



# Clio's Psyche

Understanding the "Why" of Culture,  
Current Events, History, and Society

**Psychoanalysis/Psychology of  
Anxiety and Fear: Part I**

**The Fear Contagion**

**The Mac Runyan Festschrift**

**A Ukrainian Psychoanalyst's Struggles**

**The Holocaust's Influence on Zelensky**

**Steven Pinker: A Polymath Who  
Writes Psychohistory**

**Volume 30 Number 1  
Fall 2023**

# Clio's Psyche

Understanding the "Why" of Culture,  
Current Events, History, and Society

Volume 30 Number 1

Fall 2023

---

## Psychoanalysis/Psychology of Anxiety and Fear: Part I

The Fear Contagion: A Psycho-bio-medico-historical Perspective . . . . .	1
<i>Inna Rozentsvit</i>	
Anxiety and Fear in Society and My Life . . . . .	9
<i>Paul H. Elovitz</i>	
"War Takes Part in Me": Reflections of a Ukrainian Psychoanalyst . . . . .	16
<i>Igor Romanov</i>	
Rejecting Fear as a Grandchild of Holocaust Survivors . . . . .	25
<i>Eva Fogelman</i>	
<b>Paragraphs and Short Article on Fear in Your Life</b>	
Fearing the Threat to Democracy . . . . .	29
<i>Arnold Richards</i>	
Traumatic Time and the Genesis of Fearfulness . . . . .	29
<i>Robert D. Stolorow</i>	
On the "Edge of My Seat" in Fear . . . . .	30
<i>Ruth Neubauer</i>	
The Art and Fear of Falling . . . . .	31
<i>E. Ethelbert Miller</i>	
Some Fears and Anxieties in My 80s . . . . .	32
<i>Pamela Steiner</i>	
Feelings of Fear and Creativity . . . . .	34
<i>Brigitte Demeure</i>	
The Recent Concern for Anxiety and Fear Among Teenagers . . . . .	35
<i>Paul H. Elovitz</i>	
Fearing for Our Children in Our Anxious, Gun-Crazy Society . . . . .	36
<i>Paul H. Elovitz</i>	
<hr/>	
A Polymath Who Writes Psychohistory: Steven Pinker . . . . .	37
<i>Paul H. Elovitz</i>	

---

## William McKinley Runyan Festschrift

Psychologist and Psychobiographer William McKinley Runyan . . . . .	52
<i>James William Anderson</i>	

## Clio's Psyche

William McKinley Runyan Bibliography . . . . .	59
<i>James William Anderson</i>	
<b>Essays in Honor of Runyan</b>	
Gordon Allport and "Getting Away with It" at Harvard . . . . .	60
<i>Raymond E. Fancher</i>	
Literary Fiction as Psychobiography: Fitzgerald and Cattell . . . . .	68
<i>Michael M. Sokal</i>	
Psychobiography and the Meaningful Life . . . . .	76
<i>Daniel S. Benveniste</i>	
Why Did Skinner Cut Off His Emotions? An Idiographic Approach . . . . .	82
<i>Amy P. Demorest</i>	
Advancing the Study of Individual Lives . . . . .	90
<i>Nicole B. Barenbaum</i>	
Looking Back at a Life of Studying Lives Over Time . . . . .	94
<i>Susan Bluck</i>	
Mac Runyan: Essential Scholar and Invaluable Friend . . . . .	99
<i>Lonnie R. Snowden</i>	
The "Broken" Memories of Brandi Carlile . . . . .	103
<i>Jefferson A. Singer &amp; Emma Lombardo</i>	
Mac and Me After a Half-Century: Psychobiography and Historiometry . . . .	108
<i>Dean Keith Simonton</i>	
Mac Runyan and Me—And 40 Years of Personality Psychology . . . . .	111
<i>Dan P. McAdams</i>	
<b>Tributes</b>	
A Brief Tribute to William McKinley Runyan . . . . .	117
<i>Jim Clark</i>	
William McKinley Runyan: Mentor and Friend . . . . .	122
<i>Marilyn Fabe</i>	
Celebrating Mac Runyan . . . . .	124
<i>Nancy C. Unger</i>	
"Making it into their world": My Appreciation for Runyan . . . . .	127
<i>Claude-Hélène Mayer</i>	
Runyan Under the Big Psychobiographical/Psychohistorical Umbrella . . . . .	130
<i>Paul H. Elovitz</i>	
William McKinley Runyan: Renaissance Scholar and Mentor to Many . . . . .	131
<i>Joseph G. Ponterotto</i>	
When Psychobiography Was Mac Runyan . . . . .	133
<i>William Todd Schultz</i>	
<hr/>	
Bulletin Board . . . . .	135
Call for Papers . . . . .	137

## **William McKinley Runyan Festschrift Psychologist and Psychobiographer Wil- liam McKinley Runyan: Rebel with a Cause James William Anderson—Northwestern University**

*Abstract: William McKinley Runyan is a major figure in psychobiography because he played a central role in establishing the methodological basis for the field. The in-depth study of the individual life was in disrepute in academic psychology when he was a graduate student about five decades ago, but, in no small part through his publications, such studies gained legitimacy. The article traces Runyan's own life history and examines examples of his scholarship.*

*Keywords: academic-psychology, individual, life-history, personality-psychology, psychobiography, qualitative-psychology, the-Study-of-Lives, William McKinley Runyan*

With rare openness, William McKinley Runyan—widely referred to as “Mac”—does not hesitate to reveal stories about himself that might seem embarrassing. He told me once about a time when, in secondary school, he wrote a paper about Albert Schweitzer's groundbreaking study of the historical Jesus. Mac's teacher responded to the paper with the comment, “Your arrogance is exceeded only by your ignorance.” (I imagine that the teacher was a devout believer who was offended that Jesus could be viewed as a real person and not only as a holy object of worship.) What the anecdote says to me is that, even when a teenager, Mac had gumption, a willingness to challenge orthodox approaches, and faith in his considerable intellectual abilities. My comment to Mac today would be: “Your self-confidence is exceeded only by your productivity and your wide-ranging knowledge.” In his school yearbook, he was given the nickname “Reb” (short for Rebel).

I've known of Mac since the mid-1970s when I spent two summers at Harvard as a research assistant for Henry A. Murray, the founder of the approach called the “Study of Lives.” Murray opposed the narrow purview of academic personality psychology that emphasized studies of groups of subjects using statistics. He championed in-depth explorations of the individual. Seeing my interest in his approach, Murray thought of Mac, a contemporary of mine, who also was committed to the Study of Lives. He gave me Mac's name and recommended that I contact him. Clearly, Murray

recognized Mac's abilities and saw him as someone who would carry on Murray's tradition. Mac has done just that, and over the past half-century, he has been the foremost exponent of the Study of Lives. In espousing this approach, he has fought constantly against the grain of academic psychology and has lived up to his secondary-school nickname of Reb.

Preoccupied with other work and responsibilities, I regret that I failed to follow up on Murray's recommendation to contact Mac. But I finally met Mac in 1979 when I gave a talk at the University of California (UC), Berkeley, about my psychobiographical study of William James. While there, Mac and another specialist in psychobiography, Alan C. Elms, saw in me a fellow exponent of psychobiography and made my acquaintance. When they became founding members of the Society for Personology, they engineered an invitation for me. I missed the first annual meeting in 1982 but have attended almost every one since, as has Mac. In the beginning, Mac and I were the two youngest members. Now, we are probably the two oldest members (Mac is a year older than I am). It is through the meetings of the Society—which is dedicated to carrying on the Study of Lives tradition—that I came to know Mac well. We have a long history of sharing our work and offering encouragement to each other.

My already close friendship with Mac deepened dramatically beginning in 2012 when my son Alex began as a graduate student in physics and computational neuroscience at Berkeley. Over the next six years, I made two or three trips per year to visit my son. Every time I stayed at Mac's apartment and had long, wide-ranging discussions with him. Since my son received his PhD and began working in Silicon Valley, I have continued spending time with Mac when visiting my son. I've never met anyone with a greater combination of intelligence, curiosity, and enthusiasm.

My favorite personal story of Mac dates to one of my visits to Berkeley. The background has to do with Mac's illness, multiple sclerosis. Due to the illness, his mobility has been hampered for the past decade or more. He walks slowly with the help of a walker and drives his car with hand controls. I said to him one time, "How do you manage to keep up your spirits despite having this illness?" He replied, without hesitation, "Because I'm so lucky." I was shocked. He explained that he loved his life. As a Professor Emeritus, he spends his time with his large collection of books and his computer and pursues whatever topic captures his imagination at

the moment.

Broadly speaking, the topics are related to the Study of Lives, but every time I communicate with him, there is something new that entrances him. Some examples from over the years: pioneers in the history of statistics; the Eichmann trial; the preservation of the house near the Harvard campus where William James lived; psychoanalyst Karen Horney; sex historian Michel Foucault; humorist Erma Bombeck; social psychologist Muzafer Sherif; and Murray's World War II study of Adolf Hitler. Mac's contentment also owes much to his engaging, effervescent wife, Mary Coombs, PhD, who is an Adjunct Professor in the Department of Counseling Psychology at the University of San Francisco; his many friendships; and his ongoing closeness with his brother, John Runyan, who has had a successful career in applied behavioral science and business consulting.

William McKinley Runyan, the son of William Arthur Runyan and Elizabeth Runyan, was born in New York City on Halloween in 1947. He spent his infancy in New York City until his family moved to Radburn, New Jersey. When Mac was three years old, his family began their life in Ohio. His father accepted a job as an attorney for Goodyear Aerospace in Akron, Ohio, and continued with Goodyear until retirement. Mac lived for the remainder of his childhood in two towns about 30 miles south of Cleveland: Cuyahoga Falls and Hudson. As a day student, he attended Western Reserve Academy in Hudson.

During this period, his mother obtained a PhD in English literature from Kent State University and went on to teach at Kent State and Akron Universities. Mac was an indifferent student at Western Reserve Academy but an outstanding soccer player. He was admitted to Wesleyan College because of, he speculates, his athletic prowess. After a year at Wesleyan College, he transferred to Oberlin College. Despite being tri-captain of Oberlin's soccer team, he excelled academically and gained admission in 1969 to Harvard's doctoral program in Clinical Psychology and Public Practice.

The Vietnam War was raging when Mac finished college, and he would have been eligible to be drafted. But he qualified as a conscientious objector and held alternative service jobs for two years while also doing his graduate work. During the first year, he was at Brooke House, a halfway house in Boston for ex-convicts.

In the second year, he worked at the Walter E. Fernald State School for the developmentally disabled in Waltham, MA.

After receiving his PhD in 1975, he spent four years as a post-doc at the University of California, Berkeley; for two of those years, he was also a Visiting Instructor at the University of California, Santa Cruz. In 1979, he received an appointment to the faculty of the School of Social Welfare at UC Berkeley. He rose through the ranks to a full professorship. At UC Berkeley, he was also a Research Psychologist at the Institute of Personality Assessment and Research and an Affiliate in the Department of Psychology. In 2010, he transitioned to a position as an emeritus professor. He may be the only psychologist since Murray and White who, specializing throughout one's career in psychobiography and the Study of Lives, had a full professorship at a major research university.

Shortly after he entered graduate school at Harvard, he and the other new students sat in a circle with several of the faculty members and spoke about their interests. Mac stated his intention to study life histories and how they can be carried out systematically. He found that no one else had an interest anything like his. Near the end of his second year, one of the professors, David McClelland, wrote to him that Mac's "philosophical" interests did not fit with the empirical orientation of the program. In a letter that Mac still has, McClelland declared, "So, I would urge you strongly to leave Harvard before you waste more time here, your time and our time." Mac had no intention of departing. Another faculty member, Jerome Kagan, was, if anything, more offensive. Upon hearing of Mac's intention to write a dissertation on life histories, Kagan told him that his proposal was not like taking a rocket to the moon but more like making a trip to the garbage dump. Kagan probably was not far off in imagining that Mac pictured himself soaring into the heavens.

Mac, fortunately, found support from others, most notably two professors emeriti: Henry A. Murray and Robert W. White. White, who followed Murray as a leading proponent of the Study of Lives, wrote two widely read books, *The Abnormal Personality* (1948) and *Lives in Progress: A Study of the Natural Growth of Personality* (1972).

Mac's entire career as a scholar has been dedicated to exploring, promoting, and extending the in-depth investigation of the individual. While emphasizing psychology, he consistently advo-

cates studying the person within a social, cultural, economic, and historical context. It is here that he made his mark on psychobiography. He has done more than anyone else to establish the legitimacy of psychobiography in academic psychology and has made major contributions to the methodological basis of psychobiography.

Mac Runyan's 1975 dissertation is entitled *Life Histories: A Field of Inquiry and a Framework for Intervention*. Rewriting it extensively, he produced his groundbreaking book in 1982, *Life Histories and Psychobiography: Explorations in Theory and Method*. Runyan also edited a book, *Psychology and Historical Interpretation*, in 1988. He authored a large portion of the book, as it includes three chapters written by him, totaling 128 pages of text. His CV lists dozens of articles, book chapters, and reviews.

Mac's work contains many short examples of life histories, but he has not written an extensive psychobiography. Instead, he has concentrated on what is involved in producing quality life histories and on the status of life histories within the academic discipline of psychology. In no small part through Mac's efforts, what is called "qualitative psychology" (as opposed to quantitative—that is statistically driven—psychology) is now far more accepted in academic psychology than it was when Mac was a graduate student. For the past decade, the Society for Qualitative Inquiry in Psychology has been an official component of the American Psychological Association. Mac's work has also played a major part in establishing the foundation of the field of psychobiography.

Now I will discuss a representative array of the topics Mac has looked at, beginning with his most acclaimed paper. It also has what I have told him is the best title of any work in the field of psychobiography: "Why did van Gogh cut off his ear? The problem of alternative explanations in psychobiography" (1981). One criticism of psychobiography is that one can never be certain of an interpretation. Mac points out that, in many areas of inquiry, researchers cannot be sure of their conclusions. What matters, though, is coming to the best-possible interpretations. Looking at 13 different explanations for why van Gogh cut off his ear (or a portion of it—just how much is uncertain), Mac discusses how one can evaluate these explanations. What are the criteria for determining that one interpretation is preferable to another?

In his 2005 article "Evolving conceptions of psychobiog-



raphy and the Study of Lives: Encounters with psychoanalysis, personality psychology, and historical science,” Mac Runyan challenges a basic contention made by academic psychologists who are hostile to case studies. They claim that such studies belong to the early history of the field and, since then, scientific psychology has made progress in developing so-called rigorous, quantitative methods. Mac argues that case studies have continued to be valuable—they are not outmoded. Moreover, he notes, the deeper purpose of psychology is to be able to create high-quality examinations of the individual; in other words, what is the point of psychology if it does not help us understand a particular person?

Mac pays special attention to the concept of progress, and for good reason. One of the purposes of scholars and researchers of all kinds is to improve the capacity of research in their fields. I note as an aside that the belief that every field progresses is not as obviously true as it might seem to be. Yes, there are unquestionable instances of progress, such as medical treatments of diseases and the ability to build increasingly taller buildings that don’t fall. But does any modern psychologist understand people as profoundly as Leo Tolstoy? Is there any writer of fiction over the past 400 years who compares with William Shakespeare? But I’ll put aside that tangent, except to note that it is just the kind of question that Mac, with his robust curiosity, would be interested in.

Mac Runyan, in his 1990 article “Individual lives and the structure of personality psychology,” explores what constitutes progress in psychobiography and the Study of Lives. He analyzes the possible areas where improvement can take place, such as data collection, the use of increasingly better theories, and methods of interpretation. For this article, I re-read Mac’s 1990 paper and was surprised to see that he lists pretty much the same areas as those I write about in my upcoming book, *Psychobiography: In Search of the Inner Life* (to be published by Oxford University Press).

Mac is aware that the large majority of life histories and psychobiographies make use of a psychoanalytic perspective, having explored “Alternatives to psychoanalytic psychobiography” in his article of the same name. He concluded that the possibilities for other approaches seemed vast, but, at least as of 1988, the promise had been largely unfulfilled.

I notice that the pieces I have described date from some time ago, but Mac has never stopped writing. The final work of his that

I'll examine, entitled "Studying lives in different disciplinary sub-cultures: A psychologist's personal perspective," is due to be published by Oxford University Press in 2023. In looking at questions related to the Study of Lives, Mac provides vignettes about various individuals, such as Erik Erikson, Sigmund Freud, Karen Horney, B. F. Skinner, and Carl Rogers. One section concerns the historian of sexuality, Foucault, who was a leading opponent of the use of psychology in examining political actors and thinkers. Foucault was a perceptive and influential critic of mental health institutions. Students of his life have pointed out how the establishment discriminated against and injured Foucault because of his being gay and how Foucault also suffered from internalized homophobia that led to his personal guilt. Mac points out that Foucault's personal psychology no doubt played a part in motivating him to denounce the establishment. At the end of his life, Foucault looked back at his earlier work and concluded that he had erred in not giving enough value to the role of the individual—essentially reversing, concludes Mac, his disavowal of the contribution of the person.

For a closing anecdote that captures something about Mac, I go back in time to his fourth year as an Assistant Professor at Berkeley. He broke the precedent by applying early for tenure. He received a stark "no" with the dismissive comment, "Does not make a significant contribution to knowledge." Convinced the decision was unjust, Mac challenged it. Investigating what had happened, Dean Harry Specht learned that the chair of the tenure committee, Guy E. Swanson, had not even brought the application to the committee but had dismissed it unilaterally. Reviewing Mac's application at Specht's direction, the committee promoted him to an associate professorship, which carried tenure with it. Within the rank of Associate Professor, there were several gradations, and Mac was awarded a higher level than the one he had applied for.

Mac no doubt was helped by bringing to the committee's attention comments about his book *Life Histories and Psychobiography: Explorations in Theory and Method*. Robert W. White wrote, "With impressive scholarship and with commendable judgment Professor Runyan brings up to date the larger problems in the study of lives." Bertram J. Cohler, coincidentally the main professor I worked with at the University of Chicago, opined, "This volume is among the most significant contributions to the study of lives since Henry Murray's *Explorations in Personality*." Most impressive, a book review in *Science*, which is widely considered the

foremost of the many thousands of science journals in existence, stated that Mac's work, "does much to make the investigation of individual life history respectable once more for academicians" (Valliant, 1983, p. 842). The story of Mac protesting his denial of tenure illustrates what I said at the beginning of the article: Throughout his life, Mac Runyan has exhibited gumption, self-confidence, and a rebellious streak. He has long held high expectations for himself, and he has consistently exceeded them.

**James William Anderson, PhD**, a Professor of Clinical Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Northwestern University, specializes in psychobiography and has written a book, *Psychobiography: In Search of the Inner Life*, to be published in 2023 by Oxford University Press. He is a faculty member at the Chicago Psychoanalytic Institute and a former president of the Chicago Psychoanalytic Society. He serves as editor of *The Annual of Psychoanalysis* and a member of the Editorial Board of *Clio's Psyche*. He is the editor of the William McKinley Runyan Festschrift in this issue. He can be contacted at [j-anderson3@northwestern.edu](mailto:j-anderson3@northwestern.edu).

#### References

Vaillant, George E. (1983). Studying the unique. *Science*, 220(4599), 842-843.

For more information about Mac's work, go to [www.williamrunyan.com](http://www.williamrunyan.com).



## William McKinley Runyan Bibliography

**James William Anderson**—Chicago Psychoanal. Uni.

The following chronology covers part of William McKinley Runyan's bibliography:

- 1975—Writes *Life histories: A field of inquiry and a framework for intervention* as his dissertation for the Program in Clinical Psychology and Public Practice at Harvard University.
- 1981—His article, "Why did van Gogh cut off his ear? The problem of alternative explanations in psychobiography," appears in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*.
- 1982—Publishes *Life Histories and Psychobiography: Explorations in Theory and Method* at Oxford University Press.
- 1988—Publishes *Psychology and Historical Interpretation* through Oxford University Press.

- 1990—Writes “Individual lives and the structure of personality psychology,” which is published in *Studying Persons and Lives*.
- 2005—In W. T. Schultz’ *Handbook of Psychobiography*, writes the chapter “Evolving Conceptions of Psychobiography and the Study of Lives: Encounters with Psychoanalysis, Personality Psychology, and Historical Science.”
- TBA—Currently publishing his edited book with Alan C. Elms and Ramsay Bell Breslin titled *Examining Lives: Self-Reflections in Psychobiography* through Oxford University Press. □

## Essays in Honor of Runyan

### Gordon Allport and “Getting Away with It” at Harvard

**Raymond E. Fancher**—York University

*Abstract: This article describes similarities and differences between Mac Runyan’s and the author’s experiences as clinical psychology students at Harvard. We were several years apart in different programs, but we both were personally and profoundly influenced by the Harvard “personological” tradition established by Gordon Allport, Henry Murray, and Robert White. The paper goes on to document and emphasize Allport’s special importance both in the establishment and the maintenance of that tradition.*

*Keywords: Gordon Allport, Harvard Psychological Clinic, Henry Murray, psychobiography, Robert White, the-study-of-lives*

I first met the genial Mac Runyan on June 18, 1988, at the opening reception of the 20<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of Cheiron (The International Society for the History of Behavioral and Social Sciences) held at Princeton University. A newcomer to the group, Mac introduced himself to me, and I learned that we were both products of defunct Clinical Psychology programs at Harvard: I from the old Social Relations Department in 1966 and Mac from its short-lived Clinical Psychology and Public Practice Program in 1975. Further, we had both been profoundly influenced by the “personological” tradition established at Harvard in the 1930s and 1940s by Gordon Allport, Henry Murray, and Robert White. Our commonality of

interests has kindled a warm if mainly long-distance friendship, which is well into its fourth decade now.

