

## **Dean Keith Simonton: Winner of 2014 Henry A. Murray Award**

Dean Keith Simonton, Distinguished Professor of Psychology at The University of California Davis, has been awarded the 2014 Henry A. Murray Award for distinguished contributions to the study of individual lives and whole persons. Professor Simonton will be honored at the biennial convention of the Association for Research in Personality in June 2015 where he will give an invited address.

The Henry A. Murray Award, established in 1978, recognizes outstanding scientific and humanistic scholarship in the psychological study of individual human lives. The award is named for Henry A. Murray, a pioneering personality psychologist who is probably best known for his 1938 volume, *Explorations in Personality*. In *Explorations* and in the seminal papers he wrote in the three decades that followed, Murray envisioned a broad-based, integrative approach to studying human lives in their biological and cultural contexts, bringing together psychology, sociology, cultural anthropology, psychoanalysis, the biological and the medical sciences, and even literary studies under the banner of what Murray called *personology*. As it has developed since Murray's time, the personological tradition in the psychological and social sciences emphasizes the complex interplay between biology and culture in shaping human behavior, the inherent unity and synthesizing power of individual personality, the development of personality across the life course, the blending of nomothetic and idiographic approaches to examining human personality, and the role of imagination, narrative, biography, and myth in the study of lives.

Dean Simonton received his Ph.D. from Harvard University's Department of Social Relations. He has conducted interdisciplinary research on genius, creativity, leadership, and esthetics, providing new insights into the personality, developmental, cognitive, social, and cultural factors behind eminence, giftedness, and talent in science, art, and politics. He is internationally renowned as the founder of the field of historiometrics – the application of advanced statistical models to biographical, historical, and content analytical data about eminent individuals. He has been remarkably productive, publishing twelve books and hundreds of articles in prestigious journals in general psychology, personality psychology, developmental psychology, quantitative psychology, cross-cultural psychology, and psychoanalysis, as well as in journals outside of psychology in such diverse fields as political science, sociology, education, physics, computer science, biology, music, and history. His book *Origins of Genius: Darwinian Perspectives on Creativity* (Oxford University Press, 1999) was placed on the Recommended Reading list in Phi Beta Kappa's Key Reporter and won APA's 2000 William James Book Award.

Professor Simonton's work fits well the criteria for the Murray Award, as delineated in the official documentation for the award.

First, his work exhibits "receptiveness to the value of bringing together a variety of disciplines, theoretical viewpoints, and research techniques." As already noted,

Simonton's multidisciplinary breadth is apparent in the scope of the journals in which he has published. With regard to theoretical breadth, his research has treated Darwin's theories of natural and sexual selection, Hegel's dialectic operating in intellectual history, Tolstoy's "Zeitgeist" theory of leadership, Kant's definition of genius in the fine arts, Langer's distinction between discursive and presentational symbols, and Freud's differentiation of primary versus secondary process, among others. His research techniques have spanned single-case studies either qualitative or quantitative, multiple-case inquiries using either individual or aggregate data, thematic and computerized content analyses, mathematical models, Monte Carlo simulations, and laboratory experiments.

Second, Simonton's work utilizes "conceptual tools that lend themselves to the integration of the 'tough' and the 'tender' in personality research." He has devoted a large part of his career to the blind variation and selective retention theory of creativity, or BVSR. On the tough-minded side, BVSR has provided the basis for complex mathematical models of creative productivity across the careers of multiple figures. On the tender-minded side, BVSR has been used to account for significant biographical episodes in the lives of individual creators.

Third, Simonton "recognizes the intrapsychic structure and thematic unity of individual lives in the midst of phenotypic diversity." In his extensive research on the life and works of William Shakespeare, for example, he has embedded Shakespeare's creativity in both a personal and social context and has examined how that creativity developed in thematic content and poetic style over the course of Shakespeare's career.

Fourth, Simonton's research has been centrally concerned with imagination and has employed biography and literature as psychological data. He has used biographical data to examine creative life cycles or career trajectories for poets, novelists, and nonfiction authors; classical, opera, and cinema composers; scientists, inventors, and psychologists; military leaders, absolute monarchs, and US presidents.

Finally, Simonton has shown an "interest in the biological, social, and cultural contexts of personality." From the beginnings of his career he has emphasized the fundamental importance of socio-cultural context in his study of eminent creators and leaders in many other cultures besides modern European, including Islamic, Hindu, Chinese, Japanese, and ancient Greece and Rome. He has increasingly turned to the study of genetic factors, most recently proposing meta-analytic techniques for estimating the degree to which exceptional performance might be attributed to genetic endowment.

Simonton is an unusually productive and prominent researcher whose work incorporates a diverse range of theories and methods. He combines the toughness of sophisticated statistical models with the tenderness of studying individual lives in all their complexity and nuance. He has consistently exhibited a style of intellectual leadership that has contributed to outstanding work in the personological tradition.