

Student Driven Publication 2012

Jennifer Tackett, Ph.D.

University of Toronto

2012 SRP Program Chair

Derek Dean, *University of Colorado*
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Dr. Jennifer Tackett is an Associate Professor of Psychology at the University of Houston and the Program Meeting Committee Chair of the 26th Annual Meeting of the Society for Research in Psychopathology in Ann Arbor, MI. She received the SRP Early Career Award in 2011. We were fortunate to sit down with her for a few minutes between sessions to learn about her career, research interests, and her advice for students wishing to pursue a career in psychopathology research.



Dr. Tackett began her research career as an undergraduate at Texas A&M working with a personality psychologist, Dr. Bill Graziano, and a clinical psychologist, Dr. Tim Cavell, who studied aggressiveness in children. In working with these professors, she became interested in the intersection between personality and psychopathology, especially in children with externalizing disorders. In order to explain how she melded these interests, Dr. Tackett says that she has always worked within a personality psychopathology framework, with a particular interest in disinhibition and self-regulation. Her current work in personality psychopathology is diverse and covers such areas as assessment, behavioral genetics, and statistics.

Psychopathology is complex, but if anything is clear after SRP, it is that there are many intelligent and ambitious scientists trying to make sense of our rapidly developing field. We asked Dr. Tackett for her thoughts on the future directions of her research, to which she responded, “The direction of future research in psychopathology is using a multiple level of analysis

approach to research.” Dr. Tackett emphasized that this approach gives us the opportunity to investigate highly complex models of behavior in such a way as to better tease apart the multifaceted nature of psychopathology, as well as to fill gaps in our understanding of mental illness.

An important event in the near future is the debut of the DSM-5. Dr. Tackett revealed that she was especially excited about the changes that the manual proposes to make for personality disorders. Within the context of a developmental perspective, she felt that the new trait perspective would enable researchers and clinicians to more easily conceptualize and study personality across the life span. Additionally, she thought that these changes might break down financial and academic barriers to studying personality in early life.

Dr. Tackett shared that one of the most rewarding aspects of her career is mentoring young investigators. She told us that this special role as mentor is rewarding because she enjoys seeing her students develop as researchers, clinicians, and ultimately as colleagues and friends. For example, in speaking about her lab, she emphasizes the congeniality of the group. She told us, “I just have good students and it makes it easy.” Dr. Tackett loves to help her students overcome the difficult obstacles of graduate school—obstacles that she remembers as a student and that are inevitable in an academic environment. She seeks to nurture her students through the challenges of the job because it will ultimately make her students better able to contribute to the field.

We met with Dr. Tackett towards the end of the SRP conference this year, so we asked her to reflect on her time as Program Meeting Chair. Dr. Tackett was most pleased about organizing the Face of the Future symposium, which featured the work of investigators early in their



career. It was a highlight of SRP this year—many of the graduate students and senior attendees agreed—to see young researchers present their budding research programs. This symposium highlighted one of the best features of SRP: a space for individuals at all stages of their careers to meet, converse, and develop collaborations with others in the field. Because of a strong focus on younger researchers, SRP is a catalyst for intellectual growth.

Bill Horan, Ph.D.

UCLA

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Dr. Bill Horan is an Associate Research Professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Biobehavioral Sciences at UCLA. He received his Ph.D. in clinical psychology from the University of New Mexico. Dr. Horan's research investigates social cognitive, neurocognitive, and emotional mechanisms in schizophrenia with the aim of improving social functioning through innovative psychosocial interventions. By any measure, Dr. Horan would be considered a successful research scientist, however, his path to his current position was anything but linear.

As an undergraduate Dr. Horan studied philosophy and subsequently obtained a professional position in a publishing company in New York City. When asked about this time, Dr. Horan stated "At the time, the company I was working for was publishing psychiatric and psychology journals and I found myself becoming fascinated with schizophrenia." Pursuant of this interest, Dr. Horan set about obtaining a position in the mental health field and ultimately began working as a mental health aide in a New York City hospital. Through this position, Dr. Horan began to involve himself in Dr. Philip Harvey and Dr. David Pogge's research on schizophrenia and related psychopathology.