Mac describes his *Handbook of Psychobiography* chapter “Evolving Conceptions of Psychobiography and the Study of Lives” as offering a particularly useful outlook on his work. I reviewed the *Handbook* shortly after its publication and wrote there that Mac’s chapter held particular interest for historians of psychology as it argued persuasively that psychobiography could potentially advance from being merely “a predecessor or adjunct to scientific psychology” to becoming “one of the ultimate objectives of an appropriately scientific and humanistic psychology.” On rereading it now, I am once again dazzled by the breadth and incisiveness of Mac’s scholarship, and particularly taken by his descriptions of personal encounters with significant personologists, including Murray, White, and the under-recognized Jerry Wiggins. I opined that Mac’s “brief accounts of these figures and their sometimes-surprising interrelations are fascinating and tantalizing, and call to attention the desirability of a full length history of personological psychology (hint, hint: Who better to do this than Runyan himself?)” (Fancher, 2006, p. 288).

These recollections further reminded me that although Mac and I both had career-shaping personal contact with two of the three personological fathers at Harvard, it was with two different pairs and under quite different conditions. Mac arrived with a strong, ready-made ambition to study life histories that was cruelly denigrated by mainstream senior faculty members. Allport had died in 1967, but with characteristic initiative, Mac sought out Murray and White, who were retired but still active and highly receptive to his inquiries. They helped him negotiate his way to an important dissertation that became the basis for his landmark book *Life Histories and Psychobiography: Explorations in Theory and Method* (1982). This became a template for his later career, as he has quite brilliantly and in diverse ways expanded and explored that field of inquiry.

My own path through life history research has been more serendipitous and meandering, finishing at a quite different place from where it started. I had learned a little about Allport and Murray as an undergraduate at Wesleyan, and White’s engaging *The Abnormal Personality* (1948) had drawn me toward clinical psychology. But my original intention at Harvard was to integrate clinical training with educational research, and my assigned first-year advisor/supervisor was Richard Alpert, who held appointments

in both Education and Social Relations. My experience with him was “interesting,” but better described on another occasion; it ended abruptly with his firing at the end of my first year.

Therefore, when I entered Allport's seminar on Personality and Social Psychology in my second year, I was academically adrift and a little apprehensive. I'd never met Allport before, and with his dark suit and formal manner, he seemed almost intimidating. In our first classes, he prepared a detailed seating chart and addressed each of us with a formal “Mr.,” “Miss,” or “Mrs.” while quizzing us closely about the initial reading assignments—of which we were instructed to acquire “a searching acquaintance.” Things gradually loosened up, however, as we discussed and debated issues in personality and social psychology that Allport had famously promoted, including the value of individual case studies and his perennial question of “How shall a psychological life history be written?”

Before the final examination, he gave us six questions with instructions to prepare answers for “any or all of them” on exam day. While studying, I had a surprising “Aha! idea” for an exploratory approach to the issue of life-history writing—neither an answer to a question nor on a topic I had ever seriously considered before. On exam day, Allport specified two questions and left a third to our own choosing; taking a chance, I held my breath and outlined the idea. A couple of days later, we passed by each other in the hall, and he invited me to his office to discuss my exam. As I was nervously sitting down, he asked if I was planning the project as my PhD thesis. Stunned, I stammered a question about the acceptability of such an exploratory and nonexperimental project, to which he smiled and responded, “Well, Baldwin got away with *his*.” I knew he referred here to Alfred Baldwin, a favorite early student of his whose “Letters from Jenny” study we had discussed in class. He added that, as a retiree, he could not officially advise me but would serve as an unofficial consultant if I found others to stand in.

Feeling suddenly less adrift, I enlisted the young Bob Rosenthal to be my surrogate supervisor, and more crucially, Robert White as a supportive and expert advisory committee member. He granted me access to his extensive files from the Harvard Psychological Clinic, from which I was able to extract several hundred distinct “events” from diverse case studies that could be presented in multiple-choice format for my study. My exposure to the richness and interest of those files, and to examples

of the tact and empathy with which White himself had conducted many of the most sensitive interviews, provided a clinical education in itself. About the same age as my father, “Dr. White” struck me as a benevolent father figure in the clinical program. At my oral defense, when a senior examiner skeptically questioned my study’s lack of formal hypotheses, he came to my rescue by mildly but decisively interjecting that besides the common “experiment of proof” that tests the validity of precisely specified hypotheses, there is also a legitimate “experiment of light” that can lay the groundwork for new fields of investigation.

His opinion held and facilitated the acceptance of my dissertation, with tentative but promising-seeming findings about the attributes of personality conceptualizations that enabled subjects to make accurate judgments about events from the case studies. As I began my first job at the University of Rochester where I planned to follow up, I received a congratulatory letter from Allport stating that although the general problem remained “baffling,” “I wish you all success in running it to the ground” (personal communication, December 13, 1966).

Soon, however, came the shocking news of Allport’s death from cancer, followed by the realization that my promising-seeming thesis results, based on Harvard student subjects writing about the case histories of earlier Harvard students, completely failed to replicate with broader populations. Running the problem to the ground would clearly require vastly more diverse case material, subjects, and other resources than I could possibly afford to obtain. This inspired a gradual transition of my interests and efforts into more historical and biographical directions, and toward actually writing psychologically oriented life histories of prominent psychological thinkers. When I sent my 1979 *Pioneers of Psychology* to Robert White along with an explanation of how and why I had changed my interests, his pleasing reply stated that he would have made the same choices and that “if you have skill and interest in understanding people you really want to use it rather than... searching for abstract conditions regarding its use” (personal communication, March 15, 1980).

Going forward, after I moved to York University’s large and diverse Psychology Department, I found inspiring senior colleagues in David Bakan and Kurt Danziger, who promoted the almost heretical-seeming practice of allowing occasional historical theses and dissertations. In 1980 they spearheaded a movement to establish

“History and Theory” as a formal graduate specialization area, to which students could apply with the specific intention of pursuing historical research. I joined the two of them as a third “primary” faculty member of this new area, which continues to thrive today. Among the gifted students who enrolled was Ian Nicholson, with a proposal to study the life and career of Gordon Allport. I became much more of an admiring observer than a formal supervisor as Ian dove deeply into the Allport papers at Harvard and established a warm relationship with his son Robert. He produced an award-winning dissertation and the outstanding book *Inventing Personality: Gordon Allport and the Science of Selfhood* (2003), from which I learned a great deal that was new to me about the life history of my Harvard mentor.

To start, I learned about the absolute centrality of Allport in enabling the whole personalistic tradition at Harvard. He had “gotten away with” a highly unorthodox Harvard dissertation of his own in 1921, conveniently assisted by his older brother Floyd whose 1919 dissertation on “social facilitation” had won the admiration of the founding Editor of the *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*—so much so that he invited Floyd to become his co-editor and expanded the periodical’s title to *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* (*JASP*). Floyd was also retained at Harvard as an instructor and enlisted his graduate student brother Gordon as an unofficial editorial assistant.

From this privileged vantage point, the brothers noted that the previously little-used word “personality” was increasingly appearing in psychological articles, usually as a substitute for the older term “character.” Deciding that this “elusive term” deserved systematic discussion, they proposed the notion of personality “traits” as its unifying concept. Gordon’s dissertation research was a pilot study of this idea, as he collected data purportedly measuring 10 hypothesized trait dimensions from 55 Harvard undergraduates. Although entailing considerable work, the study produced no striking findings apart from the fact that no two subjects’ “profiles” of their 10 measured traits turned out closely alike. When Gordon presented these modest results to the formidable Edward Bradford Titchener and his “Society of Experimentalists,” Titchener harshly questioned why such an unscientific project had been permitted. Nonetheless, the dissertation passed with Floyd’s help, with results prominently summarized in a 1921 *JASP* article co-authored by the two brothers.



In 1922 Harvard changed dramatically as Floyd departed for North Carolina and Titchener's prize student Edwin G. Boring arrived as a senior professor. In the meantime, Gordon experienced a "second intellectual dawn" in Germany with his exposure to Gestalt Psychology and, particularly, William Stern, the "personalistic" psychologist. Stern posited the "person" as his central concept whose "real individuality" was a unified and Gestalt-like conception of the person's unique self that is best approached by studying the relationships of qualities within a detailed life history or case study. These ideas convinced Allport that "Personality" could become a fully independent discipline, employing a complementary combination of what he later would call nomothetic methods for assessing trait interrelationships, and idiographic ones with an emphasis on individual case studies for approaching real individuality.

Gordon returned to Harvard in 1924 as an instructor, not with Boring in Psychology but in the small Department of Social Ethics where his seminar on "Personality and Social Ameliorization" became one of the earliest university courses with personality in its title. He cautiously approached Boring with an offer to help develop a new introductory psychology course, which was surprisingly accepted. This marked the beginning of a seemingly "odd couple" friendship, as the two men with very different temperaments and contrasting visions for psychology liked and respected each other. Allport's amiable personality certainly facilitated this, as he was known by colleagues for unfailing courtesy in interpersonal dealings and described by his superior in Social Ethics as "unusually sympathetic, tactful and sensitive" (Nicholson, 2003, p. 145).

In 1926, Allport left Harvard's Social Ethics for the Psychology Department at Dartmouth but returned to Harvard to teach summer psychology courses under Boring. When the controversial "social psychologist" William McDougall left Harvard in 1928, Boring saw Allport as a congenial replacement. In the negotiations that followed, Allport tactfully wrote Boring that "every problem that *can* be approached experimentally should be," but nevertheless there remain "genuine problems [that] cannot be made accessible to the laboratory method" (Nicholson, 2003, p. 171). He wondered what the attitude toward nonexperimental doctoral theses in psychology would be at Harvard. Boring reported "mild astonishment" at the question because he had "taken it for granted" that most dissertations under Allport "would not be experi-

mental” (Nicholson, 2003, p. 171). In his quietly diplomatic way, Allport received assurance from the very start that future Harvard students on the soft side of psychology would be able to “get away with” nonexperimental dissertations that would be unacceptable elsewhere.

As Allport’s reputation and professional profile expanded at Harvard in the 1930s he became an influential but minority “sociotrope” in a department dominated by experimentally oriented “biotropes.” When an explosive dispute developed between the experimental psychologists and Henry Murray at the Harvard Psychological Clinic, Allport became Murray’s most important and successful internal defender. After Murray was finally formally retained in 1937, he sent Allport a handsome certificate reading: “GORDON ALLPORT – Ideal administrator, world champion of the Unique Personality, even of the Unique Clinic, who at a crisis in our evolution stood alone for us, like Horatio at the Bridge.... But for him we would have been swept downstream and by the tide lost” (Nicholson, 2003, Fig. 38).

Thus, Allport’s influence and diplomatic skill were crucial in ensuring Murray’s continuance at Harvard, and the publication of his discipline-defining *Personality: A Psychological Interpretation* in 1937, followed the next year by the Murray-edited *Explorations in Personality*, consolidated Harvard’s position as the leading center for teaching and research in the new field. Also saved in this development was Robert White, Murray’s student who became first his chief lieutenant and then successor as Clinic Director during Murray’s frequent absences. As author of the only extended case history to be included in *Explorations*, White became a leading member of Allport’s 1940 seminar on the question “How shall a psychological life history be written?” and subsequently published sensitive case studies on Clinic subjects dubbed “Joseph Kidd” and “Helmler.” In 1946, when Allport led the socially oriented psychologists to leave Psychology and join sociologists and social anthropologists in a new “Department of Social Relations,” he arranged to have White appointed Director of the new clinical program with the rank of tenured Lecturer: his first officially secure position at Harvard. In White’s subsequent 20+ year career, he became arguably the most virtuosic *practitioner* of life history writing at Harvard, both in articles and luminous books, including *The Abnormal Personality* and *Lives in Progress*. Also, of course, he became an immensely important personal influence on both Mac and

me.

Although Gordon Allport himself conducted relatively little actual life history research, his question of “how a life history should be written” remained central in his teaching until the end of his life. He was absolutely indispensable in creating and maintaining the Harvard environment in which such work could be “gotten away with.” Mac and I are both deeply indebted to him for that and have tried, I believe, to honor that debt by supporting psychobiographical and life-history research in students and colleagues of our own. Although Allport’s question most likely will never be completely “run to the ground” as he had hoped, highly positive strides toward it have certainly been made by Mac. This is in consort with fellow Personology Society members such as Jim Anderson and Alan Elms, and also complemented by the efforts and methodology of the Psychobiography Group of the Psychohistory Forum.

**Raymond E. Fancher, PhD**, is a Senior Scholar and Professor of Psychology Emeritus at York University in Toronto. He was a founder of York’s graduate program in Historical, Theoretical and Critical Studies of Psychology in 1980, and he has published three books and over 100 articles in those fields. He served as Editor of the *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* and was a recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Society for the History of Psychology (Division 26 of the American Psychological Association). Among the remaining items on his to-do list is the completion of a psychobiography of Francis Galton. He can be contacted at [fancher@yorku.ca](mailto:fancher@yorku.ca).

#### References

- Fancher, Raymond (2006). Review of W. T. Schultz, ed., *Handbook of psychobiography*. *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, 42(3), 287-289.
- Fancher, Raymond (2020). Robert White and the study of lives. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia, Psychology*. doi: 10.1093/acrefore/9780190236557.013.616
- Nicholson, Ian (2003). *Inventing personality: Gordon Allport and the science of selfhood*. American Psychological Association. □

## Literary Fiction as Psychobiography: F. Scott Fitzgerald and James McKeen Cattell

Michael M. Sokal—Worcester Polytechnic Institute

*Abstract:* In response to William McKinley (“Mac”) Runyan, this article suggests that literary fiction can present an alternative approach to psychologically informed life histories. The article examines episodes in the life of psychologist James McKeen Cattell (1860-1944) from a point of view provided by F. Scott Fitzgerald’s portrayal of Anson Hunter, the fictional protagonist of his 1926 short story, “The Rich Boy.”

*Keywords:* 9<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Psychology, alternative-psychobiography, F. Scott Fitzgerald, James McKeen Cattell, Johns Hopkins University, literary-fiction, William McKinley Runyan

As his autobiography makes clear, Mac Runyan’s interest in psychobiography stems from his concern for life histories and particularly from his fascination with the intense study of individual lives. This interest led him in 1969 to begin his graduate study in the Harvard Program in Clinical Psychology and Public Practice and, since then, Mac’s scholarship exhibits a breadth and depth of interest that reflects the richness of his graduate education. One notable characteristic of Mac’s approach to psychobiography is its openness to alternatives to psychoanalytic psychobiography. Mac has been disappointed that he has “not found as many [alternatives] as [he] expected” (Runyan, 2021, p. 140). Perhaps this essay might begin to hint at the possibility, at least, of one of these alternatives.

As I consider my relationship with Mac, I think of him as one of the kindest men I know. His scholarly interest in the lives of individuals finds itself reflected in his concern for those around him. Over the years of our friendship, Mac has been a real personal source of support, which I am glad to acknowledge here.

Mac and I first met in the 1980s. I remember very well one visit he paid me in Worcester, Massachusetts, where I’ve lived (and taught at Worcester Polytechnic Institute) since 1970. Most psychologists probably think of Worcester as the site of Clark University, and readers of *Clio’s Psyche* undoubtedly know that in 1909, Sigmund Freud paid his only visit to the United States to speak at Clark. The university’s president, G. Stanley Hall, had invited him to Worcester to participate in a conference celebrating the university’s 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Other prominent Europeans in the psychoan-

alytic orbit—including Carl G. Jung, Ernest Jones, and Sandor Ferenczi—also attended, and Freud’s series of lectures were a highlight of the conference.

One artifact left by the Clark Conference is a group photo of many (almost all?) of the psychologists (and those in closely related fields, such as psychiatry and neurology) attending the event (see Ross, 1972, after p. 389). Mac took the opportunity of this visit to try to identify the spot on the Clark campus where this famous photo was taken and concluded that the group posed in front of a large window of what is now the Jefferson Academic Center facing Worcester’s Main Street. Others have suggested different sites for this photo, so Mac’s identification remains unconfirmed.

After suggesting something of Mac’s admirable character, it’s a serious comedown to present a psychobiographical essay focusing on a much-less-likable individual, James McKeen Cattell. It’s not that Cattell was not a significant character in early 20<sup>th</sup> century American scientific life. After all, he was one of the psychologists who attended the 1909 Clark Conference, and he appears in the well-known group photo, standing in the second row and facing to his left. (He’s number 13 in the tracing of the photo published in Ross’s [1972] biography of Hall. All others in the photo face forward.) Of course, his importance for the history of American psychology—and even more for American science writ large—extends far beyond his attendance at the Clark Conference. That’s why Hall invited him. In 1909 he was in his 18<sup>th</sup> year as Professor of Psychology at Columbia University. From 1891 Cattell had established a major center for training experimentalists and other psychologists there as well as created and implemented an ambitious (though ultimately unsuccessful) program of “mental tests,” a term he himself had apparently coined.

Some personal details will help put his life, career, and character into appropriate context. He was born in 1860, the son of a professor (and later president) of Lafayette College in Easton, Pennsylvania, and the grandson (whose name he was given) of one of the richest men in Easton. He thus grew up as the scion of one of the city’s leading families, and when the time came, he attended Lafayette. His professors always held his performance to their high standards. But they taught most of their classes in McKeen Hall and were always aware he was their college president’s son. He later studied at Johns Hopkins, and in 1886, he earned his PhD from the University of Leipzig after working with Wilhelm Wundt,

the purported founder of what became known as the “new psychology.” He then spent two years, intermittently, at St. John’s College, Cambridge.

While in England, he spent much time in London, where he met and became enamored of the ideas of Francis Galton. Galton’s interest in the differences between people helped shape Cattell’s own program of mental testing. But Galton’s promotion of eugenics had its strongest impact on Cattell. Importantly, Cattell always played down the negative implications of eugenics as it developed in the United States, and he never supported such programs as eugenic sterilization and immigration restriction. Instead, he promoted positive eugenical programs that called for the “fittest” individuals to marry each other and have large families. With his strong sense of self-regard, Cattell and his wife Josephine had seven children. In 1889, Cattell became Professor of Psychology at the University of Pennsylvania, and in 1891, he doubled his salary with a move to Columbia University, where he remained until 1917.

But why, then, are Cattell’s life and career of particular interest in an essay offering an alternative approach to psychobiography? The immediate answer emerges as one considers just how he was presented in Louis Menand’s well-respected history, *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America* (2001). This thoughtful account characterizes Cattell as “obnoxious.”

Needless to say, “obnoxious” is a strong descriptor, and it is one that really must be justified. Much recent scholarship on Cattell’s life and career provides all-too-many examples of Cattell’s unpleasant and, yes, truly obnoxious behavior. These present a psychobiographer with a series of interesting tasks; that is, to illustrate Cattell’s obnoxiousness and explain just how and why Cattell developed this trait. This essay focuses on two particularly illustrative incidents, one in 1884, soon after his 24<sup>th</sup> birthday, and one in 1929, at age 69.

In 1883, at age 23, Cattell won a fellowship at Johns Hopkins and spent the following academic year at the university. At Lafayette, he had unavoidably been a focus of his professors’ attention. In Baltimore, however, he was not, and he arrogantly complained that Daniel Coit Gilman, the university’s president, “has not taken as much interest in me, as he might have” (Sokal, 1981, p. 74). In 1884, professors at Johns Hopkins did not renew Cattell’s fellowship for a second year and awarded it instead to a fellow stu-

dent, John Dewey (and not Thorstein Veblen). Cattell responded by throwing a fit and attacking his professors (including a younger G. Stanley Hall) for what he saw as a purposeful personal insult: "I was scarcely treated fairly" (Sokal, 1981, p. 80). He later threatened President Gilman that, if he discovered "that personal considerations had influenced the withholding of the fellowship," he would "bring suit against the authorities of the university" (Sokal, 1981, p. 208).

Cattell also called on Hall at his summer home, and as Hall reported the meeting to Gilman, "He came all smiles and amiability... [but] suddenly begun to talk with most insulting way and almost charged me with lying when on the spot without even a shadow of either basis or occasion. I do not know that I have ever in my life been so angry at a human being" (Sokal, 1981, p. 111). As Ross's biography makes clear, Hall had apparently misled (perhaps even knowingly) Cattell about the renewal of his fellowship, and similar acts of perhaps purposeful dishonesty occurred throughout Hall's career. In light of that, Cattell's actions might be seen as a young man simply standing up for what he perceived to be his rights. But these incidents clearly exhibit the self-righteous narcissistic arrogance to which the term "obnoxious" may be appropriately applied.

But what led Cattell to act as he did? He hinted at his motivation in 1903, as he explicitly expressed his self-righteous egotism in just about so many words. As he told Edward B. Titchener, a professional colleague at Cornell, he never "object[ed] to a fight in a good cause," and he narcissistically always "regard[ed] any cause for which [he] did fight as good" (Cattell, 1903). Instances of such fights peppered his career.

