

# Society *for* Qualitative Inquiry *in* Psychology



## Memorial Table at the SQIP Conference

This year's conference will have a Memorial Table to honor scholars who have passed recently and whose work has been important in the development of qualitative research in psychology. The Memorial Table will display photos of them.

We need your help to assemble the table. If there is a person you wish to memorialize, please bring a photo to the conference. (Photos should be no larger than 6" X 8"; please include a label with the individual's name.) You can also send a photo to [JeanneMareck@swarthmore.edu](mailto:JeanneMareck@swarthmore.edu)

## Letter from the President



Suzanne Kirschner, Ed.D.  
College of the Holy Cross

It is with great pleasure and excitement that I share with you the latest news about our upcoming SQIP conference at Simmons University in Boston, which will be held on Monday and Tuesday, June 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> (with an optional pre-conference workshop offered by Heidi Levitt, Ph.D., on Sunday afternoon\*). We received an unprecedented number of submissions, not only from many North American researchers but also from scholars in Europe, South America, Asia, and Africa. This is evidence of widespread interest in qualitative methodologies and of their expanding presence and influence within psychology and allied fields.

We look forward to a rich and varied conference program. I am thrilled to announce that Dr. Joseph P. Gone, Professor of Global Health and Social Medicine at Harvard Medical School and Professor of Anthropology at Harvard University, will deliver the keynote address. In his research, Prof. Gone explores the cultural psychology of self, identity, personhood, and social relations in indigenous community settings vis-à-vis the mental health professions, with particular attention to mental health status and services and to therapeutic interventions such as psychotherapy and traditional healing.

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### Co-Editors:

David Tomaselli, J.D.



Elizabeth Fein, Ph.D.  
Duquesne University



## Research Spotlight: Identity Development of African-American Women in STEM Fields

By: David Tomaselli, J.D.

Special Thanks to Interviewee Rashunda L. Stitt, Ph.D.

Winston-Salem State University

Rashunda Stitt has dedicated much of her early career to exploring the identity development of African-American women in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields. An assistant professor of psychological sciences at Winston-Salem State University, Stitt works to illuminate the unique challenges of African-American women in STEM fields that emerge in relation to multi-faceted identity—and, perhaps more importantly for Stitt—these women's successes as a historically underrepresented population in STEM. Stitt's exploration has revealed themes of breaking the mold by "doing something out of the ordinary," a sense of history in "persisting for future generations in the field," and shedding traditional limitations to create new horizons for African-American girls and women.

Stitt traces her passion for understanding identity development in the educational context to her own experience as an African-American woman in STEM—she began undergraduate studies as a biology major, then switched her major to psychology, sometimes seen as a STEM field—and an innate interest in what motivates people in their educational interests. "I was always interested in what motivates people in their educational pursuits," Stitt said. "I started as a biology major because I wanted to become an M.D. [medical doctor] to work with people, but I got bored! Cells and organelles are important to who we are, but it doesn't tell the whole story! I found I was actually more interested in the people who wanted careers in STEM and why."

Stitt's formal exploration into identity development began with her 2014 doctoral dissertation at the University of Memphis entitled, "'Sounds like something a White man should be doing': Academic identity in African American female engineering students." In addition to the study's more traditional thematic and narrative analytical elements, Stitt's (2014) creative analysis resulted in a stage play highlighting an African American girl's experiences in her pursuit of an engineering degree.

Stitt incorporated creative analysis into her multi-faceted analytical approach (2014) to package findings for an audience beyond colleagues—a desire that continues to run through Stitt's work.

The fertile ground of Stitt's dissertation data has also formed the bases of two subsequent studies grounded in intersectionality. In a study to be published in *The Journal of Negro Education*, Stitt revisited all nine of her original interviews. Thematic analyses revealed continual confrontation with stereotypes and the struggle to persevere in the face of these experiences. In combatting discriminatory experiences, these young women relied on the sense that they were "paving the way for future generations" of young, African-American women to succeed in STEM and that the best way to challenge a stereotype is "by doing something out of the ordinary."

In a study for submission to *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, Stitt broadened the analysis of these interviews to account for an additional intersectional category—sexuality. Two of Stitt's nine participants self-identified as lesbians, while two others explicitly identified themselves as "straight." Stitt reviewed these four interviews in view of the following research question: What are the experiences of African-American women at predominantly white institutions with regard to their race, gender, and sexuality?



Rashunda Stitt

*I started as a biology major because I wanted to become an M.D. to work with people, but I got bored. . . I found I was actually more interested in the people who wanted careers in STEM and why."*

**Research Spotlight continued on page 4...**

# Psychobiography Column: Psychobiography and Psychoanalysis, Part One

By Dr. James William Anderson, Ph.D.  
Northwestern University

Psychoanalysis is the psychobiographer's most valuable ally and most dangerous enemy.

