with roots in an Anglo-Christian paradigm are more apt to link euphoric auras with religious origins and not simply temporal lobe activity.
Research Spotlight continued from page 5...

Tennant and team see the project’s goals as multi-faceted. By addressing a potential physiological link between TLE and mystical experiences—as well as, exploring the meaning of these experiences for patients—the project team hopes to equip clinicians with a well-founded resource that not only addresses mystical experiences as a potential feature of TLE but educates them on the significance of euphoric auras for TLE patients. Even in the ether of universal oneness or presence of a higher power, Tennant explained that patients still find auras strange and unsettling; they are still in search of an explanation. He added that clinicians would be well-served to have a more comprehensive understanding of euphoric auras that encompasses what these auras are like and how they can prove transformative for patients.

“Rich descriptive accounts and what they mean are just good science,” said Tennant. “How much variance is missed when we only rely on the numbers? We can accomplish even better work by incorporating qualitative methods to emphasize the importance of treating a person as a person.”

Remarks on Psychobiography continued from page 3...

But one day I realized, or think I realized, that it wasn’t so much the torture that drew me in, but the families that produced the torture. I’ve written books on Arbus, Capote, and Elliott Smith, and what they all had in common, and what I had in common with them, was fucked up families. Family trauma. Family secrets. Abuse. Rejection. Clotted silences. I wasn’t writing about depressed and suicidal people because I was depressed and suicidal—suicide has never crossed my mind—but because of the circumstances that made them that way. I knew these families because I came from one. I sympathized because I’d been there.

I think you need to love your subject. Not blindly, but empathically. Being a victim of emotional abuse myself, I was always very, very sensitive to cruelty, to people who suffered. The thing I’m most proud of in my work is my capacity to sympathize. It’s so key. It came from trauma and from going crazy myself. I know what it feels like to be haunted, to battle, daily, with severe emotional pain, the feeling that your mind has become an enemy.

I don’t have any drive to make psychobiography more accepted. I used to, when I was younger. I was more evangelical then. I’ve always said, and I still believe this, that mainstream psychology is method-centered. It’s less about figuring out what the important questions are and hypothesis-formation (a creative task) and more, much more, about hypothesis testing. I don’t see that changing. Psychobiography is art. That’s how I see it. It’s interpretation. It’s subjective. For those reasons, it makes most experimental psychologists uneasy, or maybe anxious. They see it as psychobabble. I disagree, but I’m too busy to argue with them. I just follow my obsessions and devote myself to doing work of the highest quality I can make it. I’m grateful for whoever reads it.
While, happily, we can connect without being in the same physical space, there is something special about gathering together. On that note, I’m pleased to announce that SQIP’s 6th annual conference will be held on June 10-11, 2019 at Simmons College (newly re-named Simmons University) in Boston, MA. A call for proposals (which includes an announcement of a pre-conference workshop led by Heidi Levitt) appears in this Newsletter.

I want to thank the members SQIP’s Executive Committee, who routinely go above and beyond, and to recognize Heidi Levitt for her service as President and the many ways she continues to lead the initiatives I’ve discussed. A special shout-out to Elizabeth Fein, Communications Director Extraordinaire, and her team: Margaret R. Roller, Rashunda Sitt, Dave Tomaselli, Joseph Tennant and Andrew Bland. Finally, I’m thrilled to announce that our President-elect is Jeanne Marecek. I’m sure Jeanne is already known to many of you for her stellar contributions to qualitative inquiry and feminist psychology.


If it’s not someone’s cup of tea, I’m fine with that. I’m not a joiner anyway. So if psychology doesn’t want me in its club, so be it. Being an outsider suits me.

[In reply to a question about the most important books in his development as a psychobiographer, Todd commented:] The most important book for me was Alan Elms’ Uncovering Lives. Alan is such a beautiful writer. He’s conversational, clear, interesting, inviting. I love his style. He writes like a writer. He writes to be read. Also, he’s never boring, and he avoids deadening jargon. When I was coming up Mac Runyan’s Life Histories and Psychobiography was a touchstone, of course. It lays out the field. It takes on the epistemological questions. His essay on why Van Gogh cut off his ear is absolutely required reading. I really liked Henry Murray and Gordon Allport too, mostly because, like Alan, they knew how to write. They wrote creatively. Their prose had a fizz to it. They did psychology artfully. I was never a big fan of Erikson—too thick, too much ponderousness to fight through. I like concision. I’ve learned about concision over time. I had to find it. Freud was my first crush. I adored everything he did, especially the meta-theoretical stuff. I read him extremely closely in college. I got to know him really well. Jung, on the other hand, turned me off, though I like his idea of the compensatory function. I used to meet all these people who told me they loved Jung, then I found out they never read him. They liked the idea of him or something. I loved R. D. Laing. I can’t stand psychiatry so I liked how he carved it up. I enjoy Melanie Klein, especially when she’s at her craziest. Silvan Tomkins is brilliant but pretty unreadable. Most of my strongest influences aren’t psychologists. I love Kafka, Flannery O’Connor, Philip Larkin, Philip Roth, Janet Malcolm, Walter Kirn, Kathryn Harrison. Those are the people I look to for inspiration.
Society for Qualitative Inquiry in Psychology (SQIP) 6th Annual Conference
Call for Proposals
June 10-11, 2019: Simmons University
Boston, MA, USA

The Society for Qualitative Inquiry in Psychology (SQIP), a Section of Division 5 (Quantitative and Qualitative Methods) of the American Psychological Association, is pleased to announce that its annual conference will be held at Simmons University (formerly Simmons College) in Boston, MA, on Monday and Tuesday, June 10-11, 2019.