In 1917, Columbia dismissed Cattell from the professorship he had held since 1891, and the incident has often been portrayed as an egregious violation of his academic freedom, brought about by his opposition to U.S. participation in World War I. But as a recent analysis of this episode argues (Sokal, 2009), Cattell's response to U.S. involvement served only as the clichéd last straw in his dealings with his Columbia colleagues. The university's actions were much more a response to Cattell's longstanding unpleasant (indeed often obnoxious) statements and actions throughout his professorship than to his opposition to the war.

Nonetheless, even after he lost his professorship, his col-

leagues in psychology still identified him as one of their science's founders in America, and they began honoring Cattell as one of psychology's grand old men. Through the 1920s and 1930s, he continued to attend annual meetings of the American Psychological Association. In 1929, he served as President of the 9<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Psychology—the first to be held in the United States—convened that September at Yale. Since I began my studies of Cattell in the late 1960s, my first years of research overlapped the final years of many psychologists whose own careers began before World War II, and I was able to interview several of them about my subject.

Several of them described Cattell as a gruff old man who shook his head ostentatiously in response to less-than-first-rate papers presented by younger scholars. Almost all of them remembered “clearly” an episode involving Cattell at the International Congress, and all claimed (at times in so many words) they'd never forget what he said. The specific incident involved Cattell's response to a presentation by Scottish (though English-educated) psychologist William McDougall, then a professor at Duke University. Through the 1920s, McDougall performed experiments trying to demonstrate the Lamarckian inheritance of learned characteristics. Cattell was not the only auditor who heard McDougall's presentation. But all who reported on Cattell's response stressed its fury. One remembered that Cattell simply hissed loudly when McDougall finished his remarks. Another reported that Cattell commented that he wouldn't believe anything McDougall said, no matter what his data supposedly showed. Interestingly, after the Congress, several younger psychologists who had heard Cattell's response exchanged letters, and they all reported how shocked they were that Cattell acted as he did. Unfortunately, none reported precisely what Cattell said.

Fortunately for this historian, psychologist Walter R. Miles (then at Stanford University) was an obsessive notetaker and kept an almost word-for-word record of much that went on during the Congress. His report of Cattell's response to McDougall's presentation—recently recovered by Lizette Barton, Reference Archivist at the Cummings Center for the History of Psychology at the University of Akron, where Miles's diary has been deposited—is exceptionally detailed. The page itself is headed (with double underlining) “The Cattell Rejoinder” and opens with the words “Cattell. Unfortunately, Sharp Rejoinder. Made friends for McDougall.” As



Miles quotes Cattell's comments, they began with criticisms of McDougall's technical assumptions and went on, "these experiments are interesting but of course they are wrong... I must be permitted to say that your methods are not modern" (Miles, 1929). Cattell continued with some further technical comments. And finally, Miles recorded the following exchange: "Dr. McD do you know why they were a failure (No) I do (and will tell you later)" (Miles, 1929). Reading this account leads me to wonder if the loud hissing reported came not from Cattell but was, instead, another auditor's response to Cattell's comments.

This account of Cattell's obnoxiousness—or perhaps more kindly, his self-righteous narcissistic arrogance—leads any psychobiographer to ask: Just how and why did Cattell develop this character trait? One possibility emerges when the scholar remembers that James McKeen Cattell bore the name of one of the richest men in the small city he was born and spent his earlier years. His family was certainly well off, and they supported his eight years of study and international travel to Lafayette (see Sokal, 1981, p. 245). Others were not so fortunate. For example, before he was awarded the Johns Hopkins fellowship (worth \$500) that had been Cattell's, John Dewey had to rely on a loan from an aunt and his earnings from teaching school for several years to pay for his tuition and living expenses during his first year in Baltimore.

Simply having money throughout one's life, however, does not explain becoming obnoxious. When viewed through the lens provided by these observations and an analysis from American author F. Scott Fitzgerald, perhaps Cattell's relative riches begin to suggest some of the roots of his character. In particular, I believe that one can learn much about Cattell—and perhaps even begin to develop a non-psychoanalytic psychobiography of him—by comparing him with Anson Hunter, the protagonist of Fitzgerald's well-regarded 1926 short story, "The Rich Boy."

An early pair of sentences in "The Rich Boy" comprise Fitzgerald's (January & February 1926) most often quoted remark; they are certainly well known to readers and critics of American literary fiction: "Let me tell you about the very rich. They are different from you and me." Ernest Hemingway even had the protagonist of his equally well-regarded 1936 short story, "The Snows of Kilimanjaro," mockingly remember "poor Scott Fitzgerald... who had started a story that once began, 'The very rich are different from you and me.'" As Hemingway's character sarcastically con-

tinued, "Yes they have more money."

But Hemingway's throw-away dismissal of Fitzgerald's introduction to his portrayal of Anson Hunter misses the depth of the portrait he paints. That is, as Fitzgerald (January & February 1926) continues, "They [the very rich] possess and enjoy early, and it does something to them.... They think, deep in their hearts, that they are better than we are because we had to discover the compensations and refuges of life for ourselves. Even when they enter deep into our world or sink below us, they still think that they are better than we are."

Accepting Fitzgerald's rather harsh characterization of the wealthy, one can see traces of the kind of self-righteous narcissistic egotism that Cattell clearly exhibited throughout his life and career. The story offers no hint that Hunter held eugenical views, but further similarities appear in Fitzgerald's description of Anson Hunter's boyhood. For example, Hunter found that his friends' parents "were vaguely excited when their own children were asked to [his] house," and even as a child he noticed "the half-grudging American deference that was paid to him" (Sokal, 2009, p. 90). Cattell experienced much the same attention—both within his family and from his friends' parents—and like any child raised within a given setting, he took it for granted. Indeed, he grew to expect this deference as his due when he entered his academic career. Like Anson Hunter, Cattell "accepted this as the natural state of affairs" and thus developed "a sort of impatience with all groups of which he was not the center... which remained with him for the rest of his life" (Sokal, 2009, p. 90). With these words, Fitzgerald could very well have been writing about Cattell.

"The Rich Boy" follows Anson Hunter into his 30<sup>th</sup> year and shows him in several family, social, romantic, and business settings. Hunter's not always "successful" in all of his endeavors. But whether he's seducing a Debutante, being forced to apologize (though never in so many words) for his actions while drunk, or dealing with a family crisis, he always remains fully confident (as Cattell was) of his personal stature and self-ensured in his ability to deal with the circumstances. Perhaps he never had (as Cattell did) "to fight in a good cause" (Cattell, 1903). But perhaps that's a benefit of being really (or at least fictionally) "very rich."

Here, then, is a portrait of a fictional literary figure that

meshes just about precisely with the characterization that emerges from a detailed review of Cattell's attitudes and actions. Indeed, Fitzgerald's words and insights convey, I believe, a vivid psychobiographical portrait of at least two individuals—that is, both Hunter and Cattell—from which a reader can learn much. It thus offers, I think, an effective alternative approach to psychobiography beyond the psychoanalytic that Mac Runyan seeks.

**Michael M. Sokal, PhD**, is a historian of science and technology (PhD, Case Western Reserve University, 1972) who has written extensively on the history of psychology and American science writ large. He is Professor of History, Emeritus, at Worcester Polytechnic Institute (active 1970-2005). He has served as Program Officer for Integrated Humanities and Science Education at the National Endowment for the Humanities (1995) and as Program Director for Science & Technology Studies (History, Philosophy, & Social Studies of Science & Technology) at the National Science Foundation (1998-2000). From 1997 through 2005, he was the Founding Editor of the APA-sponsored quarterly, *History of Psychology*. He can be contacted at msokal@wpi.edu.

### References

- Cattell, James McKeen (December 19, 1903). Letter to Edward B. Titchener, Titchener papers, Cornell University Archives, Ithaca, NY.
- Fitzgerald, F. Scott (January & February 1926). The rich boy. *Redbook*.
- Hemingway, Ernest (August 1936). The snows of Kilimanjaro. *Esquire*.
- Miles, Walter R. (1929, September 5). Comments on William McDougall presentation [Notes from the Ninth International Congress of Psychology, Yale University, New Haven, CT]. Miles papers, Cummings Center for the History of Psychology, University of Akron, Akron, OH.
- Ross, Dorothy (1972). *G. Stanley Hall: The psychologist as prophet*. University of Chicago Press.
- Runyan, William McKinley (2021). Changing visions of psychology and life histories: A personal journey. In Paul H. Elovitz (Ed.), *The many roads of the builders of psychohistory* (pp. 135-140). Academic Press.
- Sokal, Michael M. (Ed.). (1981). *An education in psychology: James McKeen Cattell's journal and letters from Germany and England, 1880-1888*. MIT Press.
- Sokal, Michael M. (2009). James McKeen Cattell, Nicholas Murray Butler, and academic freedom at Columbia University, 1902–1923. *History of Psychology*, 12(2), 87-122. □

## Psychobiography and the Meaningful Life

**Daniel S. Benveniste**—Cali. School of Pro. Psychology

*Abstract: Psychobiography is a scholarly method of psychological investigation that explores the personal and historical contexts of the subject from a given psychological perspective. Within the context of the depth psychologies, the author asserts that by linking the subject's early childhood traumas to the passionate interests of adulthood, we can discover what led the subject to live such an apparently meaningful life.*

*Keywords: childhood-trauma, Freud, meaningful-life, psychobiography, psychology, Runyan, sublimated-activity, trauma*

I met Mac Runyan after a psychoanalytic lecture we both attended in San Francisco in 1991. When the meeting ended, we left the building and stood under a light on Divisadero Street talking about the Study of Lives and the autobiographical nature of human expression until well after midnight. That was my first encounter with Mac Runyan's extraordinary capacity to wonder out loud.

Soon thereafter, I read his landmark *Life Histories and Psychobiography: Explorations in Theory and Method* (1982) and joined the newly formed San Francisco Psychobiography Work Group—the most fascinating seminar I've ever attended. Unlike the other participants, I was not working on a psychobiography at the time but instead writing short biographical sketches of people associated with the early history of psychoanalysis in San Francisco.

Each group member had their own approach to psychobiography; for example, I always wondered about the nature of the transference an author develops toward the subject of the psychobiography. This transference aspect pertains to what I call the autobiographical nature of writing psychobiography. I'm not suggesting that a psychobiography is pure autobiography. Runyan has advocated effectively for methodological rigor in the Study of Lives. I strongly support his position, but of course, there are always autobiographical components reflected in the choice of a subject, the lenses through which the subject is viewed, the emphases that are made, and those aspects of the subject's life that are given lesser or no attention.

Shortly after leaving San Francisco and moving to Venezue-

la in 1999, I befriended Sigmund Freud's oldest grandchild, W. Ernest Freud (originally Ernst Wolfgang Halberstadt), who in 2001 asked me to write his biography. When he was 18 months old, he was the object of his grandfather's famous play observation described in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920): The boy who played the game of *fort-da*, in which he threw a cotton reel out of his cot, with his mother retrieving it repeatedly. Ernest was also the only one of Freud's grandchildren who became a psychoanalyst. My transference to him elaborated the originally unconscious motivation for my interest in psychoanalytic history, which I had previously discovered was related to my grandfather, Nissim Benveniste, who died when my mother was pregnant with me.

Nissim was much loved, and his early death left everyone in the family so pained they could rarely, if ever, speak of him. Consequently, I grew up in the silent presence of this absent other, leaving me always curious about anything that happened long ago. My transference to Ernest, who could remember his grandfather, maintained my interest throughout the project, but then there came a bonus. Ernest developed a transference to me! He saw me not as his son, Colin, who had died some years before and would have been about my age, but as his little brother, Heinerle, who died in 1923 of military tuberculosis just three years after their mother, Sophie Freud-Halberstadt, had died of the Spanish flu. I began my psychobiographical research wondering if I might find in W. Ernest Freud's early life experiences traumatic scenarios that would have influenced his later life.

In searching for the meaning of life, some people find the formulas of others to be dead ends, as the meaning of life is generally not transferable, much less universal. Yet if we put aside formulas for the meaning of life and instead look at people who live meaningful lives, we discover people who are enthusiastic, impassioned, following their muse, and in the grip of their daemon.

In the Study of Lives and my psychotherapeutic work with patients, I have come to recognize that people often have experienced a childhood trauma that led to a psychological conflict, which was expressed as a symptom and later transformed into a sublimated activity. Maybe it's a hobby, an artistic endeavor, a career, an intellectual line of inquiry, a spiritual calling, a political involvement, or even a family. The sublimated activity delivers to them a deep sense of satisfaction—a sense of meaning.

Some, who were bullied in childhood, stay close to the trauma and remain symptomatic by pursuing a life of ongoing victimization, or they turn passive into active and become bullies themselves. Others, however, position themselves close to the traumatic scenario but sublimate their conflict by reconfiguring themselves as protectors. Some who were not well seen or recognized by parents may call attention to themselves in symptomatic ways or transform the trauma by becoming performers, politicians, marketing specialists, or some other profession that appropriately attracts the attention of others. Many medical doctors found their careers in childhood when a family member became ill. Many criminals, police, and lawyers are often engaged in the struggle between the demands of the id and those of the superego as they were initially played out in early childhood. As I like to tell my students, "A good dissertation topic is a symptom that you want to sublimate."

Although Sigmund Freud did not write about the meaning of life, he evidently lived a meaningful life. He had a passionate engagement with the world: He saw patients all day long, ate dinners with his family, and then wrote with a fountain pen by lamp-light until late in the night. By the end of his life, he had formulated psychoanalytic theory and technique, established an international organization, and written 23 volumes that illuminated the very nature of the soul. He also smoked 20 cigars a day and suffered digestive and cardiac problems. While many of our conflicts can be sublimated, no one's conflicts—not even Freud's—are sublimated completely or always.

We find psychological meaning in recognizing the social-emotional metaphor embedded in the remembered story of trauma, linking it to parallel scenarios in contemporary life. Some of those scenarios are themselves symptoms, and others are meaningfully sublimated. Let's look at three of Freud's early childhood traumas.

Sigmund Freud was born on May 6, 1856, and his brother Julius came a year and a half later. In 1897, during his self-analysis, Freud recalled his malevolent wishes and childish jealousy directed toward this rival who had stolen his mother's love. When Julius died at seven months, little Sigmund's malevolent death wishes were miraculously fulfilled.

Freud's mother was his father's third wife. His father's first wife had a son who, in turn, had a son, John, who was one year older than Sigmund, meaning that John was Sigmund's nephew. The

two were great friends and rivals. The dynamic of pleasure and guilt in surviving the death of Julius, combined with his intense friendship and rivalry with his nephew, John, established in Freud's object relations a specific way of relating to close friends and colleagues.

In a letter to Wilhelm Fliess, Freud wrote, "This nephew and this younger brother have determined, then, what is neurotic, but also what is intense, in all my friendships" (Masson, 1985, p. 268). The dynamic of a great friend and rival in the same person was obvious in Freud's relationships with Joseph Breuer, Wilhelm Fliess, Alfred Adler, Carl Jung, Otto Rank, and others. In another letter to Fliess, Freud wrote, "I have found, in my own case too, [the phenomenon of] being in love with my mother and jealous of my father, and I now consider it a universal event in early childhood, even if not so early as in children who have been made hysterical" (Masson, 1985, p. 272).

Freud recognized the same scenario in the legend of Oedipus Rex and the dreams and free associations of his patients. He further speculated that the Oedipus complex was an organizing dynamic in the construction of personality and the very foundation of culture.

Freud's heir apparent was his daughter Anna Freud. It is well known that she had a very close relationship with her father and dedicated herself to preserving and extending his work. What is acknowledged to a lesser extent is that she had a lifelong conflict with her mother and, not coincidentally, dedicated her clinical and theoretical work to the importance of the mother-child bond.

Her mother, Martha Freud, and older sister, Sophie, were both seen as feminine, but Anna was not. She was dedicated to her books, her work, and her father. Anna and Sophie were engaged in a lifelong sibling rivalry that did not end until Sophie died of the Spanish flu in 1920. Anna then swooped in to look after Sophie's two young boys, Ernest and Heinerle. She dedicated much of her time to caring for her nephews and other orphaned and troubled children. In *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense* (1936), Anna identified two new defense mechanisms: sublimation and a form of altruism, both of which she embodied in her personal and professional life.

Anna Freud's nephew Ernest, born in 1914, was Freud's oldest grandson. As a young boy, Ernest was deeply in love with

his mother and openly hostile toward his father. His love for his mother was further threatened by a little brother, Heinerle, born in 1919. In 1920, while pregnant with a third child, Sophie died. It was a terribly disorganizing trauma for the almost six-year-old Ernest. Then, when he was nine, his brother Heinerle died. Ernest struggled emotionally and socially through childhood, adolescence, and into adulthood. He was sensitive, irritable, moody, and had frequent conflicts with others. He studied psychology, was psychoanalyzed, and went into psychoanalytic training.

Working with his aunt Anna at the Hampstead Clinic, he became interested in mother-infant relations and baby observation, then specialized in the psychological aspects of neonatal intensive care. He visited neonatal intensive care units (NICUs), wrote on the topic, and lectured internationally. By 1977, at the age of 63, Ernest felt “hooked” on the study of neonatal intensive care but didn’t understand why. He observed that people who work in NICUs were typically born prematurely or had a family member who was a preemie.

These circumstances, however, did not apply to Ernest, so to explore his fascination further, he free-associated. The following thought occurred to him: “‘I owe it to my little brother!’ On reflection, this did not refer to the brother I had lost when I was nine and a half, but to when I was five and three-fourths when my mother died....” He went on to reflect: “I later learnt that my mother had been pregnant with a third child, and I must often have puzzled about it, and the process went on unconsciously.... *By observing preemies... I was trying to retrieve information about the little unborn sibling*” (Freud & Martin, 1985, pp. 33-34; emphasis added by author). As Friedrich Nietzsche (1907) noted in *Beyond Good and Evil*, “It has gradually become clear to me what every great philosophy up till now has consisted of—namely, the confession of its originator, and a species of involuntary and unconscious autobiography” (p. 10).

Erik H. Erikson was another person who sublimated his trauma into a meaningful life. Erikson never knew his father but was given his stepfather’s name, Homburger. He was born and raised in Germany; began his career as an artist; became a psychoanalyst without ever going to the university; had his psychoanalytic training in Austria; married a Canadian; moved to the United States; changed his name to Erikson (son of Erik); and coined the term “identity crisis.”



Joseph L. Henderson, a student of C. G. Jung, recalled that “at one time [Jung] said that the whole of his [Jung’s] psychology was a personal confession” (Benveniste & Henderson, 2000, p. 45). I take this to mean that parts of Jung’s psychology contained autobiographical components, and these are what made his work into a meaningful project throughout his life. This does not mean that he only discovered himself. When a man knows a little something about himself, he knows just that. But when he knows himself at great depths, he also begins to know something about all humanity. Of course, the same goes for women, and in this regard, we could wonder about the lives of Jane Goodall, Margaret Mead, Frida Kahlo, Frieda Fromm-Reichman, and so many more.

I recently came across the interesting story of Diana Trujillo. I have not studied her life in any depth at all, but a *People* magazine article gives a charming glimpse into her story. She was born in Cali, Colombia, in 1983. She recalled, “There was a lot of violence going on in my country, so for me, looking up at the sky and looking at the stars was my safe place.” As well as how: “My parents got divorced when I turned 12. After that happened, my mom had nothing. No money. We didn’t even have food. We’d boil an egg and we’d cut it in half, and that was our lunch that day.” She continued by saying: “I remember just laying down on the grass and looking at the sky and thinking, ‘Something has to be out there that’s better than this. Some other species that treats themselves better or values people better’” (DeSantis, para. 6 & 7, March 1, 2021). Diana Trujillo is now an aerospace engineer and Flight Director at NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory where she continues to look up at the stars. She is the Robotic Arm System lead for the Perseverance rover now making discoveries every day on the planet Mars.

It is evident to many that Mac Runyan also leads a meaningful life. He was significantly influenced by his direct associations with Erik H. Erikson, Henry A. Murray, Robert W. White, and other teachers and colleagues. Yet I would assume that early childhood experiences may have been the determining factors responsible for driving his interest in the Study of Lives into nothing less than a passion, a passion that is evident in both his academic productivity as well as in his remarkable ability to show us all how to wonder out loud.

In conclusion, I assert that those who lead meaningful lives are those who have discovered how to sublimate the psychological

traumas of their early childhood experiences. This allows them to love, work, care, and create with enthusiasm, determination, and passion transforming at least a part of their life into an adventure that gives meaning to it all.

**Daniel S. Benveniste, PhD**, is a clinical psychologist in Sammamish, Washington; an Honorary Member of the American Psychoanalytic Association; and the author of *The Interwoven Lives of Sigmund, Anna, and W. Ernest Freud: Three Generations of Psychoanalysis* (2015) and, more recently, *Libido, Culture, and Consciousness: Revisiting Freud's Totem and Taboo* (2022).