Psychoanalysis is indispensable because its goal is the understanding of the inner world, just the territory that psychobiography seeks to illuminate. The vision of psychoanalysis is that each person has a complicated mind, partially conscious and partially unconscious, and one's thought and behavior stem from that mind. The nature of any person is the result of previous experience, as it has interacted with biological factors. And relationships, past and present, are central to everyone's existence. Even hermits become loners largely because of previous relationships and continue to live according to the relational patterns and assumptions in their minds.

Henry A. Murray was the originator of a major qualitative approach, the "study of lives," which emphasizes the in-depth exploration of the individual. He said to me (I worked with him for two summers as a research assistant in the 1970s) that there is no such thing as psychoanalytic theory; rather there is a diverse collection of theories. They can offer guidance for the psychobiographer to many of the chief thought and behavioral patterns, attachment styles, conflicts, defenses, developmental attainments, psychopathologies, and character styles. Those theories are gold for the psychobiographer, who is lost without them.

To make my point, I shall look at three alternatives to psychoanalysis.

Carl Rogers, in developing client-centered therapy ("person-centered" is now the preferred term), positioned it as an improvement on psychoanalysis. But look what happened when he undertook to take a client-centered approach to doing psychobiography. He examined a woman called "Ellen West," whom Ludwig Binswanger had discussed in a case study.

"Her organism wants to be healthy and strong," according to Rogers' (1980, p. 173) basic formulation, "but the introjected 'I'—the false self she has taken on to please others—wants to be, as she says at one point, thin and "intellectual.'" His explanation can only be called psychoanalytic; it describes a conflict that he sees as taking place in her inner world. It is much in line, moreover, with the work Donald W. Winnicott (1965), who wrote in depth about the false self well before Rogers and who remains widely read today among psychoanalysts.

Aaron Beck described to a colleague some of the central experiences that led to his development of cognitive theory. He noticed that patients had a current of thought that was separate from what they were explaining to him in therapy. In his colleague's (Weisharr, 1993) words, "Although less accessible than voluntary thoughts, these other thoughts appeared as if they had lives of their own. They were 'automatic thoughts'" (p. 20). One patient, for example, angrily criticized Beck, and at the same time the patient felt guilt, coming from a second current of thought that caused him to feel it was bad for him to be angry. Beck's explanation cannot be called anything but psychoanalytic psychology; he just avoids using basic psychoanalytic terms, such as the unconscious and the superego.

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*[Henry A. Miller] said to me. . . there is no such thing as psychoanalytic theory; rather there is a diverse collection of theories. They can offer guidance for the psychobiographer to many of the chief thought and behavioral patterns, attachment styles, conflicts, defenses, developmental attainments, psychopathologies, and character styles.*

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To ensure that she accounted appropriately for the composition of her research population and addressed potential hierarchies of inequality, Stitt examined her participants and their categories of self-identification in terms of Cole's (2009) fundamental questions to calibrate for intersectionality in psychological research: 1) Who is included in the category of study? 2) What role does inequality play? and 3) Where are the similarities [among issues facing varied stakeholders]?

Stitt selected a narrative analytical approach to explore the complexities of sexuality. "I had the young women contribute diary entries about their experiences in STEM in terms of gender, race, and sexuality," said Stitt. "I was honing in on the personal and wanted to maintain the complexity of their experiences." What ultimately emerged was that these young women—regardless of sexual orientation—thived with the help and support of their families. "I found that people meeting benchmarks had high levels of familial support," said Stitt. "There were no limitations based on sexuality to stand in the way of their pursuits."

Not unlike these young women, Stitt shared that her success is largely attributable to continual support. "I really had great mentorship from, both, men and women along the way. Their insight was unique and beneficial at different stages," said Stitt. Stitt strives to make her work more and more accessible and the ultimate hope is that her work grows in exposure to expand the horizons of possibility for African-American girls and young women.

"It's a project I've not gotten to yet," said Stitt, "but my plan is to write a children's book to show kids what is possible."

**References:**

Cole, E.R. (2009). Intersectionality and research in psychology. *American Psychologist*, Apr; 64(3), 170-180.

Stitt, R.L. (2014) *"Sounds like something a white man should be doing": Academic identity in African American female engineering students*. Doctoral Dissertation. Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertation and Theses Database, Publication No. AAT 3648501.

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**Letter from the President continued from page 1...**

A citizen of the Gros Ventre tribal nation of Montana, he has investigated these issues through collaborative research partnerships in both reservation and urban American Indian communities.

The conference will also feature:

- Cutting-edge symposia and papers that highlight the permeable boundaries between qualitative inquiry and recent developments in postcolonial, decolonial, feminist, and critical race theories and methods
- Innovative perspectives on foundational concepts in qualitative inquiry, such as validity, causation, consensus, representation, and the rhetoric of research writing
- Research featuring many different methodological approaches, including thematic analysis, phenomenology, IPA, discourse analysis, Participatory Action Research (PAR), narrative, interviewing, ethnography, grounded theory, oral history, autoethnography, photovoice, and archival research
- Several symposia and papers that focus on the distinctive challenges and opportunities associated with teaching and learning to do qualitative inquiry. These presentations include a plenary session in which advanced doctoral students studying individuals and communities in the Boston area reflect on the role of reflexivity, positionality, and other issues encountered when the researcher has membership or experiences in common with those whose experiences they seek to understand
- Symposia and papers on a wide range of substantive topics, including mental health, immigration and refugees, LGBTQ+ issues, human development, education and the ethics of research, and many presentations that embody a commitment to giving voice to and supporting individuals and groups who experience marginalization, oppression, and exclusion.