*There will also be an optional pre-conference workshop the afternoon of Sunday, June 9th. Please see the end of this Call for Proposals for information.

Because our society is focused on qualitative inquiry, we are specifically interested in proposals that discuss contributions of qualitative methodology and methods, or approaches to research design that transform the understanding of a phenomenon of interest or transform psychology as a discipline. These could include (but are not limited to) methodological advances in qualitative inquiries of all kinds; philosophical issues such as epistemology and ethics; strategies and practices for effective instruction in specific qualitative methods; applications of methods in empirical research; and ethical issues attendant on the qualitative research process. Submissions from multidisciplinary, international, and student scholars are welcomed, given such attempts to wrestle with multiple meanings and expressions of psychological life and their potential to introduce innovation into the field of psychology.

Submission Instructions: Completed proposals should be submitted as a single, well-organized document in Microsoft Word format. In all cases, we request that you foreground in your proposal the contribution of the methodology/method in achieving your aims. Please name the file ‘2019 SQIP’, then the first and last name of the corresponding author, and abbreviated title (e.g., “2019 SQIP – Full Name – Narrative Study of Advocacy”). Submit proposals electronically to SQIPconference@gmail.com by January 15, 2019.

Proposal submissions are invited in four forms: Organized Symposia featuring 3-5 presenters who will address a common theme during a 60-90 minute session; Individual Papers that we will group into sessions of three papers each; Conversation Hours that will engage audiences in considering issues relevant to qualitative methods; and Poster Presentations that authors will discuss in our poster sessions, featuring individual and/or group work.

For Symposia, please indicate in this order:
• The type of proposal (symposium)
• Preferred time slot (60 or 90 minutes, as available)
• The name and contact information (including email addresses) for all participants, including chair and discussant(s) (as applicable) and whether they are a student or professional.
• An overarching symposium title and abstract (not to exceed 300 words)
• Complete titles and abstracts (not to exceed 300 words each) for the individual presentations in the symposium

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For Individual papers and Posters, please indicate in this order:

- The type of proposal (paper or poster)
- The name and contact information (including email addresses) for all participants, including chair and discussant(s) (as applicable) and whether they are a student or professional.
- The paper title and abstract (not to exceed 300 words)

For Conversation Hours, please indicate in this order:

- The type of proposal (Discussion Hour)
- The name and contact information (including email addresses) for all participants, including chair and discussant(s) (as applicable) and whether they are a student or professional.
- An overarching discussion hour title and abstract (not to exceed 300 words)


If you would like to receive SQIP newsletters and community information, please visit to sign up for the QUAL list: [https://listserv.temple.edu/cgi-bin/wa?SUBED1=QUAL&A=1](https://listserv.temple.edu/cgi-bin/wa?SUBED1=QUAL&A=1) (copy and paste into browser)

We look forward to seeing you at Simmons University in June!

Profs. Suzanne Kirschner & Gary Senecal, Program Committee Co-Chairs
Prof. Suzanne Kirschner, Host Committee Chair

*An optional PRE-CONFERENCE WORKSHOP will be offered on the afternoon of Sunday, June 9th, for a nominal fee. This year, we are delighted to host a workshop led by Heidi Levitt, Ph.D., Professor of Psychology, University of Massachusetts/Boston:

**Methodological integrity in qualitative research:**

*Strengthening the design of your study and your communication with reviewers*

This 4-hour workshop provides an overview of the concept of methodological integrity that was put forward by a SQIP task force to guide the process of research designs and journal review and adopted by the APA reporting standards. The workshop will guide you to use this perspective to strengthen your qualitative research designs, across methods, and to tailor procedures to your question, goals, and approaches to inquiry. Also, you will learn how to use this concept to communicate with reviewers and craft arguments to support your methods within the journal review process.
Call for Nominations for 2019 APA Division 5 Awards
Information on how to make nominations for the 2019 awards

APA Division 5 (Quantitative and Qualitative Methods) is seeking nominations for 8 awards in the area of research methods, including 4 awards in qualitative inquiry. Please consider nominating a colleague, student or mentor for one of these Division 5 awards, and please circulate this announcement widely—these awards are an opportunity to honor methodologically thoughtful and innovative work in psychology.

Qualitative Methods:

- Distinguished Contributions in Qualitative Inquiry Award
- Distinguished Contributions to Teaching and Mentoring Award
- Distinguished Early Career Contributions in Qualitative Inquiry Award
- Distinguished Dissertation in Qualitative Inquiry Award

Quantitative Methods:

- Samuel J. Messick Distinguished Scientific Contributions Award
- Jacob Cohen Distinguished Contributions to Teaching and Mentoring Award
- Anne Anastasi Distinguished Early Career Contributions Award
- Anne Anastasi Dissertation Award

All award recipients will be given an awards plaque and an honorary one-year membership in Div. 5. Recipients attending the 2019 APA Annual Convention will be honored at the Div. 5 awards symposium, where each will have the opportunity to make a brief presentation.

Neither the nominator nor the nominee need be a current or former member of either APA or Div. 5. Both self-nominations and nominations by others will be considered.

Detailed nomination instructions for each award can be found on the Div. 5 awards page on the website (https://www.apadivisions.org/division-5/awards/index.aspx). Please send all requested nomination materials by email to Nathan Kuncel, chair of the 2019 Awards Committee, at kunce001@umn.edu by December 1, 2018. A confirmation email will be sent when an award package is complete. The outcome of the review process will be announced by March 15, 2019. Should you have any questions concerning the awards, the nomination process and/or the review process, please contact Nathan.

Society for Qualitative Inquiry in Psychology

For information related to the Society please email: info@sqip.org.