### References

- Benveniste, Daniel, & Henderson, Joseph L. (2000). *Thinking in metaphor*. Summaries of Joseph L. Henderson's ARAS lectures 1985–1998. Unpublished.
- DeSantis, Rachel (March 1, 2021). Meet NASA's flight director of Mars Perseverance, who came to U.S. with \$300 and cleaned bathrooms. *People*.
- Freud, W. Ernest, & Martin, Jay (1985). W. Ernest Freud and Jay Martin: A conversation. *Psychoanalytic Education*, 4, 29-56.
- Masson, Jeffrey M. (Ed.). (1985). *The complete letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess, 1887–1904*. Belknap Press.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich (1907). *Beyond good and evil*. Macmillan. □

## Why Did Skinner Cut Off His Emotions? An Idiographic Approach to Psychobiography

**Amy P. Demorest**—Amherst College

*Abstract: In honor of Runyan's championing of the idiographic approach, an idiographic method using Tomkins' Script Theory is illustrated through analysis of Skinner's avoidance of emotions.*

*Keywords: B. F. Skinner, identifiers-of-salience, idiographic, Irving E. Alexander, psychobiography, Script-Theory, Silvan S. Tomkins, William McKinley Runyan*

### My History with Mac and the Idiographic Approach

The first title of this paper is meant as a tribute to William McKinley Runyan's wonderful paper, "Why did van Gogh cut off his ear?" (1981). The second title is intended to pay homage to his

wonderful book, *Life Histories and Psychobiography* (1982), in which the final two chapters are on idiographic methods and psychobiography. These two works were published just as I began graduate school, and Mac's strong voice in calling for the idiographic study of individual lives was deeply influential to my professional development. Mac was also one of the original members of the Society for Personology, and I count myself lucky to have come to know him when I joined the group years later. Beyond admiring his work, I came to admire him as a person for his insatiable curiosity and generosity of spirit. I offer this paper on an idiographic approach to psychobiography in honor of Mac's influence on me and the field.

As Mac pointed out, "idiographic" can refer both to a goal and a method. An idiographic goal seeks an in-depth understanding of a particular individual. Mac argued persuasively that although American psychology has been dominated by the goals of understanding people in general or groups of people, the study of individuals is a worthy enterprise for which psychology has much to offer. This would presumably be obvious to clinicians who engage fully in this enterprise in their daily work, but in academic psychology, there has been a tendency to see the enterprise as in essence not scientific. Mac's 1982 book played a major role in correcting this bias, as it took a decidedly systematic and scientific approach to the study of individual lives. I remember hearing Mac's voice as a representation of rationality in the face of pervasive prejudice. Here is just one example of many of his arguments that have stuck with me: "To the cry of 'How can you generalize from that idiographic study?' the equally appropriate response is 'How can you particularize from that group or population study to the individual?'" (Runyan, 1982, p. 172).

As a method, the idiographic approach focuses on the discovery of those psychological variables significant to a particular individual and how those variables are organized within that individual. In his 1982 book, Mac reviewed a number of these methods. My goal in this paper is to describe and illustrate an additional one that has emerged since 1982, which I have found especially fruitful in my work. This approach is based on Silvan S. Tomkins' (1987) Script Theory.

### **Tomkins' Script Theory**

Script Theory adopts the assumption that each person has their own unique views of life, which have emerged from their

unique inheritances and experiences. It employs general psychological knowledge about emotions, motivations, and cognitions all people share as a function of being human: in particular, that there are many kinds of emotions we can experience; that we are motivated to increase positive emotions and decrease negative emotions; and that we develop schemas for understanding those emotional experiences that have been significant in our lived experience. However, the theory also assumes there is uniqueness in which emotions are most significant for each individual, in the priorities and strategies for maximizing positive emotion and minimizing negative emotion, and in the particular schemas each individual forms about emotional experiences. Below I review the basics of Script Theory and then illustrate the application of this theory to the case of psychologist B. F. Skinner.

According to Tomkins's Script Theory, personality is organized around "scenes." A scene is an emotional experience consisting of at least one emotion and one object or event that evokes the emotion; a scene can also include information about people, props, actions, etc. To understand and deal with emotionally significant experiences, people cognitively but nonconsciously link scenes together based on their similarities. This co-assembling of scenes results in "scripts," which are implicit assumptions for anticipating and dealing with families of similar scenes, to maximize positive emotions and minimize negative emotions. According to this model, personality is a function of the significant scenes an individual has experienced and the expectations they have implicitly developed for anticipating and dealing with families of co-assembled scenes. The individual is both dramatist and actor, constructing the scripts through which to understand and live life.

Tomkins argued we are all endowed with the ability to feel a range of emotions, and we each meet a range of events in our lives, and thus each individual has many scripts. Further, people begin building rudimentary scripts as early as infancy. For example, the experience of physical distress caused by hunger innately leads an infant to cry out. Depending on how the caretaker responds, the infant's distress can be alleviated or magnified, and from these differences can emerge individual differences in the first basic scripts about how one's distress is relieved or made worse. With age comes both more experiences and a greater cognitive capacity for linking experiences together. For example, in the first six months of life, infants do not cry or show fear when returning to a

doctor's office for inoculation, but after six months, they do. Thus, with an increasing capacity for memory and imagination, the individual develops the ability to co-assemble similar emotional experiences that occur far apart in time.

According to Tomkins, in the initial stages of script formation, scenes determine what form a script will take. Important features of scenes are extracted and co-assembled, and the emerging script is modified to accommodate the information provided by newly met relevant scenes. At some point, however, a script is sufficiently formed enough to determine the individual's experience of scenes. The script directs the individual to scan events for script-relevant properties and to synthesize analogs from those events, and in this way the script becomes self-confirming. A script established and used in self-confirming ways will require substantial disconfirmation in newly met scenes to be modified. It is the self-confirming nature of scripts that makes for the consistency of personality, and it is the disconfirmation of scripts in novel emotionally significant scenes that allows for personality change.

Thus, Script Theory offers a way to capture the complexity and uniqueness of human experience. In applying this theory to psychobiography, the best way to identify the important scripts that define an individual's personality is to examine the individual's narratives. Many different sources of narratives might be fruitful: autobiographies, diaries, letters, interviews, speeches, and professional writings. There are two steps required in deriving scripts from the narratives appearing in these sources: one, significant scenes must be identified; and two, scripts must be extracted from those scenes. Below I illustrate how each of these steps can be accomplished, using the case of psychologist B. F. Skinner.

### **Identifying Scripts for B. F. Skinner**

To identify significant scenes, one method is to look for when emotion is expressed. Script Theory claims scenes are organized around the experience of emotion, and thus the appearance of emotion in a narrative should signify the basis for a scene. Given Skinner's radical behaviorism (denying emotions have any role in determining human behavior), it is somewhat surprising that he expresses emotion at all in his autobiographical writings. One example occurs when Skinner recounts that he experienced "homesickness" in his first year at college and sent an illustrated book to his parents with a "maudlin" inscription of which he was soon "ashamed." He also reports writing an imaginative story

about the experience a few years later, suggesting he had scripted the scene. Skinner (1976/1984) reproduced that imaginative story in his autobiography:

Father and mother had laughed at Henry's first letters. Prosaic descriptions of college, the food, and his health, but with them an occasional unguarded note of homesickness.... His overtones of homesickness increased as the months passed until a book came, carefully planned to reach home on mother and father's wedding anniversary. It was a large book, a gift edition in blue and gold, called *Beautiful Homes of History*. On the first page was carefully written: 'To father and mother, whose home surpasses the beauty and holiness of any of these. Henry.' Mother read it with moist eyes, and hated to have father smile at it.... But after it was put on top of the bookstand, father occasionally laughed at it; and sometimes mother smiled too.... Two months afterward Henry came home for the holidays. But during the first hour when he told them his joyous history, no one spoke of the book. No one even spoke of homesickness.... That night before [mother] went to bed she went to the bookstand and ran her fingers over the cool gold letters on the blue cover.... Then with a little swell of feeling she lifted the cover. But the first page had been removed with a sharp knife. (pp. 202-203)

Thus, this portrays an emotion-laden scene worthy of a script analysis.

Once a scene has been identified, the next task is to derive a script from it. According to Tomkins, people form scripts by linking together different but similar emotional experiences, so scripts are more general than scenes. Further, to enable the individual to predict and respond to future experiences, the script provides a sequential outline of what events should be expected to follow in what order. Thus, to derive scripts from scenes, we must translate the particular scene into abstract and sequential form. Applying these principles to this scene would yield a script such as the following: "I express homesickness toward intimate authority figures —> they ridicule me —> I feel shame —> I avoid such expressions in future." This could also be written in narrative form as: "If I express homesickness toward intimate authority figures, they will ridicule me and leave me feeling ashamed, therefore I should avoid such expressions in future." We cannot know from only one scene

how abstract the elements of a script are (e.g., whether this script applies to other types of emotions besides homesickness, or other types of people besides intimate authorities); for that, we would need the full family of scenes.

A second method for finding significant scenes is to look for “identifiers of salience” (Alexander, 1988). Irving E. Alexander proposed that people signal important material by how they tell their stories. If we can learn to read these signals, we can know what is most important to them. He named nine identifiers of salience: primacy (what comes first), frequency (what recurs), emphasis (what is accented), uniqueness (what is unusual), negation (what is denied), omission (what is missing), error (what is a mistake), isolation (what does not fit), and incompleteness (what is left unfinished). Some of these signals of importance might be intentional (e.g., emphasis) and others not (e.g., error). They are especially valuable as guides to significant material when a person is not emotionally expressive, as is the case for Skinner.

Another scene from Skinner’s first year in college was made salient by many of Alexander’s identifiers of salience. When Skinner was spending time with his younger brother Ebbe while he was home for the holidays, Ebbe suddenly developed a severe headache, fell unconscious, and died. The first account Skinner gives of this experience is in an autobiographical chapter in which he writes “I was not much moved” (Skinner, 1967, p. 388). This is salient by negation (not much moved) and uniqueness (how many people would not be moved by such a thing?). The account Skinner gives in his full autobiography a decade later contradicts the first account (error) as well as demonstrates a double negation: “I was far from unmoved” (why not simply say he was moved?). Further, although his two accounts differ in whether he was moved, they both continue in the same paragraph with the same odd association (uniqueness and isolation); Skinner reports that he had once in childhood struck his brother with an arrow and was shocked when years later he heard Hamlet’s lines:

Let me disclaiming from a purpos’d evil  
Free me so far in your most generous thoughts  
That I have shot mine arrow o’er the house,  
And hurt my brother. (Skinner, 1976/1984, p. 210)

Both accounts end here without any explanation of the association (incompletion).

The negation, error, and incompleteness in Skinner's accounts of this scene suggest he is not giving the full story; he may even be defending against his own awareness of it. In such a case, it becomes important to identify other related scenes to fill out the script. From his reports of this scene, it appears Ebbe's death led Skinner to recollect and feel guilty about past harm he had done to his brother. In looking for related scenes in his autobiography, I found only one instance in which Skinner did anything harmful to his brother, and it hardly seems to merit profound feelings of guilt: He tricked Ebbe into stepping on a cow pie. However, I also found that sibling rivalry was made salient by both negation and frequency: After recounting that Ebbe enjoyed more affection from their parents, Skinner reports he was never aware of any rivalry; he repeats this denial of rivalry in two other places as well. Again, this negation might give evidence of censorship on Skinner's part.

What about any related imagery in imaginative stories, which might be less defended since they are not autobiographical? An informative instance occurs in Skinner's professional writing when he offers an example to illustrate the behavioral approach to "Freudian dynamisms." This example imagines a boy feeling rivalry with his brother over affection from their parents, leading him to aggress against his brother. But punishment from the parents leads the boy to feel guilty, and thus to repress any knowledge of his aggressive tendencies. Putting these various narrative accounts together suggests that Ebbe's sudden and unexpected death might have reawakened Skinner's previously repressed guilt about past hostile feelings toward his brother, resulting in further repression of his feelings (at first characterized as being not much moved). This indicates a script along the lines of the following: "If I express hostility to an intimate peer, intimate authorities will punish me, making me feel guilty; therefore, I should avoid even being aware of those hostile feelings."

### **Implications of these Scripts**

The two scripts extracted thus far show some similar elements in sequence, indicating they may both belong to a more general script. In both, an emotion is felt and expressed (homesickness; hostility) but is met with a negative response from intimate authorities (ridicule; punishment); this leads to feelings of negative self-judgment (shame; guilt) and censorship of the original emotion. There may be sub-scripts within this general script: For example, perhaps positive emotions such as affection are at risk for



ridicule and shame, whereas negative emotions such as hostility are at risk for punishment and guilt.

Regarding the earlier question of how abstract the script elements should be, other scenes in Skinner's autobiography suggest a range of emotions are relevant to this general script, which applies to both parents. For example, in one scene involving the emotion of pleasure, Skinner tells his father he has made a date to meet a girl to talk about Dostoevsky, and his father responds by laughing "with half-veiled disgust." In another scene involving pleasure, Skinner tells his mother he is going to a piano recital with tea afterward, and his mother responds with the remark: "Don't you think that's so effeminate?" It thus appears that Skinner experienced a host of scenes in which a range of emotions was met with negative responses from both parents, leading him to feel ashamed and guilty about these emotions and to censor them in his behavior and his thoughts. Indeed, this pattern of disavowing feelings characterized Skinner's professional claims in radical behaviorism: He argued that the experience of emotion has no place in the science of human behavior. This analysis of some members of a family of scenes and their consequent script might explain why Skinner cut off emotions.

I hope in this paper to have illustrated how a script analysis can be fruitfully used to capture both the complexity and uniqueness of the human experience. It is a valuable tool to add to our list of idiographic approaches to psychobiography.

**Amy P. Demorest, PhD**, is the Eryn L. Oberlander Professor of Psychology at Amherst College. She earned a BA from Williams College and a PhD from Duke University, and she has done a research fellowship at the Center for Psychotherapy Research at the University of Pennsylvania and a clinical fellowship at the Massachusetts Institute of Psychoanalysis. Her book, *Psychology's Grand Theorists* (2004), provides an idiographic analysis of Freud, Skinner, and Rogers. She can be reached at [apdemorest@amherst.edu](mailto:apdemorest@amherst.edu).

### References

- Alexander, Irving E. (1988). Personality, psychological assessment, and psychobiography. *Journal of Personality*, 56, 265-294.
- Runyan, William McKinley (1982). *Life Histories and Psychobiography*. Oxford University Press.
- Skinner, B. F. (1967). B. F. Skinner. In Edwin Boring & Gardner Lin-

dzey (Eds.), *A History of Psychology in Autobiography, Vol. V* (pp. 387-413). Appleton-Century-Crofts.

Skinner, B. F. (1984). *Particulars of my life*. New York University Press. (Original work published 1976).

Tomkins, Silvan S. (1987). Script theory. In Joel Aronoff, Albert I. Rabin, & Robert A. Zucker (Eds.), *The Emergence of Personality* (pp. 147-216). Springer. □

## **Advancing the Study of Individual Lives: William McKinley Runyan's Multidisciplinary Inspiration**

**Nicole B. Barenbaum**—Uni. of the South (Sewanee)

*Abstract: An appreciation of the contributions of William McKinley ("Mac") Runyan to the psychological Study of Lives, the author gives an example of how Runyan's work has inspired and informed her own work on the history of ambivalence toward the study of individual lives in personality psychology.*

*Keywords: American-personality-psychology, methodological-choices, multidisciplinary-Study-of-Lives, psychobiography, psychohistory, William McKinley Runyan*

It is an honor to be invited to write for this celebration of Mac Runyan, whose unflagging promotion of the psychological study of individual lives has contributed so much to scholars in many disciplines. For me, Mac has been a guide, an inspiration, an advocate, a colleague, and a friend for many years. His pioneering book, *Life Histories and Psychobiography* (1982), and his chapters in *Psychology and Historical Interpretation* (1988), continue to inform researchers interested in the history and methodology of the psychological Study of Lives and in psychohistory. (My own copy of *Life Histories and Psychobiography* has been consulted so often that the pages are loose!) But his compelling personal stories of his multidisciplinary search for a field of study and his encounters with narrow definitions of what counts as psychology (and as science) give a glimpse of his dedication to the study of human lives in all their complexity and suggest how far the psychological Study of Lives has progressed in the last 50 years.

Imagine a young Mac Runyan at Oberlin College in the late 1960s, proposing an honors thesis on consciousness or subjective

experience, only to learn that the Psychology Department did not address these topics! Or as a psychology graduate student hoping to become an interdisciplinary social scientist at Harvard—once home to Gordon Allport, Henry Murray, and Robert White, all champions of the study of individual persons—being told that his interest in the study of individual lives was too “philosophical,” and a waste of time (Runyan, 2019, p. 38). It must have taken great fortitude and independence of mind to resist. But Mac had already found supporters, including Murray and White (professors emeriti). He continued to pursue his interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary interests throughout his career, maintaining his focus on the Study of Lives in ever-questioning and expanding ways with a striking breadth of scholarship—from examining methodological and conceptual problems to challenging limited views of psychology and history, personality psychology, and science.

As an admirer of Mac’s work since my graduate school days (his 1981 paper “Why Did van Gogh Cut Off His Ear?” was a breath of fresh air!), I was delighted to have a chance to talk with him at a meeting of Cheiron after giving a paper on Allport’s promotion of case studies. Discussing our shared interests in Allport’s and Murray’s advocacy of the study of individual lives and relationships between the lives and work of psychologists, I was impressed that the well-known author of *Life Histories and Psychobiography*—such a comprehensive, scholarly work—was so soft-spoken, unassuming, and gracious. Over the years, in many conversations over meals, at conferences, and during my research trips to Cambridge, Mac always raised interesting questions, made insightful suggestions, encouraged me in my own work, and recommended interesting readings. He also introduced me to several of the countless scholars he knows, including members of the Society for Personology whose work I had long admired. I appreciate his interest not only in the many works and ideas he examines so carefully but also in their personal-experiential side. (I remember a long walk in Cambridge with Mac, searching for the house where Edwin G. Boring had lived.) I also enjoy the expressions of boundless enthusiasm and a delightful sense of humor that punctuate his serious remarks.

Some of the most striking features of Mac’s scholarship, in my view, are his attention to the study of individual lives as not only interdisciplinary (crossing disciplinary boundaries) but multidisciplinary (existing in separate traditions across many disciplines)

and his efforts to apply insights from many disciplines to make convincing arguments for the Study of Lives as a “historical-interpretive” science. In doing so, he takes seriously many criticisms of biographical approaches, but challenges objections based on narrow definitions of “science,” as did Allport and Murray. Mac’s willingness to explore an astonishing number of approaches to the Study of Lives; his even-handed efforts to synthesize and address a wide range of methodological and conceptual problems; and his promotion of a judicious epistemological relativism help bring order to a complex field without sacrificing complexity.

Mac’s work has inspired and informed my own in many ways; here is just one example. In a chapter reconceptualizing the structure of personality psychology, Mac raised a question about the “puzzling history” of “relationships between personality psychology and the study of individual lives.” He asked how a central concern with individual persons of “founders of the field” Allport and Murray in the 1930s had fallen by the wayside in the 1950s and 1960s (Runyan, 1997, pp. 41-42). Inspired by his call for further research on this question, I suggested an answer in chapters co-authored with David Winter (see Winter & Barenbaum, 1999; Barenbaum & Winter, 2003) examining the history of ambivalence toward the study of individuals in personality psychology. Adopting a longer time perspective, and using a multidisciplinary approach informed, in part, by Mac’s multidisciplinary historical reviews of the Study of Lives and psychobiography, we showed that personality was a focus of research in several disciplines long before the “official” emergence of American personality psychology with the texts of Allport and Murray. During the 1920s, most American psychologists investigating personality were already studying groups, relying heavily on psychometric and quantitative methods, and avoiding the life history and case study approaches they associated with sociology, social work, psychiatry, and medical psychology. Despite Allport’s and Murray’s efforts to promote the study of individuals as the new subdiscipline became institutionalized, the marginal status of life histories and psychobiography in personality psychology from the 1940s onward continued an earlier trend.

Yet the study of individuals continued to attract a minority of personality psychologists, and in a more receptive intellectual climate reflecting the emancipatory sociopolitical movements of the late 1960s and 1970s, psychologists in several subdisciplines began turning toward qualitative and narrative approaches. Ap-

pearing in 1982, Mac's book was welcomed not only by psychohistorians and psychobiographers in other disciplines but also by academic psychologists using personological and narrative approaches. Since then, personality psychology has seen a remarkable growth of interest in the study of individual lives, with recent work embracing greater complexity and diversity. Examples include an emphasis on social/cultural/historical contexts; diversity of theoretical approaches, authors, and people studied; attention to people's own voices and authors' reflexivity; and interdisciplinary study (in a special issue devoted to psychobiographies of social change agents, the *Journal of Personality* [2023] features studies illustrating these trends). For Mac's work heralding and contributing to these developments, we owe him many thanks.

**Nicole B. Barenbaum, PhD**, is Professor Emerita of Psychology at the University of the South (Sewanee). She studied at Cornell University (AB) and Boston University (PhD). She has served as President of Division 26 (History) of the American Psychological Association, on the Review Board of Cheiron, and on the Steering Committee of the Society for Personology. She has published about the history of personality psychology with a focus on personological approaches and on the lives and work of Gordon W. Allport and Henry A. Murray. She can be reached at nbarenba@sewanee.edu.