After obtaining his Master's degree in psychology, Dr. Horan enrolled as a doctoral

student in Dr. Jack Blanchard's laboratory at the University of New Mexico where he focused on emotional experience in schizotypy and schizophrenia. He then completed his clinical internship at the University of Pittsburgh's Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic and a postdoctoral fellowship in Dr. Michael Green's laboratory at UCLA before being accepting a position as Research Professor at UCLA.

When asked to reflect on what has made him successful, Dr. Horan stated, "never underestimate the importance of your mentors!" Dr. Horan emphasized how influential his mentors have been on his intellectual development and decision to pursue a career in psychological research. No wonder, since his list of mentors includes a number of influential and productive academic researchers such as Drs. Philip Harvey, David Pogge, Jack Blanchard, Michael Green, and Keith Nuechterlein. Dr. Horan humbly stated that he "got lucky" and fell into this great group of people to work with - "They've been so kind in giving me their time, working with



me on things that I was interested in, giving me opportunities.” Dr. Horan believes that having great role models has been fundamental to his development as a researcher.

When asked what advice he would provide for aspiring graduate students, Dr. Horan emphasized the need to “develop a thick skin so you can deal with rejection!” He explained that, in academia, rewards are few and far between, and don’t always come in a predictable way; even when you work really hard at something and a lot of people around you think it’s good, it might get rejected nonetheless. According to Dr. Horan, building this resilience is a learning process, and essential to survival in academia. Further, he reiterated the importance of mentors in helping you hold onto the core of why you’re doing what you’re doing.

Finally, when asked what areas of schizophrenia research he is excited about, Dr. Horan stated that he believes the shift in treatment focus towards recovery as a goal,

instead of just managing the positive symptoms of schizophrenia, represents an important step forward for the field. In addition, citing Keith Nuechterlein’s Zubin Award Address, he related that he is excited by the advances made in the study of cognition in schizophrenia, especially as a result of the MATRICS project. Finally, he stated that he is excited about the increased attention that has been paid to emotion, negative symptoms, and social cognition over the past



couple of years. He believes the field is starting to understand how to classify these constructs and better comprehend their underlying psychological and neural mechanisms stating, “As we continue to study and refine these constructs, we will have another important set of targets for treatment that will hopefully facilitate better functioning in the community for patients.” It goes without saying that we were all inspired by Dr. Horan's impressive work in the area and are excited to see what comes next!

June Gruber, Ph.D.

Yale University

2012 Early Career Award

Kathrin Herzhoff, *University of Houston*

Katie Kryski, *Western University*

Michael Vanderlind, *University of Miami*

Dr. June Gruber, Assistant Professor of Psychology at Yale University, is the recipient of this year's Society for Research in Psychopathology Early Career Award. The opportunity to interview Dr. Gruber proved inspirational, as she shared with us her passion for research and her advice to graduate students. Specifically, Dr. Gruber explained that the beginning of an academic career has its novelties- quite like the beginning of graduate school. She encapsulated the experience noting, "In this early phase of your career, you are doing everything for the first time and everything has that excitement of newness." Yet despite this early stage of her career, Dr. Gruber has already made important contributions in the field through groundbreaking research on positive emotion and, notably, how positive emotion can go awry. She explains that "most research looks at how [positive emotion] is adaptive but we know a lot less about how it can be disruptive." Within this context, Dr. Gruber's Positive Emotion and Psychopathology (PEP) Laboratory at Yale University focuses on the role of positive emotion in Bipolar Disorder, Depression, Anxiety Disorders and other psychopathologies.



When asked how her current research interests evolved, Dr. Gruber described a marrying of the social and clinical sciences. She began her research career as a research assistant in a social psychology laboratory and later transitioned to exploring similar concepts within clinical populations. Dr. Gruber explained that she tries to take a basic science approach to exploring the role of affect in psychopathology, thinking of herself as a hybrid clinical/social psychologist. She stressed that, "if you're going to study how a process goes awry, you first have to understand the function of that process". Reflective of this philosophy, Dr. Gruber strives to collaborate both with clinical and non-clinical psychologists, attending conferences that span the clinical, social and affective neuroscience areas.