**Psychobiography continued from page 3...**

My final example involves B. F. Skinner, the most important developer of behavioral psychology. In the second volume (Skinner, 1979, p. 137) of his three-volume autobiography, he describes his reaction after a lover broke up with him: "For a week I was in almost physical pain, and one day I bent a wire in the shape of an N [the first initial of her name], heated it with a Bunsen burner, and branded my left arm. The brand remained clear for years."

Skinner offers no explanation, probably because he realizes that behavioral psychology cannot make sense of such an incident. I do not advocate making a psychoanalytic interpretation when there is no additional information. But such incidents are familiar to psychoanalytic therapists, and I can suggest an example of a formulation that could explain such an episode. Unconsciously, Skinner may have felt that the branding would keep this former girlfriend, who had abandoned him, with him, and at the same time the physical pain from the burning may have hurt less than the emotional pain and hence may have seemed preferable. Skinner's brand of behaviorism falls short of being capable of dealing with tortuous and torturous human activities that call for the aid of psychoanalysis. It is undeniable that Skinner's branding was unconsciously motivated; his not believing in psychoanalytic psychology did not keep him from behaving in the way psychoanalytic psychology says people behave.

At the beginning of this column, I stated that psychoanalysis is the psychobiographer's most valuable ally and most dangerous enemy. What do I mean by that, it's most dangerous enemy? In part two of this column in a future newsletter, I will comment on that question.

**Both items continued on page 6...**

Letter from the President continued from page 5...

We hope you'll join us for what promises to be a dynamic and enjoyable conference, in which both established and emerging researchers will have the opportunity to share their work, learn from each other, and—not least—connect with others who share their interests and commitments. You can find more information at <http://sqip.org/sqip-2019-conference/>.

Registration for the conference, the pre-conference workshop, and on-campus housing is scheduled to open on March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019. Please check the conference web page for details.

\*An optional PRE-CONFERENCE WORKSHOP will be offered on the afternoon of Sunday, June 9<sup>th</sup>, 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.

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Psychobiography continued from page 5...

#### **References:**

Rogers, C. (1980). *A way of being*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Skinner, B.F. (1979). *The shaping of a behaviorist*.

Weisharr, M.E. *Aaron A. Beck*. London: Sage Publications.

Winnicott, D.W. (1965). *The maturational processes and the facilitating environment*. New York: International Universities Press.

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## Update from the International Committee

Laura Kilby, Ph.D., *Chair*, SQIP International Committee, Sheffield Hallam University (UK)

Peiwei Li, Ph.D., *Liaison*, SQIP International Committee, Lesley University (US)

### **The International Committee grows in size!**

To enable us to do crucial work generating interest in SQIP and increasing engagement with SQIP as widely as possible we put out a call across existing international members to join the committee. We received a fantastic response from colleagues, and our committee membership now stands at 13 colleagues from Brazil, Colombia, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Malaysia, the Netherlands, Scotland, Switzerland, the UK, and the US. Our new committee members are already undertaking a range of vital activities, which will all contribute to further growth. Some initiatives include: 1) developing a mechanism for international communication among committee members, 2) building liaison with other qualitative organizations, and 3) growing international SQIP membership.

### **Contributions to the Annual Conference**

Two of our new committee members have taken a lead on organising an international symposium proposal for the 2019 conference, as well as a proposal for a conversation hour. Both of these proposals present exciting engagement with the SQIP conference from diverse international researchers. In a separate development for the 2019 conference, another new committee member has proposed a symposium comprising a group of UK-based qualitative psychologists who aim to share their particular flavour of qualitative methods with the SQIP community.

### **Strengthening International Bonds**

We are very pleased to have strengthened the relationship between SQIP and the Qualitative Methods in Psychology (QMIP) section of the British Psychological Society. Both parties have agreed to a reciprocal fee waiver to support a member from the respective organisation attending the conference of the other. This is a vital step in developing sustainable international engagement across organisations who represent the interests of qualitative psychologists wherever they may be. One of our new committee members is also currently developing important links with other qualitative organisations based in Malaysia.

### **Current numbers**

About 20% of current SQIP members are internationally located, including scholars from Australia, Austria, Canada, Germany, Hungary, India, Ireland, Malaysia, Netherlands, Norway, South Africa, Switzerland, and UK.

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For information related to the Society please  
email: [info@qualpsy.org](mailto:info@qualpsy.org).

**Society for Qualitative Inquiry in Psychology**

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