### References

- Barenbaum, Nicole B., & Winter, David G. (2003). Personality. In Irving B. Weiner & Donald K. Freedheim (Eds.), *Handbook of psychology: Vol. 1, history of psychology* (pp. 177-203). Wiley.
- Runyan, William McKinley (1997). Studying lives: Psychobiography and the conceptual structure of personality psychology. In Robert Hogan, John A. Johnson, & Stephen R. Briggs (Eds.), *Handbook of personality psychology* (pp. 41-69). Academic Press. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-012134645-4/50003-2>
- Runyan, William McKinley (2019). Adventures in psychobiography and the study of lives: A personal journey. In Claude-Hélène Mayer & Zoltan Kovary (Eds.), *New trends in psychobiography* (pp. 35-53). Springer Nature Switzerland AG. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-16953-4\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-16953-4_3)
- Winter, David G., & Barenbaum, Nicole B. (1999). History of modern personality theory and research. In Lawrence A. Pervin & Oliver P. John (Eds.), *Handbook of personality: Theory and research* (2nd ed., pp. 3-27). Guilford. □

## Looking Back at a Life of Studying Lives Over Time: The Struggle for Tenure

Susan Bluck—University of Florida

*Abstract: This paper uses a narrative interview process to elicit Mac Runyan's ultimate self-defining memory that he would most want to represent him once he is gone. The shared memory is consonant with the legacy that his colleagues all admire: his excellent voice, in person and in his writing, persistently calling for social science to fully recognize the importance of the study of individual lives.*

*Keywords: autobiographical-memory, individual-lives, legacy, narrative-interview purpose, psychobiography, self-defining-memory*

My idea for a contribution to this Festschrift for Mac Runyan came from a narrative interview process that I have used in my Life Story Lab. It is heavily grounded in Jefferson A. Singer and Pavel S. Blagov's introduction of the wonderful construct of, and method for eliciting, *self-defining memories*. My research has, of late, focused on endings in the life story—including death, the final ending. In previous research, we developed instructions for asking people about what we called their *ultimate self-defining memory*. That is, what is the one experience from your life that you most want to be remembered about you after you're gone?

It dawned on me that a Festschrift honors one's academic life and contributions, marking an ending of sorts, though not the final ending. Still, this type of ending may be a time for some life review. So, having previously provided him with instructions, I had a delightful time doing an oral interview with Mac Runyan on February 27, 2023, about his chosen ultimate self-defining memory. That interview transcript, edited, is reproduced below.

In my lab, the next step would be to content-analyze a whole sample of people's memories. I will not subject Mac's memory to content-analysis here, but as I read and re-read it, several potential content-analysis constructs came to mind: Is this largely a story of meaning-making, communion, redemption? Or, aha, this is it! It is a story of having a sense of purpose in life. I have settled on the idea that, while likely also many other things, Mac's story is largely one of having and maintaining a clear sense of purpose, through thick and thin, across an entire academic career. It is one of confidently exploring and expanding one's line of thinking regardless of

its popularity in mainstream psychology of the day. His story shows not only humility but at the same time diligent scholarship and constant curiosity about important ideas for psychology and how they might be encouraged to flourish.

Mac's ultimate self-defining memory, as you will read here, I believe represents the legacy that his colleagues all admire: his excellent voice, in person and in his writing, persistently calling for social science to fully recognize the importance of the study of individual lives.

**Susan Bluck (SB):** Please, start at the beginning and tell the whole memory just as you remember it happening, focusing on what you were experiencing, feeling, and thinking.

**William McKinley "Mac" Runyan (MR):** The specific memory is me trying to get tenure at Berkeley. The larger framework is the question, what is the place of the study of individual lives in relation to scientific psychology? As I said, that's a theme I've been concerned with since I started graduate school in 1969. I'm very interested in that. I wrote a dissertation on life histories in 1975 and have written books related to it.

So, one preliminary event is being in graduate school at Harvard, which was incredibly exciting for me. I idealized Harvard. I showed up in 1969 and looked at the directory of all these names. These are the people I've been reading in college: Erik Erikson, Henry Murray, Robert White, a bunch of other people, and I say, being in graduate school is going to be great. The most positive parts were both Henry Murray and Robert White. Very late in his life, White was supposed to get some award, and he wasn't mobile enough to do it. So he asked me to go to American Psychological Association (APA) and receive the award for him. It really choked me up. I was honored to do it.

Also setting the stage, Lee J. Cronbach's presidential address to the APA was "The two disciplines of scientific psychology," published in *American Psychologist* in 1957. This was referring to experimental psychology and correlational or quantitative psychology. He later published "Beyond the two disciplines of scientific psychology" in *American Psychologist* in 1975. This was referring to person-situation interaction, which I was supportive of. But I felt there was at least a fourth discipline of scientific psychology: the detailed study of individual lives.

There are, of course, additional disciplines of scientific psychology, such as behavior genetics and neuroscience. In my view, detailed studies of individual lives can help understand the history of each of these different traditions. Before starting graduate school in 1969, I read the most recent in the series *A History of Psychology in Autobiography* (1967), with autobiographies by Gordon Allport, Henry A. Murray, Carl Rogers, and B. F. Skinner. I felt reading their autobiographies made it easier to engage with the work of each of these major psychologists. I was honored to edit the most recent volume in this series with Gardner Lindzey (Vol. 9, 2007).

In graduate school, we learned about major research methods in psychology, but the study of individual lives was often not included. A question for me is, what is the place of studying individual lives in relation to scientific psychology? Is it simply non-scientific and outside of real science? Or is it a foundation of the whole endeavor? That is still hotly debated.

I personally experienced some of this debate, starting in graduate school. I was lucky to go to a place where Henry Murray was, and still alive at that time. He would say about what I was doing, "This is the most important thing in the world to be working on right now." But a number of other people said, "This is not real science." In fact, in my second year in graduate school, a prominent faculty member wrote me a letter. It said, "What you are doing does not fit into our program. I suggest you save time. Our time and your time, and drop out of graduate school now." In some ways that wasn't so upsetting because a lot of people in my program were saying, "You're doing fine. So just stay away from this guy. Have nothing to do with him." To the extent possible, I did that, even though he was powerful in our program. I sort of just steered around him and avoided it.

But the central memory I wanted to share was something I couldn't just avoid like that. It was when I came up for tenure in the School of Social Welfare at UC Berkeley. Don McKinnon was there, as former Director of the Institute of Personality Assessment and Research. But the Dean of the School of Social Welfare, where I was, was named Harry Specht. I applied for tenure after four years while people usually wait five or six. But my Dean was supportive. Well, after some time, the tenure committee didn't respond. So the Dean kept having to contact them to ask, "Hurry up, what's happening here?" By this time, he was away in London.



Summer, I think. So, he's contacting me on the phone. He said, "I finally heard from them and here I'll read you what they said. In brief, they say your work does not make a substantial contribution to knowledge." So basically, they were saying, "Thank you for your service to the University. Goodbye."

I was mildly upset. We were both surprised. No other feedback. This is pretty unusual behavior for a tenure committee. But the thing that was encouraging to me is that the Dean says to me (this really makes me choke up remembering this), "Don't worry, there are at least three things we can do." So, he outlined the things and investigated what the committee process had been. It turns out the tenure committee had never even met! They never talked; they never discussed. They had no substantive criticism. This was the personal view of the guy who was head of the tenure committee! They hadn't had a discussion. So the Dean says, "This is a piece of cake." It took a year, but they put together a new committee and had a process for review.

But you know I was in no gigantic hurry. During that year, my book, *On Life Histories and Psychobiography*, was published in 1982 in hardcover and in paperback in 1984. There were a number of positive reviews of the book in different disciplines. I talked to the publisher, saying, "I'm being examined for tenure. Will you please put a bunch of these blurbs onto the book, on the back?" As best I recall, the reviews said things like: "This book contributes more to the study of lives than any book since Erik Erikson's *Young Man Luther* (1958)." Another said: "This is the most important contribution to the study of lives since Henry Murray's *Explorations in Personality* (1938). This book makes life history respectable again."

People in the discipline, who knew the field, acknowledged the contribution of the book: Walter Jackson Bate, Robert White, Bertram J. Cohler as well as Alexander George and Juliette George, co-authors of the classic, *Woodward Wilson and Colonel House: A Personality Study* (1964), said something like, "This valuable book will be read and re-read by generations of students of biography and historical explanation."

It did take almost a year until they came back with the good news. They said, "We think you deserve tenure, and we're going to give you a higher level of Associate Professor rank than you applied for." I said, "Great, I appreciate that."

So, I felt, this is great. But also, one thing that was surprising to me is (and here I'm proud of this in a way) that the original tenure report says something like, "This makes no contribution," but I was able to say what I felt myself. I said to myself: "I know the literature in this field pretty well, and I think it does make a contribution. I don't believe this for a moment."

I was delighted about getting tenure because I liked being in Berkeley. I like being around the Institute of Personality Assessment & Research. A lot of good people were there, like Ravenna Helson from the Society for Personology. It was one of the more congenial places in the country that I knew of, which had a number of people sympathetic to this tradition, and a lot of places are not that sympathetic. So I felt fortunate to be there, and I was delighted to get tenure. I said, "This is, from my standpoint, wonderful." I was really happy. You sometimes have good luck and sometimes bad luck in your career.

**SB:** Why do you think you shared that particular memory out of all the memories in your life?

**MR:** I think I shared this memory to be remembered by because it's really a central theme in my intellectual life. There's probably more to explore about that—why did this Study of Lives become so important to me? Partly as I understand it is this: I had a sociology professor in college, J. Milton Yinger, who became president of the American Sociological Association. He wrote a book that helped shape my view of the world, *Toward a Field Theory of Behavior: Personality and Social Structure* (1965). He says that there are at least four levels of analysis that we need to pay attention to: biological, individual, cultural, and social. These can be identified roughly with the four sciences of biology, psychology, anthropology, and sociology.

You don't know that much when you are starting graduate school, but even then I thought, the one thing I'd like to add to this is the study of individual lives. How does that fit in here? Because that's also, to me, an important level of analysis.

So you asked me how this ties back to my memory about not getting, and then getting, tenure. I think there was some of that element, too, about what I was trying to do. Even though I didn't feel the whole thing rested on my shoulders. I was less worried about that at the time but more concerned before and after. I'm still worried about it now in terms of the whole field of psychology and

the social sciences. Where does the Study of Lives fit into efforts to be a rigorous social science? So I've tried to address that in things that I write.

**SB:** Do you think that that's kind of a legacy for you—being dedicated to the study of individual lives over time—and that this memory you've told today in some way talks about your championing that as it intersected with your own life?

**MR:** Sure, I think so, and it's maybe unusual because I never really thought about this. About how long I've been doing that work—it's been since the beginning of graduate school. There was an overnight retreat for our new program. So everybody sits around in a circle with the faculty. They've done a lot of stuff, and they introduce themselves. You know, I'm David McClelland, and I did such and such. But graduate students are a totally different thing. It's not like, "Look at all this great stuff I have done." Instead, it's about, "Here's what I'd like to do." Even at that first orientation meeting (54 years ago), I said something like, "I'd like to explore the extent to which the study of individual lives can be made more scientific or more rigorous."

*Susan Bluck, PhD*, is Professor of Psychology and Director of the Life Story Lab at the University of Florida (<https://lifestorylab.psych.ufl.edu/>), a Fellow of the Gerontological Society of America, and a member of the Society for Personology. Her multidisciplinary research team consists of postdocs, graduate, and undergraduate students interested in adult development and autobiographical memory. The lab researches life stories, examining the role autobiographical memory plays in maintaining a sense of identity, creating social well-being, and directing future plans. This includes investigation of the end of the story: research on narratives of death and dying relevant to improving quality of life at the end of life, as well as death education initiatives. She can be contacted at [bluck@ufl.edu](mailto:bluck@ufl.edu). □

## **Mac Runyan: Essential Scholar and Invaluable Friend**

**Lonnie R Snowden**—UC Berkeley

*Abstract: Throughout a long and distinguished career, William McKinley Runyan's unwavering commitment to the study of individual lives has re-*

*sulted in key scholarly insights into influential historical figures, as well as an understanding of how to approach the study of individual lives and properly situate it within the wider scholarly enterprise. This article celebrates Mac and how the author has benefited immeasurably from knowing him.*

*Keywords: Donald T. Campbell, life-course, personality-psychology, philosophy-of-psychological-inquiry, psychobiography*

I joined Berkeley Social Welfare's faculty slightly before Mac and became aware of his scholarship when he applied for an open position. The position's responsibilities included teaching a required but previously unsuccessful course called Human Behavior in the Social Environment, and Mac's life course orientation seemed well-suited to filling this need. But what really appealed to me was his 1977 paper, "How should treatment recommendations be made? Three studies in the logical and empirical bases of clinical decision-making," probing the logic of clinical decision-making and appearing in one of psychology's leading outlets. It presented insightful, clear, and economical probing—entirely free of jargon or pretense—of the structure of a core task of psychological practice. More than psychological theory, the author would bring thinking about the foundations of psychological explanation to our interdisciplinary faculty.

Mac and I became good friends over the years due not only to mutual devotion to college basketball, celebrating the opening day of practice and our passage through career stages together. We commiserated about roadblocks and celebrated rising through the ranks. But, even more, we were both committed readers deeply interested in ideas and committed to intellectual progress. We shared psychological, philosophical, historical, and biographical knowledge and exchanged book titles in lengthy discussions, which I always found extremely stimulating and informative.

Upon reflection, I realize that I found our discussions very satisfying partly because we engaged with real issues and avoided fashionable, but I think misguided, debates. Understanding individual lives often emphasize methods deemed qualitative. Most of my research is quantitative—not from allegiance to the "scientific method" but because the work is often best served when approached from a framework of statistical theory. However, when understanding people's irreducible personal perspectives is necessary or learning about established policy, naturally, I use open-

ended interviews or engage in close study of documents. To my recollection, Mac and I never discussed “quantitative vs. qualitative methods”—a murky topic that’s opposition mired, I think, in disciplinary politics.

Our mutual admiration for Donald T. Campbell illustrates mutual commitments and understandings. He’s best known for his classic account of experimental design with Julian Stanley titled “Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Designs for Research” (1996), which inadvertently contributed to a sometimes-dogmatic embrace of powerful but quite limited experimental methods. We discussed Campbell as a sophisticated philosopher of social science and his contributions to scholarly debates far removed from his methodological contributions; this deep understanding enabled him to write insightful non-technical accounts of research methods. Campbell and Stanley’s book really is a logical treatise on causal inference by considering various methodological options facing many investigators. Their approach was hardly inevitable: economists cover identical ground from statistical theory, conceiving it as avoiding “endogeneity” and “biased estimation.” (Tip: When brokering a meeting between a psychologist and an economist, if the economist says “endogeneity,” you say to the psychologist “confounds.”) Mac was not surprised when I expressed an opinion that Campbell’s early discussion of time-series methods, which I have used, is the best description of them I have encountered. Campbell explained exactly where the advantage lay and why time-series were not used more without dwelling on their weird and off-putting technical details.

What continues to distinguish Mac’s work is his insistence on an individual human being’s life courses as a perspective—indeed, a level of analysis—demanding its own line of critical investigation. This turns out sometimes to find a skeptical audience in academia, especially in social science departments, not because it is unworthy—it really is inescapable—but because it conflicts with unspoken institutional and professional biases. My much-less formidable but frustrating version of this problem is persuading individually oriented theorists and researchers to think at community and state levels of analysis. (This bias even has a name: “atomistic fallacy.”)

Mac’s higher hurdle is some academics’ unwillingness to accept that the life course is indeed a level of analysis. Many seem to believe that understanding individual lives can be reduced to a

handful of general behavioral principles which, if rigorously established, are almost self-evident in their application. Mac's work challenges this as fallacious thinking as it invites open-ended, disciplined scholarly inquiry of individual lives using whatever methods the problem demands. Thus, even when general principles apply, which principles, when they're applied, and how—and to the behavior defined how as it unfolds in continuing sequences—requires its own investigation. Mac partially characterizes this as sequences of person x situation interactions in “A stage–state analysis of the life course” (which was published in 1980 in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*).

Put another way, no “magic bullet” from cognitive neuroscience or social or personality psychology, even when understood in “context,” can explain the course of a particular individual's life; this undertaking requires investigation of the facts of that life occurring in sequence, and testing of alternative possibilities, to assemble a trustworthy and coherent account. No biologist would claim that ecology reduces to principles of cellular functioning, but many psychologists seem to believe that understanding an individual life reduces to knowing the “right” principles of psychological functioning applied to behavior at the “right” moment in time.

Mac's deep curiosity paired with his extensive reading and probing serves him well as he continues to advance the study of individual lives. The importance of his field always has been and will continue to be evident, and he deserves great credit for moving forward such an important field. His enduring influence is evident in updates (e.g., John Barresi revisiting Mac's van Gogh piece in 2019) and continuing recognition of his landmark *Life Histories and Psychobiography: Explorations in Theory and Method* (1982). His insistence that institutional and intellectual barriers should not bar advancement speaks to his commitment and integrity. I am proud to have benefited from our many intense talks and to count him as a friend.

**Lonnie R Snowden, PhD**, is Professor of the Graduate School in the Health Policy and Management Division, School of Public Health, University of California at Berkeley. Recipient of the American Psychological Association's (APA's) Presidential Citation and Award for Distinguished Contributions to Research in Public Policy, the Surgeon General's Exemplary Service Award, and other awards, Snowden is a health policy and services researcher specializing in racial and ethnic disparities in the delivery of

health and mental health care. His email address is snowden@berkeley.edu. □

## The “Broken” Memories of Brandi Carlile

Jefferson A. Singer—Connecticut College

Emma Lombardo—Connecticut College

*Abstract: This analysis of singer/songwriter Brandi Carlile identifies key self-defining memories, forming a narrative script of “brokenness” and creative triumph that is her memoir’s central trope.*

*Keywords: Carlile, memoir, narrative-identity, narrative-script, psychobiography, Runyan, self-defining-memory*

For more than 40 years, psychologists have been indebted to William McKinley (“Mac”) Runyan for modeling an interpretative approach to psychobiography in his 1982 work, *Life Histories and Psychobiographies*. Runyan’s work reaffirmed that conducting a theory-based qualitative analysis to examine a given individual’s life can be a legitimate and informative scientific enterprise. In this spirit, we offer the following study of the influential singer-songwriter Brandi Carlile. Carlile, winner of multiple Grammy Awards and admired for her LGBTQIA+ advocacy, published a best-selling memoir, *Broken Horses*, in 2021. “Broken Horses” is also the title of one of her most powerful anthems.

Our analysis centered on the concept of “brokenness” as a unifying metaphor in her life story. To conduct this analysis, we relied on a particular theoretical perspective within psychobiography—“narrative identity,” as previously applied by McAdams in studies of U.S. presidents, including Donald Trump, and by Singer in analyses of the autobiographical memories of 19<sup>th</sup> century writer Robert Louis Stevenson and the 20<sup>th</sup> century rabbi, philosopher, and activist Abraham Joshua Heschel. Singer’s memory analyses build on a tradition dating back to Adler and continuing through the work of Mayman, Tomkins, and Arnold Bruhn, and it is informed by his collaboration with the late Martin Conway.

### **Brief Overview of Carlile’s Life and Work**

Brandi Carlile (born in 1981) is an American singer, instrumentalist, and producer who grew up in a countryside trailer home southeast of Seattle, Washington. From a musical family, she began performing at an early age. At age four, she nearly died from

meningitis and subsequently suffered from bouts of poor health throughout her school years, eventually dropping out of high school to focus on her musical career. Raised in an evangelical community but openly gay by early adolescence, she often experienced discrimination but did not back down from expressing her sexual orientation. Quickly gaining a local following in the Seattle music scene, she parlayed this success into a recording contract and began to chart country music hits by the early 2000s.

Her music draws on folk, country, and rock 'n' roll influences within the broad "Americana" category, and she has won six Grammy awards. She has broken down many barriers as an influential LGBT+ artist, but her music reaches all kinds of audiences, and she has had extensive collaborations with the most prominent musicians in the industry, including Elton John and Joni Mitchell. Carlile has become known for her identification with those who suffer from injustice and conflict, as well as for her advocacy and activism. Through her early adulthood, Carlile was only able to own horses that were broken down and unwanted. Aware of this, her young daughter proposed the apt title, *Broken Horses*, for her memoir.

### **Narrative Identity and Self-Defining Memories**

In the last decade, Singer has brought a new theoretical perspective to psychobiography, blending the narrative identity model of Dan McAdams with his longstanding research on a specific form of autobiographical memory, the "self-defining memory." In his analyses of Stevenson and Heschel, he identified specific memory narratives from these subjects' lives that are vivid, emotionally intense, repetitively referenced, linked to networks of similar memories, and expressive of enduring concerns or conflicts. These self-defining memories often coalesce in more abstract patterns of emotion, behavior, and response that serve as "narrative scripts" influencing the subjects' self-understanding and interactions.

Examining Brandi Carlile's memoir, we asked the question, "Might we find emblematic self-defining memories that encapsulate major life themes or conflicts in her life?" It was clear from her choice of the memoir's title that Carlile intended to foreground the concept of "brokenness" as a crucible from which her songwriting and performance emerge. As a person with chronic physical ailments, a high school "drop-out," and with an openly gay identity in an evangelical Christian community, there were clearly many resonances to a sense that she felt "damaged" or ill-fitted to a world



in good working order. At the same time, the lyric in “Broken Horses” declares, “Only broken horses know how to run.” In other words, Carlile sees brokenness as the wellspring of resilient creativity. It is suffering that has made her a “tried and weathered woman” who “won’t be tried again.”