In a clear example of the scientist-practitioner model, Dr. Gruber described how her research interests have unfolded, in part, due to her clinical experiences where she was first introduced to the disruptive nature of positive emotions. Dr. Gruber recalled her experience with one patient, who described experiencing extreme levels of positive affect but, simultaneously, had

gone bankrupt and was living out of a car. Dr. Gruber, a licensed psychologist, continues to ingrate clinical work into her schedule to ensure that these populations of interest are more than “numbers or points on a scatter plot.” Further, she described clinical work as grounding and beneficial towards the generation of new research ideas. She often incorporates research questions when talking with clients, using their responses and insights to guide her research pursuits.

Having watched Dr. Gruber accept the Early Career Award--a recognition given to the most promising scientists--it is an understatement to say that we were eager to probe her for advice. In a career where it is so easy to focus on numbers (number of publications, grants, awards), she



recommended that scientists, at all stages of their career, “focus on the process and not the outcomes.” She advised that we focus on what we can learn through each experiment,

both those that work and those that do not. Further, she argued that a focus on numbers puts one at greater risk for burnout, whereas a passion for the scientific process itself allows successes to surface organically. Her reminder that there are few other jobs where one is paid to explore his or her interests, made us excited both for her future research program and our future research careers. As a final piece of advice, Dr. Gruber reminded us to remember that life also exists outside of the laboratory. She shared that she likes to put work into perspective by spending time with her dog, practicing yoga, and travelling internationally. We think it is fair to say that we are all looking forward to seeing what’s next for Dr. June Gruber.

Sheri Johnson, Ph.D.
University of California, Berkeley
2012 SRP Secretary

Elissa J. Hamlat, *Temple University*
Shauna Kushner, *University of Toronto*
Deborah Stringer, *University of Notre Dame*

Dr. Sheri Johnson, Professor of Psychology at UC Berkeley, investigates the degree to which various psychosocial features such as stressful life events, behavioral activation and inhibition, and social support account for individual differences in bipolar disorder, a disease she characterizes as a collection of "multiple syndromes." More specifically, because patients with bipolar disorder show considerable heterogeneity in symptoms of mania, depression, and anxiety, this variability can lead to challenges in developing and implementing treatment. To this end, Dr. Johnson's work in determining how psychosocial features impact the course and treatment of bipolar disorder has been internationally recognized, and she has been the recipient of major awards from a number of prestigious funding bodies.



At the 2012 Annual Meeting of the Society for Research in Psychopathology, we sat down with Dr. Johnson and asked what advice she would give those pursuing careers in psychopathology research.

First, she stressed that early investigators should make sure they are passionate about the research questions that they make the focus of their work. She acknowledged that

finding the right question can take time, but asserts that it is well-worth the wait given the satisfaction you will derive from pursuing projects close to your heart. Dr. Johnson's second recommendation was to never be too shy to ask more established researchers for their opinions or perspectives as the field of psychopathology is "remarkably

interpersonal." She reflected that SRP members are often delighted to speak with aspiring researchers and encourages students to introduce themselves and to ask for input from members at these meetings.

In a related point, Dr. Johnson strongly recommended collaboration with scientists from various research backgrounds. As science becomes increasingly complex, collaboration is critical to ensure that you are doing the best possible work and "transdiagnostic symposia are great ... for encouraging that kind of dialogue." She highlighted the 2012 meeting's session on neuroconnectivity as a promising model for fostering interaction between people with primary interests in dissimilar diagnostic areas. Finally, Dr. Johnson emphasized that maintaining a balance between personal and professional life enables creativity and

fosters energy, which has contributed to her success and satisfaction. She is enthusiastic to co-host what promises to be a terrific upcoming SRP and looks forward to seeing everyone in Oakland in the Fall 2013.