In looking for emblematic self-defining memories, we loosely applied the criteria recommended by Todd Schultz for identifying the “prototypical scene” from an individual’s life. Schultz sees the prototypical scene as an *uber*-self-defining memory that manages to convey the most powerful themes of an individual’s life. Through repetitive recall and retelling, it becomes a compressed placeholder for the expression of these themes in the individual’s psyche.

However, with our interest in the narrative script of “brokenness,” we were seeking to identify a series of critical self-defining memories that share a particular template of similar affect-action sequences. This means we were looking for multiple memories rather than the prototypical scene. Nevertheless, to identify the key memories, we applied his criteria: one, vividness/specificity/emotional intensity; two, interpenetration (emergence of this narrative across different media of self-expression); three, developmental crisis; four, family conflict; and five, “thrownness” (a unique occurrence in the narrative that violates the status quo).

The second author culled the entire memoir and generated a series of memories that might be candidates for these prototypical self-defining memory characteristics. Given this essay’s space limitations, we have selected two key memories to which Carlile gives substantial attention, not only in her memoir but in interviews and, explicitly and indirectly, in a number of her song lyrics. In a nearly archetypal fashion, these two memories deepen and expand the theme of brokenness.

### **A First “Broken” Memory**

Carlile calls attention to this memory in the third sentence of her memoir, “I contracted meningococcal meningitis at age 4.” Her account of falling ill, being hospitalized, going into a coma, and gradually awakening and recovering, runs across five pages and is rich in both painful and darkly humorous detail. What emerges from her retelling is that her frailty in that experience gave her insight into aspects of both powerlessness and power that form the defining parameters of her brokenness.

Watching her very young parents' helplessness during her hospital stay galvanized a sense in her young mind that she was on her own in this world—that whatever mending was going to happen had to be done by herself—no one else could do this for her. At the same time, seeing their pain and, even more acutely, the despair and fear of her little brother, just 11 months younger, crying at her bedside, she felt an overwhelming empathy for all of their suffering. Added to these two insights—of her own power and her deep reservoir of feeling for others—was a third recognition: “But everyone agreed that God kept me alive because He had a plan for me.” Carlile calls this her “grossly inflated sense of self-importance.”

Thus, in the first chapter of her memoir, using a self-defining memory of her illness as the primary vehicle, Carlile sets out the terms of her brokenness. It begins with an acknowledgment of being shattered—of breaking down. From that moment of collapse emerges an ironic awareness of one's own resources—the power of mind, will, and talent. This self-propulsion is driven by God's plan and, for exactly this reason, is suffused with a deep empathetic responsibility to others. There is grandiose self-importance, but it is driven by love and not self-aggrandizement. As she wrote in her first major hit song, “The Story”:

All of these lines across my face  
Tell you the story of who I am  
So many stories of where I've  
been  
And how I got to where I am  
But these stories don't mean  
anything  
When you've got no one to tell  
them to.  
It's true...I was made for you.

### **A Second “Broken Memory”**

By age 17, Carlile had reached a crossroads in both her developing sexuality and her Christianity. Although out to her family and about to move in with her first girlfriend, she had still been a faithful attendee of Church and Christian summer camp and clung to a belief that she could reconcile her lifestyle with a place in the congregation. Close to the young pastor, she prepared for a late baptism. Yet on the very day of the ceremony, even at the point of waiting in the vestry in her swimsuit, she was not prepared for the pastor's request that she repent from her homosexuality. He had

allowed her to go through the training; she had hidden nothing from him. He was apologetic but insistent. She fled from the Church and found support from her family and many others in the town. In fact, this second key moment of seeing her ultimate “defectiveness” in the eyes of the conventional religious world taught her a kind of larger grace, more in tune with the ennobling dimension of Christ’s suffering on the cross than the pieties of any ceremony.

There was grace in the outrage my public rejection incited in my family and in the tiny town. I hadn’t fully seen it until then. That’s how real “heart change” is made. Consciousness that shifts not as a result of triumph, but of sacrifice, even sometimes humiliation. That’s where the mercy creeps in. (Carlile, 2022, p. 86)

Once again, she linked this memory narrative to her narrative script of empowerment in her creative enterprise—self-importance with a mission for others, emerging from a confrontation with brokenness, “I would take the leap, move out of my parents’ home, and find salvation where the rest of the misfits and rejects find it. Through twisted, joyful, sexual, weird and wonderful music” (Carlile, 2022, p. 87).

### **Discussion**

In this brief tribute to Mac Runyan, we sought to demonstrate how one can apply a psychological theory to elucidate the understanding of key aspects of individual life (and individual lives in general). Our analysis illustrates how investigation of specific self-defining memory narratives in a life story can provide crucial material for extracting a narrative script that expresses the organizing thematic motif in an individual’s self-understanding and sense of identity. Although space limitations only allowed for two examples, there are at least a half-dozen more vivid self-defining memories provided by Carlile’s memoir that illustrate the same pattern:

Brokenness-----Awareness of both Powerlessness and sudden Empathic Power-----Rising to a State of Grace and Creative Purpose.

In our work as both personality and clinical researchers, the valuable synthesis that this psychological theory provides within a framework of narrative identity makes for a greater understanding of individual motivation, psychodynamics, and behavioral patterns. Since our application of self-defining memories and narrative scripts draws on a body of both experimental and clinical research, it brings the benefit of multi-method rigor to our forays into psy-

chobiography. That it can provide fruitful insight into the life of a contemporary popular artist only illustrates that the field of study Mac Runyan championed those many decades ago is far from broken, but richly vibrant and fertile.

**Jefferson A. Singer, PhD**, is the Faulk Foundation Professor of Psychology at Connecticut College in New London, Connecticut. With a long career of research in personality and clinical psychology, he has shared more than 25 joyous years with Mac Runyan as fellow members of the Society for Personology. He can be contacted at [jasin@conncoll.edu](mailto:jasin@conncoll.edu). **Emma Lombardo** is senior undergraduate double major in Psychology and Sociology at Connecticut College. She is also a gifted piano player and a *cappella* singer. She can be contacted at [elombardo@conncoll.edu](mailto:elombardo@conncoll.edu).

#### References

- Carlile, Brandi (2022). *Broken horses*. Crown.
- Singer, Jefferson A. (2022). "O'er the hilltops is the word of God": Abraham Joshua Heschel's prototypical self-defining memory and its relationship to his vision of the good life. *Journal of Research in Personality, 101*, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2022.104287>. □

## Mac and Me After a Half-Century: Psychobiography and Historiometry

**Dean Keith Simonton**—University of California, Davis

*Abstract: While Harvard graduate students, Runyan and the author initiated a conversation concerning contrary ways of conceiving the relation between psychology and history. The exchange converged regarding the "madness of King George."*

*Keywords: Elms, historiometry, King George III, Mad King George, psychobiography, psychopathology, stress, University of California*

A half-century ago, William Mac Runyan and I were graduate students at Harvard University. Although we were contemporaries, both receiving our PhDs in 1975, we were in very different graduate programs, he in clinical and I in social. Nevertheless, sometime during our studies, a chance encounter occurred in the library, where we struck up a conversation. It became clear that we shared certain common interests, most notably in combining psychology and history. I don't remember the details of that exchange

largely because they became submerged in my memory by many more recent conversations once we had become established at our respective University of California campuses, he at Berkeley (UCB; in Social Welfare) and I at Davis (UCD; in Psychology). The proximity of the two campuses permitted multiple occasions where I was invited to give talks at UCB's Institute for Personality Assessment and Research (later renamed the Institute for Personality Assessment and Social Research). Several times, Runyan walked across campus to hear my presentation and then engaged me in extended conversations regarding how our respective positions had developed. This discussion was facilitated by the fact that Runyan had an ally, a senior colleague of mine who occupied the next office over at UCD: Alan C. Elms, a distinguished psychobiographer in his own right.

The differences between Runyan and Elms, on the one hand, and me, on the other, centered around such issues as nomothetic versus idiographic explanations, quantitative versus qualitative analyses, and multiple-case versus single-case studies. For some time, it didn't seem that any progress was being made in resolving the conflicts because psychobiography and historiometry were focusing on divergent questions regarding the interplay of psychology and history. Was it even possible to frame a question that both could attempt to answer?

Runyan then provided the missing opportunity. In his 1988 article on "Progress in Psychobiography," he explicitly addressed the question of what caused the psychopathic episodes experienced by King George III of Great Britain. Apparently, researchers had converged on the consensus that the monarch suffered from porphyria, the interpretation later adopted in *The Madness of King George*, the 1994 film based on a 1991 play. Yet it was assumed without empirical investigation that these bouts of madness could not be even partially attributed to the various severe stresses that King George had endured throughout his long reign. I tested this assumption using historiometric methods in my 1998 article, "Mad King George: The Impact of Personal and Political Stress on Mental and Physical Health," and found a relationship between periods of stress and illness. The investigation consisted of the following three steps:

First, more than a dozen research assistants used available biographical data to compile two separate chronologies of the king's life, one containing stressful events and the other pathologi-

cal symptoms. The two chronologies were not compiled by the same assistants.

Second, two sets of independent raters (separate from the preceding) scored the above compilations for fluctuations in stress (total, personal, and political) and health (total, physical, and mental) across 624 consecutive months between January 1760 and December 1811, inclusively. Because there were 22 judges evenly divided between the two measures, calculating the reliability coefficients became possible, which compared favorably with the norms in psychometric assessment.

Third, established time-series methods were used to compute the cross-correlations between the three stress measures and the three health measures. These correlations showed that the king's health tended to deteriorate after major episodes of stress. These results provide some support for the assertion, by a distinguished historian of George's reign, that "the stress endured by this hard-working man seemed sufficient to account for his violent breakdown" (Watson, 1994, p. 197).

Notice that this study evaluated a nomothetic hypothesis (the stress-illness association) using quantitative techniques (both variable measurements and statistical analyses) applied to multiple cases (624 within individual time-series units). Even so, it deals with a well-known psychobiographical question. Better yet, the stress-illness correlations discovered for the monarch are about the same order of magnitude as those found in the general population. King George was strikingly human, after all. He could have developed a vulnerable physical and mental constitution, perhaps even porphyria, but he also had to endure personal and political stresses that were far above normal. At the same time, the lagged correlations are small enough to be easily overlooked by anybody merely scanning the immense inventory of biographical and historical names, dates, and places. Historiometry then helps avoid the problem of not seeing the forest for the trees.

I have applied historiometric methods to other major figures, namely William Shakespeare, Napoleon Bonaparte, Ludwig van Beethoven, Thomas Edison, Pablo Picasso, and B. F. Skinner. But the King George inquiry remains the one most directly connected to Runyan's own work in psychobiography. Indeed, his 1988 article was the direct inspiration for my 1998 article, both appearing in *The Journal of Personality*.

Runyan, Elms, and I lost contact over the years, a process accelerated by our respective retirements. I couldn't even run into Elms in the hallway. Hence, I welcomed this opportunity to continue a conversation that began 50 years ago. Will it go on from here?

**Dean Keith Simonton, PhD**, received his Harvard doctorate in Social Psychology and retired as a Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Psychology at the University of California, Davis. His more than 500 publications, including over a dozen books, treat various aspects of genius, creativity, and leadership. In 2023, he served as President of the Society for the History of Psychology (Division 26 of the American Psychological Association). Simonton may be contacted at [dksimonton@ucdavis.edu](mailto:dksimonton@ucdavis.edu).

#### References

- Runyan, William McKinley (1988). Progress in psychobiography. *Journal of Personality*, 56, 295-326.
- Simonton, Dean Keith (1998). Mad King George: The impact of personal and political stress on mental and physical health. *Journal of Personality*, 66, 443-466.
- Watson, John Steven (1994). George III of Great Britain. In *Encyclopedia Britannica, Micropaedia* (15<sup>th</sup> ed., 5, pp. 194-196). Encyclopedia Britannica. □

## Mac Runyan and Me—And 40 Years of Personality Psychology

Dan P. McAdams—Northwestern University

*Abstract: The author describes his evolving relationship with “Mac” Runyan in the context of the history of personality psychology, going back to “Why Did van Gogh Cut Off His Ear?” (1981), followed by the publication of Life Histories and Psychobiography (1982), Mac’s burst of creativity helped to catalyze significant change in the field of personality psychology. Forty years later, Mac’s early contributions have proven to be prescient.*

*Keywords: Life Histories and Psychobiography, narrative-study-of-lives, personality-psychology, psychobiography, Vincent van Gogh, William McKinley Runyan*

### Chapter 1: Becoming a Personality Psychologist in the Late 1970s

I arrived at Harvard in the fall of 1976 as a 22-year-old in-

genue from a small liberal arts college in Indiana. With no prior research experience and little understanding of what doctoral students do and why they do it, I struggled to find a place in the Personality and Developmental Psychology doctoral program within the Department of Psychology and Social Relations. I had imagined that I might study and write about human nature and the vicissitudes of individual human lives, as my undergraduate reading of Freud, Piaget, Kierkegaard, Dostoyevsky, and other great thinkers had led me to believe. I quickly learned, however, that psychologists no longer did that sort of thing, at least not for their day jobs. Nomothetic, hypothesis-testing research, typically conducted under controlled laboratory conditions, was now the norm. I also learned that once upon a time, a small band of personological pioneers had embarked upon the kind of scholarship that I expected to find in graduate school, and even here at Harvard. They were Henry Murray, Robert White, Gordon Allport, and Erik Erikson. I set them up in my mind as heroes from a bygone era.

I learned how to do personality research in graduate school. Whereas I once delighted in tracing Freud's interpretive moves in his case of Dora, I now invested my intellectual libido into psychometrics, construct validity, and the articulation of nomological networks in scientific research. I developed a line of research on individual differences in something I called "intimacy motivation" (McAdams, 1980). I also threw myself into the scientific controversies of the day. Within personality psychology, the big issue back then was the person/situation debate: What accounts for the lion's share of variance in human behavior? Is it a person's internal traits or the exigencies of the situation? Back then, the situationists were killing it. Repeatedly, studies seemed to show that variations in environmental conditions decisively shaped people's behavior. By contrast, internal factors like personality traits seemed to matter hardly at all. For me, this all made for a very depressing state of affairs.

As I took my first academic job at Loyola University of Chicago, I continued to research intimacy motivation, but I also began to read widely in psychoanalysis, life-span studies, philosophy, and literary criticism. I poured over Erikson's psychobiographies, *Young Man Luther* (1958) and *Gandhi's Truth* (1969), and I wondered if there would ever come a day when personality psychology could be used in the service of psychological biography. It seemed unlikely. The situationist critique called into question the



very idea of personality, which rests (for most people) on the assumption that individual persons must possess (at least a few) more-or-less stable characteristics that shape their behavior and experience across situations and over time. If these characteristics do not exist, then personality does not exist. If personality does not exist, then applying ideas from personality psychology to the biography of a prominent person, as Erikson did with psychoanalysis, would seem to be nothing more than a fool's errand.

### **Chapter 2: Enter Mac**

Little did I know back then that sprigs of hope and change were greening up in what seemed at the time to be an intellectual desert. For example, a small group of renegade psychologists formed the Society for Personology in the early 1980s, dedicated to reviving Murray's legacy of studying the whole person. Included in the group were Rae Carlson, Ravenna Helson, Silvan Tomkins, Harrison Gough, and others who identified primarily as personality psychologists. Mac Runyan was one of the first members of the group. In another important development, the editorial board of the highly prestigious *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* (*JPSP*) decided to split the publication into three parts, one of which was to be given over mainly to those disgruntled personality psychologists who seemed back then to be the losers in the person/situation debate. Robert Hogan, a professor at Johns Hopkins University, was appointed to be the editor of that third section, which was named "Personality Processes and Individual Differences." Hogan was an enthusiastic champion of traits and persons. Viewing his role as a passionate advocate rather than a stern gatekeeper, Hogan invited scholars to submit their most innovative work. To the surprise of many, Hogan's section of *JPSP* attracted a tsunami of interesting and unconventional papers in the early 1980s, dwarfing in size and influence the other two sections of the journal.

Among the most interesting and unconventional papers ever published during Hogan's tenure was Runyan's (1981) "Why did van Gogh cut off his ear? The problem of alternative explanations in psychobiography." When I opened my copy of the journal and encountered Runyan's piece, I could not believe what I was reading. Rather than painstakingly describing the methodology and statistical results from a hypothesis-testing laboratory study, Runyan posed a fundamental question for the study of persons: How do you know if your interpretation of a life is right? For his "data," Runyan featured a famous historical incident. On the evening of

December 23, 1888, Vincent van Gogh, then 35 years old, cut off the lower half of his left ear and took it to a brothel, where he requested to see a prostitute named Rachel. He handed her the ear and asked that she “keep this object carefully.” In an intellectual tour de force, Mac evaluated the relative credibility of 13 different psychological explanations for van Gogh’s bizarre act, calling up criteria like logical soundness, comprehensiveness, consistency with what we know about human nature, and the results of efforts to falsify a proposed hypothesis. Even if we never arrive at the one true explanation that trumps all others, we can use clear standards to eliminate some explanations and elevate others. Following rational guidelines and examining all the data, we can make significant progress in understanding a life.

Runyan’s 1981 essay on van Gogh later appeared as Chapter 3 in his subsequent book, *Life Histories and Psychobiography: Explorations in Theory and Method*. The book situated psychobiography in a broad tradition of qualitative inquiry in psychology and the social sciences, encompassing life history approaches, case studies, idiographic analysis, and more. Runyan (1982) blended case vignettes of famous people, from Jesus to Malcolm X, with scholarly discussions of personality theory, scientific reasoning as applied to individual lives, interpretive methods in the humanities, and the history of biography. One reviewer hailed the book as “among the most significant contributions to the Study of Lives since Henry Murray’s [1938] *Explorations in Personality*” (Cohler, 1982). Another predicted, correctly, that “this will be the most important book in life history research for some time to come” (Ricks, 1982). For me, the book was a godsend, for it gave me hope that my original affinity for studying big ideas about individual human lives might someday translate into tangible intellectual work. More than anything I read before or since, Mac’s authoritative and generative book reaffirmed for me a deep and abiding connection to those Harvard heroes: Murray, White, Allport, and Erikson.

### **Chapter 3: Mac’s Legacy**

In the years to follow, I got to know Mac Runyan personally, as a friend and esteemed colleague. He spent a day at my home back in the mid-1980s, and I recall that he met my mother, who was also in town. She was starstruck by Mac. She had never met a famous psychologist before, and she could not believe how nice he was! Mac’s kindness and generosity—he scores off the map on the basic temperament trait of agreeableness—are legendary among

those who know him, as are his erudition and his intellectual curiosity. I believe that the development of my own intellectual project on the study of life stories and narrative identity (e.g., McAdams, 2013) owes much to Mac's early influence. His work also presaged the emergence in the 1990s of the interdisciplinary movement in the social sciences called the narrative Study of Lives. Mac's early work rekindled and refined my passion for personology and the study of the whole person, and it inspired me to try my hand at psychobiography (e.g., McAdams, 2020). The many conversations Mac and I have had in the decades since, especially under the auspices of the Society for Personology, have continued to shape my thinking in countless ways.

Mac's legacy is also apparent in the field of personality psychology proper. Beginning in the late 1980s, personality psychologists turned the tide in their battle with the situationists, as an avalanche of research findings and theoretical advances demonstrated the awesome power of dispositional personality traits. Mac's work on psychobiography and life narratives had no bearing on this positive development in the field of personality psychology. Instead, Mac envisioned what personality psychologists might do once the person/situation debate had been settled. Now that the bedrock concept of a personality trait has been secured, personality researchers were freed up to explore a myriad of phenomena that speak to individual differences between people and the uniqueness of each individual human life. Mac's *JPSP* article signaled some of what might be possible for the field of personality psychology once it exorcised its demons and opened its purview to a full range of theoretical and methodological options. Within psychology more generally, Mac's early writings on life histories and psychobiography also helped to pave the way for the upsurge of interest in qualitative methodologies and epistemologies, as demonstrated in the establishment of the American Psychological Association's journal, *Qualitative Psychology*.

The most recent evidence for Mac's long-term legacy is the publication of a special issue of the *Journal of Personality* (2023), edited by Jonathan Adler and Jefferson Singer, given over to psychobiographies of social change agents. The editors of this landmark volume aim to reaffirm the value of psychological biography within the field of personality studies while encouraging scholars to examine the lives of people who have endeavored to change society for the better, especially with respect to efforts to promote social

justice and racial equity. As in many of the narrative-based, qualitative studies published in psychology today, Adler and Singer aim to explore the lives and life circumstances of marginalized groups and people of color.

In *Life Histories and Psychobiography*, Mac Runyan focused largely (though not exclusively) on the lives of prominent and often privileged White men and women, like the four figures pictured on the book's front jacket: Virginia Woolf, Sigmund Freud, Abraham Lincoln, and Vincent van Gogh. Today, however, the kinds of methods and epistemologies championed by Mac in 1982 have gained considerable traction among scholars who aim to convey the lived experience of Black and Brown people across the world. Qualitative methodologies, life narrative approaches, case-based research, idiographic explorations of individual lives, and psychobiography have increased steadily in their influence and significance within personality psychology and related fields. These approaches are often employed today in emancipatory discourses aimed at giving voice to those who have been silenced and affirming the lives of those who have often been ignored.

In conclusion, Mac Runyan's early writing had a profound influence on me early in my career, reconnecting me to the personological tradition represented by Murray and Erikson while giving me hope that a more expansive perspective on personality studies might someday be possible. Our friendship has continued to reinforce and refine that influence. For the broader field of personality studies, Mac anticipated important conceptual and methodological developments that began to take shape once personality psychologists were finally able to vanquish the situationist critique and reaffirm the basic concept of a personality trait. In the early 1980s, it seemed as if Mac was mainly looking back to a glorious past. But it turned out that he was also, perhaps unwittingly, looking forward to what would eventually become a better future for the psychology of personality.

**Dan P. McAdams, PhD**, is the Henry Wade Rogers Professor of Psychology and Professor of Human Development and Social Policy at Northwestern University. He is the author most recently of *The Strange Case of Donald J. Trump: A Psychological Reckoning* (Oxford, 2020) and (with William Dunlop) *The Person: A New Introduction to Personality Psychology* (Wiley, 2022). He can be contacted at [dmca@northwestern.edu](mailto:dmca@northwestern.edu).

### References

- Case, Amanda S., Aguiñiga, Sergio Maldonado, & Hoxsey, Abigail (2023). Social change at the local level: A psychobiography of Khali Sweeney from Detroit's downtown boxing gym. *Journal of Personality, 91*, 134-149.
- Cohler, Bertram J. (1982). Back cover endorsement. In William McKinley Runyan, *Life histories and psychobiography: Explorations in theory and method*. Oxford University Press.
- McAdams, Dan P. (1980). A thematic coding system for the intimacy motive. *Journal of Research in Personality, 14*, 413-432.
- McAdams, Dan P. (2013). *The redemptive self: Stories Americans live by* (revised and expanded edition). Oxford University Press.
- McAdams, Dan P. (2020). *The strange case of Donald J. Trump: A psychological reckoning*. Oxford University Press.
- Ricks, David F. (1982). Back cover endorsement. In William McKinley Runyan, *Life histories and psychobiography: Explorations in theory and method*. Oxford University Press.
- Runyan, William McKinley (1981). Why did van Gogh cut off his ear? The problem of alternative explanations in psychobiography. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 40*, 1070-1077.
- Runyan, William McKinley (1982). *Life histories and psychobiography: Explorations in theory and method*. Oxford University Press. □

## Tributes

### A Brief Tribute to William McKinley Runyan

Jim Clark—Florida State University

*Abstract: Mac Runyan deserves to be celebrated as one of the founders of contemporary personology because of his important contributions to the philosophical, epistemological, and historical explorations of the theory, method, and practice of this field and general psychology. His intellectual power is matched only by his kindness and commitment to colleagues and students. This article presents a personal report of that influence.*

*Keywords: category-mistake, forensic-case-studies, personology, psychobiography, study-of-lives, William James, William McKinley Runyan, Vincent van Gogh*

Mac's distinguished career at Berkeley, his brilliant books

and papers, and the thousands of students, colleagues, and readers that he has engaged comprise a truly remarkable life's work. His insistence on making his own way as a rebellious Harvard graduate student ultimately allowed him to help define the emergent field of personological inquiry. Mac discovered that making the case for psychobiography and the Study of Lives through a rigorous discussion of method would be the signature across his writings. This choice was so crucial, as he realized that psychology (and all social science) is perennially in danger of perpetuating category mistakes—the error of applying the wrong criteria to the analysis of a phenomenon. Category mistakes generate the avalanches of confusion that block scientific advancement, and Mac was not only interested in promoting psychobiography and the Study of Lives but also employed that endeavor to help all social scientists to address fundamental epistemologies.

Another important contribution is Mac's emphasis on ecological validity through attending to historical and psychosocial contexts that the "view from nowhere" (Nagel, 1986, p. 56) grievously ignores. The idea that the Study of Lives focuses on persons moving through time and places appears simple but proves crucial: "[The] history of the personality is not the same as the life history. The life history is a larger unit of analysis. It includes the history of the person interacting with contingent social, cultural, and historical contexts" (Runyan, 2005, p. 29). Runyan (2005) explains that "This can be a valuable complement, even a humanizing component, to the hard science of personality which emphasizes biological factors in evolutionary psychology, neuroscience, and genetic sources of personality" (p. 29). Conceptually, untangling the "person" from the "personality" puts the investigator on the right path at the outset of any personological exploration. This might prove to be the most important prevention of category mistakes in the service of doing successful work toward a "humanized" personology.

During my own sojourn as a doctoral student at the University of Chicago, Mac's work was first placed in my hands in 1990 by my teacher, now friend, Bill Borden, who was beginning to write his own books and papers about pluralism and pragmatism in psychodynamic theory. Bill had seen my strong interest in Robert Coles' work, especially the multi-volume *Children of Crisis* (1967-1977), as signaling a commitment to personological approaches, even though I could never have identified this myself. He gave me

a reading list that included Dan McAdams, D. B. Bromley, Henry A. Murray, Robert White, Paul Meehl, Jim Anderson, Louis Sass, Oliver Sacks, Franklin Shontz, as well as others that Mac also identifies as crucial to the field of personology.

When I began my career as an assistant professor at the University of Kentucky College of Social Work, I predictably got diverted to working on more traditional, quantitative studies, was promoted and tenured, and then was appointed as director of the doctoral program—an eventuality about which I was ambivalent. But chance favors the prepared mind. At a meeting of the Group for the Advancement of Doctoral Education (GADE), I found myself across the table from a fellow director self-identifying as Mac Runyan. After I nervously introduced myself, he suggested that we begin our own conference on personology, so we absconded to a nearby restaurant and had a six-hour conversation. I cannot remember if I attended any other GADE sessions, but that conversation put me back on track and profoundly influenced the future direction of my career.

After that meeting, Mac kindly invited me to visit him at the University of California, Berkeley, and our conversations continued. These personal encounters helped me to realize that Mac's personological approaches were infused with empathy and compassion. While discussing the merits of Paul Meehl's classic paper, "Why I Do Not Attend Case Conferences" in his edited *Psychodiagnostics: Selected papers* (1973, pp. 225-302), I commented that Meehl's sarcastic, incisive criticisms of clinicians and their poor clinical reasoning were hilarious and created a paper that you just couldn't put down. Mac was quiet for a while and remarked that while he admired him, he thought that "Meehl could have been much kinder to those people while still making all of the same points." I was struck by Mac's reaction to his paper and found it instructive as to the moral dangers of academic life, specifically the frequent correlation between genius and unkindness.

But I also found a larger claim embedded in Mac's remark: that compassion and intellectual humility might yield their own rewards by prioritizing curiosity and intellectual openness when pursuing personological exploration. I think some of this is also found in Mac's insistence that understanding persons requires a much wider lens than found in the "hard sciences" that Meehl strove to emulate in his important work in personality assessment and decision science. Mac (2005) advocates for an "appropriately scientific

and humanistic psychology” (p. 36) that requires a particular way of seeing.

Mac also made several concrete suggestions about my work. First, he encouraged my continued exploration of the life and work of Robert Coles, a figure he also appreciated. We discussed approaches to understanding these endeavors through the conversations I was having with Dr. Coles in Concord, Massachusetts. Both Mac and Bob love William James and his commitment to the phenomenology of persons’ subjective experiences wherever they are accessible. William James must be especially smiling at Mac’s ongoing curation of such generative conversations between philosophy and psychology.

We spent time discussing the oft-forgotten significance of James for psychology and philosophy. Mac discussed his campaign to get Harvard University to purchase James’ home, which was being “renovated” by a real estate developer. This neglect of the James residence seemed a metaphor for how psychology and the social sciences had forgotten their own historical founders in pursuit of “pure” science. A fundamental category mistake was impacting Harvard’s institutional legacy.

Almost as an afterthought during another visit, I discussed my forensic work, especially the life history investigations to develop mitigation for clients facing the death penalty. I was doing this work outside of and disconnected from my academic research, but Mac strongly encouraged me to think differently about this. He urged me to write up these cases formally and to integrate personological frameworks into all academic work. I began to do this and publish works such as “Social work, psychobiography, and the study of lives” (Clark, 2010) with the support, again, of Bill Borden. Later, in a volume co-edited with Ed Monahan, I would credit Mac and personology for helping forensic behavioral health professionals see the contributions that rigorous case study methodology could make to the theory and practice of capital case mitigation. This curated gathering of the best in the field became *Tell the Client's Story: Mitigation in Criminal and Death Penalty Cases* (Monahan & Clark, 2017).

Among the many other concerns that Mac explored in *Life Histories and Psychobiography* (1982), the chapter on alternative explanations has important applications for all forensic work. Remarkably, recent suggestions that van Gogh might have *not* severed



his own ear, but that another (perhaps Gaugin) had sliced it off during a fight, and a recent film, *At Eternity's Gate* (2018), depicting that the painter might have been shot by hooligans rather than suffering death by suicide, are intriguing. They are ongoing “forensic science” extensions of Mac’s classic paper, “Why did van Gogh cut off his ear? The problem of alternative explanations in psychobiography” (1981), which he later elaborated upon in one of his contributions in the *Handbook of Psychobiography* (2005).

The lesson here is that when generating alternative explanations, especially in forensics, major cases are rarely closed. It can be argued that effective, heuristic case studies are endlessly argued, and thereby suggestive of fresh approaches to method and historical understanding, and further, that in the right hands, these explorations have the potential to generate innovations for the social sciences in general. Among his other achievements, Mac deserves great credit for formulating and formalizing this fascinating van Gogh case study that continues to engage biography, art history, psychiatry, and psychology over 40 years after its first appearance in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. Indeed, Mac’s fundamental contributions are important to consider as we pursue ongoing work in law, medicine, and psychology.

**Jim Clark, PhD**, is provost and executive vice president of the Florida State University (FSU). Before that, Jim served as dean of the FSU College of Social Work as well as in previous faculty and leadership posts at the University of Kentucky and the University of Cincinnati. He has published in the fields of forensic behavioral health, child traumatic stress, professional ethics, university students’ stress and resilience, and the Study of Lives. Among several professional and scholarly organizations, he is a member of an amazing group, the Society for Personology—thanks to Mac Runyan’s nomination. He can be reached at [jclark5@fsu.edu](mailto:jclark5@fsu.edu).

### References

- Clark, James J. (2010). Social work, psychobiography, and the study of lives. In William Borden (Ed.), *Reshaping Social Work Theory: Toward a Critical Pluralism in Contemporary Practice* (pp. 81-113). Columbia University Press.
- Monahan, Edward C., & Clark, James J. (2017). *Tell the client's story: Mitigation in criminal and death penalty cases*. American Bar Association.
- Nagel, Thomas (1986). *The view from nowhere*. Oxford University Press.

Runyan, William McKinley (2005). Evolving conceptions of psychobiography and the study of lives: Encounters with psychoanalysis, personality psychology, and historical science. In William Todd Schultz (Ed.), *Handbook of psychobiography* (pp. 19-41). Oxford University Press. □

## **William McKinley Runyan: Mentor and Friend**

**Marilyn Fabe**—University of California (Berkeley)

*Abstract: My serendipitous encounter with Mac Runyan at the first meeting of the Bay Area Psychobiography Group in 1992, and his support and encouragement over 30 years, inspired my long-lasting involvement in teaching and writing psychobiographical film criticism.*

*Keywords: Emily Dickinson, Freud's Interpretation of Dreams, Life Histories and Psychobiography, Maya Deren's "Meshes of the Afternoon," "The Question of Inadequate Evidence," the San Francisco Bay Area Psychobiography Group, van Gogh*

I was fortunate to meet Mac in 1992 when I began teaching film at UC Berkeley, where Mac was on the faculty in the Public Health Department. The occasion was the first meeting of the San Francisco Bay Area Psychobiography Group, of which Mac was a founding member. He was introduced to me as the father of psychobiography.

I had joined the group to get help with a paper on a puzzling dream film I was teaching in a course on avant-garde films, Maya Deren's *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943). Influenced by my training in graduate school in psychoanalytic approaches to interpreting literature, I interpreted *Meshes of the Afternoon* with the help of Freud's methodology in *The Interpretations of Dreams* (1899). Then I read a two-volume meticulously researched biography of Maya Deren, which stunningly seemed to corroborate my interpretation. I had stumbled into psychobiography.

My film colleagues in Berkeley had little interest in connecting the interpretation of films to the lives of their creators, so I was more than lucky to find Mac Runyan and a group of scholars in many disciplines who shared my interest and could teach me more about it. With some trepidation, I presented a draft of my paper to the psychobiography group, feeling way out of my league. The

suggestions and encouragement I received enabled me to improve the paper, which was published by *Women Studies* in 1996.

Mac's presence in the psychobiography group, which still meets today, has been especially valuable to me. Over the years, his thoughtful responses to my papers combined with his generous recommendations of references and resources continue to inspire my work and enrich my thinking. Mac became a friend whose help went beyond psychobiography. As others have often mentioned, Mac has a knack for coming up with just the right book title. In my case, he suggested the title for my book on the history of narrative film art. The book was based on close shot-by-shot analyses of sequences from exemplary films. Playing on the title of Jiri Menzel's renowned *Closely Watched Trains* (1966), Mac suggested *Closely Watched Films*. It was Perfect.

Mac's *Life Histories and Psychobiography* (1982/1984) became my psychobiography bible. This brilliant, compellingly written book instructed me in the history and theory of psychobiography and legitimized my passion for it. Mac argues for the importance of studying individuals by providing vivid and intriguing accounts of the psychobiographies of Woodrow Wilson, Emily Dickinson, Virginia Woolf, Wilhelm Reich, Shakespeare, Freud, Henry Murray, Karen Horney, and numerous others, including King George III and Jesus. Drawing on his reading of J. Cody's *After Great Pain: The Inner Life of Emily Dickinson* (1971), for example, Mac provides convincing evidence based on Dickinson's letters, inferences drawn from her poetry, and insights from psychoanalytic theory, concluding that Dickinson's poetry grew out of her suffering from her rejection by an inadequate mother. No bad mother, no poems.

Under the heading of "The Question of Inadequate Evidence," Mac presents serious critiques of psychobiographical interpretations only to then defend them. He points, for example, to a major criticism of historical psychoanalytic psychobiographies: You can't put the subject on the couch. Although he acknowledges the seriousness of that criticism (no dreams, no free associations, or access to childhood memories), he then argues persuasively that the psychobiographer of a historical figure in some crucial ways is *better* equipped to understand the psychological roots of a work than a therapist with a living patient. The psychobiographer has the advantage of knowing the entire life span of the subject; he or she can go beyond the evidence of a subject's personal account to draw on

outside sources for information, often not revealed until after the subject's death. Finally, Runyan suggested that if the subject is a writer or artist, the psychobiographer has a wealth of creative material to draw upon and interpret.

I have also had the pleasure of working with Mac, along with Ramsay Breslin, Alan Elms, Stephen Walrod, and later, Jim Anderson, on the editorial board of our psychobiography group's forthcoming book, *Examined Lives: Self-Reflections in Psychobiography*, an anthology of essays written by members of the group. The interdisciplinary diversity of the members is reflected in the range of their subjects, including Elvis Presley, Glenn Gould, Mark Rothko, Stephen De Staebler, Ferdinand Hodler, Alfred Hitchcock, Emma Goldman, and Flannery O'Connor. The unifying theme of the book is that we not only examine the lives of our subjects but look into our own life experiences for clues about why we chose our particular subjects to write about. The book concludes with an essay in which Mac writes about his own experience as a theorist of psychobiography and as a member of the psychobiography group.

I am grateful for my serendipitous meeting with Mac at the dawning of my interest in psychobiography. His encouraging and helpful presence in the psychobiography group, his inspiring *Life Histories and Psychobiography*, and our continuing friendship and conversations over the years are the foundations of my ongoing fascination with writing and teaching psychobiographical film criticism.

**Marilyn Fabe, PhD**, is Senior Lecturer Emerita in the Department of Film and Media at the University of California, Berkeley. She is the author of *Closely Watched Films: An Introduction to the Art of Narrative Film* (2004, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 2014) and has published psychobiographical essays on Maya Deren, Alfred Hitchcock, Orson Welles, Charles Chaplin, and Woody Allen. Dr. Fabe may be contacted at [m.fabe@icloud.com](mailto:m.fabe@icloud.com). □

## Celebrating Mac Runyan

**Nancy C. Unger**—Santa Clara University

*Keywords: email, friendship, philosopher, psychobiography, scholarship, social-psychology, William James*

I am delighted to have the opportunity to reflect on what

Mac Runyan has done for the field of psychohistory—and to more generally celebrate Mac’s intellectual curiosity, kindness, zest for life, and delightful sense of humor.

Mac and I met in 1982 at a Stanford University conference on “History and Psychology: Recent Studies in the Family, Biography, and Theory.” I was still working on the dissertation that would become my first book, *Fighting Bob La Follette: The Righteous Reformer* (2000), and was thrilled—as well as a bit intimidated—to be in the company of so many established scholars, including Mac. But Mac took the time to ask me, a nervous graduate student, about my interest in psychobiography, and expressed a genuine desire to learn more about my work.

Mac had already made a name for himself in this nascent field with his 1981 article in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, “Why did van Gogh cut off his ear? The problem of alternative explanations in psychobiography.” This sequential approach to evaluating the variety of theories offered to explain van Gogh’s self-mutilation remains one of the most sensible and compelling attempts I’ve ever encountered to tackle the problem of multiple interpretations. It has all the hallmarks of Mac’s work: It’s thoughtful, engaging, and uses the foundations of social psychology to probe deeply and break new ground.

My expectation is that others in this issue are grappling meaningfully with Mac’s scholarly legacy. His intellectual accomplishments are profound indeed. Not surprisingly, he has won the Henry A. Murray Award, which recognizes a style of intellectual leadership marked by distinguished contributions to the study of individual lives. So it is a high compliment when I say that, despite the importance of the many intellectual contributions Mac has made over the course of his long and varied career, I value him most as a friend.

The friendship that began at the 1982 conference developed over the past 40 years. Mac’s interest in my scholarship has never flagged—he has read my work and watched recordings of my presentations. He has been more than just a reliable cheerleader. Mac becomes truly engaged with the material and offers thoughtful commentary that inspires future work. Occasionally we meet in person for lunch, inevitably followed by a visit to a bookstore where we end up in the biography section, noting which ones we’ve read and swapping notes on what we’ve learned. More often our

interactions take place over the phone, via Skype, and, in more recent years, on Zoom, with email being the method we have relied upon the most.

I've never been able to bring myself to delete any of Mac's emails because each one is like having a little snapshot of what is capturing his interest at the moment. It might be, for example, several paragraphs about William James (the pragmatist philosopher often called the father of American psychology), and Mac's work with the Cambridge Historical Commission to save James's house. Once, his reading of the autobiographical chapter in *The Philosophy of W.V. Quine* (1998), a Harvard logician, sparked the memory of another Quine book, *From a Logical Point of View* (1953). The latter title, Mac informed me, Quine had taken from a calypso song by Harry Belafonte. In that same email, Mac quoted a definition of a philosopher as someone "trying to find the answers to life's persistent questions." The source? Guy Noir, the fictional private eye on Garrison Keillor's radio show *Prairie Home Companion* (1974-2016). Mac's emails are always thoughtful, sometimes scholarly but never ponderous, and range wonderfully from wrestling with an intellectual question to delighting in some aspect of popular culture.

We are also very serious about food. It is a rare holiday that passes during which Mac does not ask about my menu. We share a great affinity for honey-baked ham, a subject that has figured heavily in many an email exchange, although we often range into significant discussions of various side dishes as well.

Mac Runyan is more than a pioneering scholar. He has enriched my life and the lives of countless others (colleagues, students, and friends) with his wide-ranging intellectual curiosity and enthusiasm, lively sense of humor, and general decency and kindness.

**Nancy C. Unger, PhD**, is Professor of History at Santa Clara University, specializing in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. She is the author of many scholarly articles and essays as well as two award-winning biographies. Her *Beyond Nature's Housekeepers: American Women in Environmental History* (2012) was short-listed for the California Book Award. She served on the editorial board of this journal and has been featured on C-SPAN and PBS, and her op-eds have appeared in venues including CNN, *Time*, and the *Washington Post*. She can be contacted at [NUnger@scu.edu](mailto:NUnger@scu.edu). □

## **“Making it into their world”: My Appreciation for William McKinley Runyan**

**Claude-Hélène Mayer**—University of Johannesburg,

*Abstract: Sharing her encounters with Mac Runyan, the author talks about her interview with him in 2018, his publications and contributions at large as well as in her own book, and her other important interactions with and observations of him.*

*Keywords: colleagues, European, interview, life-history, psychoanalysis, psychobiography, psychology, publications*

My first personal encounter with Mac Runyan—and I am sure he is not aware of that—took place in 1994 when I started to study Philosophy and French at a German university. I had been interested in the development of the lives of individuals and had always wanted to explore individuals' ideas of existence and reality and the guiding principles of their behavior. One year later, when I enrolled in Cultural Anthropology, I explored individual life narratives and analyses in non-European countries and cultures in more depth. There was no way I could have gotten around Mac's publications, such as “In defense of the case study method” (1982), “Idiographic goals and methods in the study of lives” (1983), and his famous book on *Life Histories and Psychobiography* (1982).

When you come from a European scientific background, it is a common trait to look up to U.S.-American pioneers—and you develop an image of the person behind the written text while getting the feeling to know the person already without ever having seen them. So, when I visited the U.S. in 2018, I contacted Mac via email, asking him if I could interview him about psychobiography. He accepted, and we talked about how it can be differentiated from biography, how it relates to contemporary psychology, as well as about the role that psychoanalysts play with regard to psychobiography. Mac also spent time talking about Irvin D. Yalom and his contributions to historically informed biography and psychology, and he explored his relationship with his teachers. Parts of the interview were finally written up by Mac and printed in the book *New Trends in Psychobiography*, which was edited by Zoltan Kovary and me in 2019.

Mac had also agreed to write a chapter for the same book, which he titled “Adventures in Psychobiography and the Study of

Lives: A Personal Journey.” It was a fascinating ride through parts of his own life history, selected psychohistorical subjects, and his encounters with “hard” and “soft” traditions in sciences. At the beginning of this chapter, he describes how “thrilled” he was when he started studying at Harvard University, realizing that many of the scientists he knew from reading their books had offices on campus. In 1969, Mac wondered how he would “make his way into their world” (Runyan, 2019, p. 36).

Almost 54 years later, Mac is looking back at an outstanding, extraordinary international career during which he opened many doors into the worlds of these scholars, such as B. F. Skinner, Henry A. Murray, and Robert W. White. They amazed him with their personalities, life stories, narrations, and theoretical approaches. He vividly described how they influenced him on different levels during his times of being a student and scholar: personally, theoretically, and methodologically. He did not only make his way into their world, but he also expanded it and became a well-known co-constructor.

I think what impressed me the most in our talk in 2018 and our email communications thereafter was how kindly and fascinated Mac spoke about the different personalities of extraordinary colleagues and his relationship with them. His thoughts were deep and his description of his relationship with other scholars seemed to make up important parts of his world. I had never thought about how to “enter his world,” but looking back I realized that he had taken me into his world, as well as into theirs.

Obviously, Mac had found a way into “their world,” and the three hours we had spent on the phone flew by in no time for me. I was impressed by all of Mac’s scientific knowledge, his deep thoughts, the inquisitive nature of his personality, and how he rhetorically intertwined his knowledge with his experiences, as well as the description of his emotional facets and personal anecdotes. Further, I was surprised by how open Mac was to talking with me not only as a scholar but also as a human being. Although we were only on a phone call, his scientific curiosity, empathetic and emotional connectedness, and reflective strengths were very unique and pulled me into his narrations.

I contacted Mac again in 2022, inviting him to write a Foreword or a blurb for our latest book on psychobiography, *Beyond WEIRD: Psychobiography in Times of Transcultural and Transdis-*



*ciplinary Perspectives*, which I edited with my South African colleagues Roelf van Niekerk and Paul J. Fouché and our U.S.-American colleague Joe Ponterotto—all renown psychobiographers. Mac agreed to write both a brief Foreword and a blurb, and we were all thrilled to have him on board for this project.

Further, I was touched when Mac attended an online talk on “Angela Merkel and Graça Machel: The Comparative Heroine’s Journeys of Two Women Leaders,” which I presented in April 2022 at a Psychohistory Forum meeting. The discourses around psychobiography and historical and contemporary influences on the lives of leaders during the Forum were critical, encouraging, and highly stimulating, including pioneers in psychobiography, such as Jim Anderson, Paul Elovitz, and Ken Fuchsman. The discussions evolved around Angela Merkel’s and Graça Machel’s lives, their relationships with their parents and husbands, and the comparison of their political careers. During the talk, Mac’s metaphor of “the worlds” came back to me, and I asked myself during the discussions how these psychobiographers would experience their worlds. I thought that I was not sure how much I could ever make it in “their world,” but I can sincerely say that they made it in mine. This was through Mac’s early writings, which opened my doors (and I am sure the doors of many other scholars as well) into life history narrations and psychobiography.

**Claude-Hélène Mayer, PhD**, is a Professor in Industrial and Organisational Psychology at the University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa. Her main research areas are psychobiography, women in leadership, shame, and the Fourth Industrial Revolution. She can be contacted at [claudemayer.com](http://claudemayer.com) or [claudemayer@gmx.net](mailto:claudemayer@gmx.net).

### References

- Runyan, William M. (2019). Adventures in psychobiography and the study of lives: A personal journey. In Claude-Hélène Mayer & Zoltan Kovary (Eds.), *New Trends in Psychobiography* (p. 35-53). Springer. □

Announcing the online intermediate  
psychobiography course to be taught from  
Sunday December 10<sup>th</sup> through March 3<sup>rd</sup>.

## Runyan Under the Big Psychobiographical/Psychohistorical Umbrella

Paul H. Elovitz—Psychohistory Forum

*Keywords: Asimov, COVID, Elms, International Society for Political Psychology, Lifetime Achievement Award, psychobiography, Runyan*

Mac Runyan is an excellent scholar and colleague who I only recently came to know personally as a fellow psychobiographer. First, we worked together when he wrote the chapter, “Changing Visions of Psychology and Life Histories: A Personal Journey,” for my edited *The Many Roads of the Builders of Psychohistory* (2021, pp. 135-140). Next, he joined the Psychohistory Forum where he regularly participates in our bi-monthly Psychobiography Reading Group. I knew about his commitment to psychobiography as soon as his important *Life Histories and Psychobiography* book came out in the early 1980s.

Unfortunately, at that time, there was a major gulf between the work each of us was doing, which was caused by several factors. One, there was enormous division and little communication between those in California and on the East Coast. Two, for many if not most on the West Coast, everyone associated with the *Journal of Psychohistory* and organizations that Lloyd deMause founded were badmouthed as practicing wild psychohistory and were to be shunned. After discovering psychohistory while still teaching history in the late 1960s at Temple University, I was always cautious about Lloyd deMause when he went off the academic reservation, although I greatly appreciate his bringing like-minded colleagues together, doing breakthrough work on the history of childhood, and providing a journal for publishing our scholarship.

I first met Mac at an International Society for Political Psychology conference in Boston in 2003. At the Q&A session following a presentation, five of us spoke to each other. David Beisel, Jerry Piven, and I were sharply critical of being lumped in with deMause's sometimes wild psychohistory. Both Mac and his fine colleague, Alan Elms, seemed open to what we were saying. It was good to finally meet both of them in person. In the 1990s I had already had some exchanges with Alan, who shared a common interest in Isaac Asimov with me. In fact, in 1996, I had written a most positive review of Alan's *Uncovering Lives: The Uneasy Alliance*

of *Biography and Psychology* (1994). Earlier this year, the Psychohistory Forum gave him a Lifetime Achievement Award (unfortunately, due to his declining health, it had to be given to Alan *in absentia*).

Knowing and doing some psychobiography with William McKinley Runyan has been a delight, as is publishing this much-deserved Festschrift honoring him. Mac Runyan is curious, insightful, knowledgeable, and eager to share his insights and knowledge with colleagues at our virtual meetings. In fact, no matter how long the online platform is left open after a meeting, he continues to exchange with others. My only regret is that because of my responsibilities to my wife, who is struggling with Parkinson's disease, bad arthritis, and numerous other ailments, I can't stay to join in these enjoyable conversations. Fortunately, I hear about them from our colleague Inna Rozentsvit and others.

In the wake of the horror of COVID-19, there has been a positive side effect for the Psychohistory Forum, its psychobiography subgroup, and other activities. Barred from meeting in person, now our virtual and hybrid meetings bring together colleagues from the East and West Coasts as well as many others from around the entire world. Getting to do psychobiography with Professor Runyan has been a great delight. It was with considerable pleasure that we recently granted Mac a Lifetime Achievement Award and that we are now publishing this Festschrift in his honor. I am proud to call him a colleague and friend.

**Paul H. Elovitz, PhD**, a presidential psychobiographer since 1976, founded the Psychohistory Forum in 1982, established *Clio's Psyche* as its editor in 1994, and co-founded the Psychobiography Research and Publication Group in 2021. He may be reached at [cliospsycheeditor@gmail.com](mailto:cliospsycheeditor@gmail.com). □

## **William McKinley Runyan: Renaissance Scholar and Mentor to Many**

**Joseph G. Ponterotto**—Fordham Univ., Lincoln Center

*Keywords: expanding-psychobiography, interdisciplinary-scholar, psychobiography, psychohistory, psychology, Vincent van Gogh, William McKinley Runyan*

I feel honored to be able to contribute a few words of acknowledgment and appreciation for William McKinley (“Mac”) Runyan. As of this writing, I have never met Mac in person, but have communicated with him by phone, email, and through quite a few Zoom group gatherings. Naturally, like many readers of *Clio's Psyche* and the *Journal of Psychohistory*, I have read and cited his corpus of contributions advancing the history of psychology, psychohistory, and psychobiography.

For me, Mac stands out for two overlapping reasons. First, he is truly a Renaissance scholar in the depth and breadth of his knowledge base. Beyond being the world's leading expert in psychohistory and psychobiography, Mac is deeply read in philosophy, neuroscience, history, anthropology, political science, and sociology. I don't believe I have ever had a conversation with Mac where he did not cite a scholar's work from anthropology, neuroscience, political science, or some other discipline that connected in some way to a project I was working on. Of course, in most cases, I knew nothing or very little of the particular scholar he was citing or their field of study, but with Mac's encouragement, I went back to school (so to speak) to read more broadly beyond psychology and biography. Mac has helped me become more of an interdisciplinary scholar, which is essential for competence in my specialty area of psychobiography.

I imagine other contributors to this Festschrift for Mac will comment more specifically on his impactful books, chapters, and articles, but I do want to highlight select topics in a few of his publications that particularly impacted me and surely many other psychobiographers. Three early books that were significant in launching my psychobiography career were Alan Elms's *Uncovering Lives* (1994), as well as Mac's *Life Histories and Psychobiography* (1982) and *Psychology & Historical Interpretation* (1988). Particular features of Mac's contributions included: a thorough review of the literature in psychohistory and psychobiography with commentary on classic (in his eyes) contributions in various disciplines; interesting case studies internationally; his chronicling (actually counting) production in psychohistory/psychobiography books, articles, and dissertations over multiple decades; advocating for the theoretical expansion of psychobiography beyond psychoanalytic conceptions; and promoting methodological flexibility by valuing quantitative and mixed methods approaches to psychobiography along with its more common qualitative and narrative focus. A ma-

major methodological contribution of Mac's that has guided my work is his procedure for rigorously assessing and weighing alternative explanations for a particular event on the action in a lived life (see Mac's classic 1981 article, "Why did van Gogh cut off his ear? The problem of alternative explanations in psychobiography," in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 40[6], pp. 1070-1077).

While the depth and breadth of Mac's scholarship have had a marked influence on my development as a psychobiographer, perhaps more meaningful to me has been his encouragement of my work and his confidence that I could contribute to the field of psychobiography. In this way, Mac has been a mentor to me both professionally and personally. Whenever I get off the phone, Zoom, or finish reading an email from Mac, I am instantly energized to get back to work and incorporate some of his ideas into my developing project. He gives me confidence in myself, which perhaps weighs more than his depth of knowledge in psychology, history, and psychobiography. My sense is that I am only one of many developing scholars that he has touched in this way. Essentially, Mac is a "good" person—kind, supportive, encouraging, empathic, humble, curious, and fun. He is one of the most gifted and impactful interdisciplinary scholars of the last half century, and through the warmth of his personality, he has touched colleagues, students, and mentees in deep and meaningful ways. Thank you, Mac.

**Joseph G. Ponterotto, PhD**, is Professor of Counseling Psychology in the Graduate School of Education at Fordham University, Lincoln Center Campus, New York City. His primary research and teaching interests are in multicultural psychology, psychobiography, career counseling, and research methods. He is the author of two book-length psychobiographies on Bobby Fischer (in 2012) and John F. Kennedy, Jr. (in 2019), both published by Charles C Thomas Publisher. He can be contacted at [Ponterotto@Fordham.edu](mailto:Ponterotto@Fordham.edu). □

## When Psychobiography Was Mac Runyan

**William Todd Schultz**—Pacific University

*Keywords: Alan Elms, attachment-object, Life Histories and Psychobiography, personologist, psychobiographer, psychobiography, UC Davis, van Gogh, William McKinley Runyan*

When I first discovered psychobiography down at UC Davis with Alan Elms, in most respects, there really was no “psychobiography.” If psychobiography existed, it was Mac Runyan. Psychobiography was Mac Runyan, and his book, *Life Histories and Psychobiography* (1982), which I can see clearly now, in my mind’s eye, in white and red with pictures of historical figures on the cover. I don’t think I slept with it, but I very well could have!

To me, at first, Mac was a mystery man. He taught at Berkeley, and that made him “cool,” I imagined. But for a long time, I knew *of* him but I did not *know* him. Meeting Mac at last was like meeting a celebrity. In the flesh, a *psychobiographer!* He was always slightly rumpled, very kind, very sweet, modest, and beautifully sincere, but all with a formidable burning intelligence and a deep knowledge of every corner of the wide wide world of psychology, from its beginnings to now.

But back to Mac’s book. For me, it was a sort of attachment object. I could call its existence to mind any time I needed reassurance that psychobiography was possible, that one could make a career of it, that one could write books about it, and that it was a legitimate enterprise. Every year, with honor, I still teach Mac’s brilliant 1981 van Gogh chapter, “Why Did van Gogh Cut off His Ear?”, and it stimulates loads of discussion as to which explanation is “best.” Psychobiography has two towering figures at the center of its modern origin story: Alan Elms and Mac Runyan. I have been incredibly fortunate to know and learn from both. For his thoughtfulness, deep intellectual complexity and sense of nuance, warmth, generosity, and tenacity, Mac will always be a model of not only a great personologist but also, more importantly, a great person.

**William Todd Schultz, PhD**, is a PhD personality psychologist who specializes in profiles of artists. He’s published four books: *Tiny Terror* (2011) on Truman Capote, *An Emergency in Slow Motion* (2011) on Diane Arbus, *Torment Saint* (2013) on Elliott Smith, and *The Mind of the Artist* (2021)—along with numerous articles and book chapters. He curates and edits the Oxford book series Inner Lives. In 2015, Schultz was awarded the Erikson Prize for Mental Health Media; from 2016-2017 he was a Shearing Fellow at the Black Mountain Institute in Las Vegas; and in the summer of 2021, he completed a Yaddo Artist Residency. He lives

and teaches in Portland, Oregon. He can be contacted at schultzt@pacificu.edu. □

## **BULLETIN BOARD**

**2023 CONFERENCES:** The next Psychohistory Forum Work-In-Progress seminar will be held on September 30, 2023 (Saturday), when **Jeffrey Rubin** will speak on “Shakespeare’s Psyche as Revealed in His Plays.” The subsequent meeting (also virtual) will be on November 5, 2023 (Saturday), on Poetry and Psychoanalysis/Psychohistory with presenters **Judith Harris, Juhani Ihanus, and Howard Stein**. On **May 19, 2023, at the IPhA**, the Forum held its third **Lifetime Achievement Awards** virtual ceremony with recipients **C. Fred Alford, David James Fisher, Daniel Rancour-Laferriere, and William McKinley “Mac” Runyan**. Other presentations are currently being planned for 2024 and additional meetings will be hybrid or virtual. In-person meetings will be at the Lincoln Center of Fordham University thanks to Professor **Harold Takooshian**, who hosts them, and each will have a virtual component. Prior meetings included Burton N. Seidler, “I Double Dare You to Prove it to Me!: Using Qualitative Observations to Understand Everyday Phenomena,” on May 6<sup>th</sup>. The Psychobiography Reading Group met on February 25<sup>th</sup>, April 1<sup>st</sup>, and June 3<sup>rd</sup>, discussing Winnicott and Erikson’s Gandhi and Luther. **PRESENTERS:** At the IPhA’s **May 18 -20, 2023** annual meeting, the following Forum members were among the presenters and recipients: C. Fred Alford, **Jim Anderson, Claude Barbre, Jerome Blackman, Marc-André Cotton, Brian D’Agostino, Brigitte Demeure, Paul H. Elovitz, David James Fisher, Ken Fuchsman, Susan Kavalier-Adler, Dorothea Leicher, Ruth Lijtmaer, David Lotto, Jun Lu, Allan Mohl, Denis O’Keefe, Peter Petschauer, Daniel Rancour-Laferriere, Inna Rozentsvit, Jeffrey Rubin, William McKinley (“Mac”) Runyan, and Howard F. Stein**. Peter Petschauer also presented at the **German Society for Psychohistory and Political Psychology** (Gesellschaft für Psychohistorie und Politische Psychologie—GPPP) conference on **March 24-26, 2023**, in Munich, Germany. The GPPP 2024 meeting will be in Cologne from April 26-28, 2024, with the working theme “History as Nightmare.” The Association for the Psychoanalysis of Culture and Society (APCS) will meet at the Rutgers Inn and Conference Centre in New Brunswick on October 26-29, 2023; and the Interdisciplinary Conference of the Forum for Psychoanalytic Education (IFPE) will meet on October 26-28, 2023, in Pasadena, CA. **CONGRATULATIONS:** To Claude Barbre of the Chicago School of Psychoanalysis on receipt of the Distinguished Psychoanalytic Educator Award from the IFPE last September.

**WELCOME NEW MEMBERS:** Marc-André Cotton, **Raymond E. Fancher, Anna Geifman, Helene Lewis, Jun Lu, Patrick McEvoy-**

**Halston, Peter Schulz-Hageleit, Lorin Schwarz, Helene Wolf, and Gerlinde Zibulski.** **THANKS:** To Platinum Members David James Fisher and Mary Peace Sullivan; Benefactors Herb Barry III, Peter Barglow, David R. Beisel, Thomas Ferraro, Eva Fogelman, Peter Loewenberg, David Lotto, Jamshid Marvasti, Candace Orcutt, Arnold Richards, and William McKinley (“Mac”) Runyan; Patrons Theresa Aiello, Claude Barbre, Donna Crawley, Paul H. Elovitz, John J. Fitzpatrick, Ken Fuchsman, Alice Lombardo Maher, Denis O’Keefe, Peter W. Petschauer, Joyce Rosenberg, Jacques Szaluta, Duke Wagner, and Richard Wood; Sustaining Members James W. Anderson, Daniel Benveniste, Jerome Blackman, James R. Booth, Marilyn Charles, Janice Berry Edwards, John Hartman, Judith Logue, Allan Mohl, Jeffrey R. Rubin, and Pamela Steiner; and Supporting Members Michael Britton, Tom Cook, Nathan Gerard, John R. Lamkin, Susan Nimmanheminda, Robert D. Stolorow, and Hanna Turken. Our special thanks for **thought-provoking materials** to James William Anderson, Nicole B. Barenbaum, Daniel S. Benveniste, Susan Bluck, Jim Clark, Brigitte Demeure, Amy P. Demorest, Paul H. Elovitz, Marilyn Fabe, Raymond E. Fancher, Eva Fogelman, Emma Lombardo, Claude-Hélène Mayer, Dan P. McAdams, E. Ethelbert Miller, Ruth Neubauer, Joseph G. Ponterotto, Arnold Richards, Igor Romanov, Inna Rozentsvit, Dean Keith Simonton, Jefferson A. Singer, Lonnie R. Snowden, Michael M. Sokal, Pamela Steiner, Robert D. Stolorow, and Nancy C. Unger. To Nicole D’Andria for editing, proofing, and Publisher 2016 software application and Professor Paul Salstrom and Divine Sylvester for proofing. Our special thanks to our authors, editors, and numerous overworked referees who must remain anonymous. □

*We Wish to Thank Our  
Talented Authors, Diligent,  
Hard-working, and Prompt  
Editors, and Our Loyal  
Referees Who Must  
Remain Anonymous.*

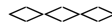


*Clio's Psyche* Call for Papers on  
Psychobiography and the Autobiographies  
of Psychobiographers  
Spring 2024 Issue  
(Papers due 1/15/2024)

*Some possible psychological/psychoanalytic/approaches include:*

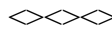
- o What makes the person you wrote on so interesting?
- o When did the subject's specialness first manifest itself?
- o What is the relationship between the subject's childhood and adulthood?
- o What obstacles and traumas did your subject face and overcome?
- o Why did you choose to write a particular psychobiography?
- o Write a 1,000 word or less review of a just published psychobiography.

*We seek articles from 2,000-4,000 words—including a 25-word abstract, 7-10 keywords, and your brief biography ending in your e-mail address—by 1/15/2024.*



Call for Articles for *Clio* Festschrifts  
Subject and Date for Submission

Peter Webb Petschauer October 1, 2023 for the Winter 2024 issue  
Paul H. Elovitz January 15, 2024 for the Spring 2024 issue



*Clio's Psyche* publishes papers on a wide range of subjects of psychohistorical interest.

First preference is given to papers relevant to special features, Festschrifts, issues, and symposia. The normal word limit in files accepted are 1,000 words for review essays, 1,500 words for symposia responses, 2,000 words for articles, 3,500 words for symposia, and 4,000 words for psychobiographies. *Case studies are encouraged. Send articles and inquires to cliopsycheeditor@gmail.com.*