

9th Annual Rocky Mountain Humanistic Counseling & Psychological Association Conference

**The Power of Possibility:
Rethinking Mental Wellness & Social Systems**



**Hybrid Conference
October 17-19, 2025**

The Rocky Mountain Humanistic Counseling and Psychological Association (RMHCPA) was founded in 2016 to promote and develop humanistic psychology in the Rocky Mountain Area.

Our Mission

The Rocky Mountain Humanistic Counseling and Psychological Association's mission is to support and promote existential, humanistic, and transpersonal psychology and counseling, especially in contributing to psychotherapy, education, theory, philosophy of psychology, research methodology, organization and management, and social responsibility and change in the Rocky Mountain Area.

Rocky Mountain Humanistic Counseling and Psychological Association Board

Lisa Vallejos, PhD
Board Chair

Ian E. Wickramasekera, II, PsyD
Vice Chair

Nathaniel Granger, Jr., PsyD
Treasurer

Shawn Rubin, PsyD
Secretary

Louis Hoffman, PhD
Executive Director

Edbury Enegren
Graduate Student Member

Francis J. Kaklauskas, PsyD
Member-at-Large

Rasha Khalaf, PhD
Member-at-Large

Alfredo Palacios, PhD
Member-at-Large

Aja'Dae Trent
Member-at-Large

Justin Walmsley, MFT
Member-at-Large

Continuing Education and Training Committee

Louis Hoffman, PhD (Chair)
Melissa Racho, PhD
Laura N.B. Bock

Dan Johnson, PhD
H. Luis Vargas, PhD

Conference Coordinator

Jennifer Leischner

9th Annual Rocky Mountain Humanistic Counseling and Psychological Association Conference

Table of Contents

Continuing Education Information.....	4
About the Live and Asynchronous Programs.....	4
Conference Schedule.....	5
Keynote Speaker Bio.....	8
Presenter Bios.....	8
Award Recipient Bios.....	17
Presentation Abstracts.....	18
Conference Sponsors.....	32
Why Join RMHCPA.....	32
Getting Involved with RMHCPA.....	32
Why Support RMHCPA.....	32
RMHCPA on Social Media.....	33

Continuing Education

Continuing Education Credits need to be purchased separately from the conference. In order to receive CE credits, you must be present for the entire live version of the presentation and complete an evaluation form. We cannot offer CEs for viewing the archived asynchronous versions of these presentations. *You cannot miss more than 5-minutes of a live presentation and receive credit.* We have CE volunteer who will monitor attendance. The volunteer will check to see if individuals who registered for CEs are present in the zoom room for the duration of each presentation. If you have any questions or concerns about the CE process, please direct them to Dr. Louis Hoffman. After each day of the conference, you will receive information on how to complete an evaluation for the CE programs offered that day. After you have completed the evaluation, notify us at ce@rmhcpa.org. Within 5-7 days of completing the evaluation and notifying us, you will receive your CE certificates by email. CEs are only available for the live portion of the workshop.

The Rocky Mountain Humanistic Counseling and Psychological Association (RMHCPA) has a collaborative agreement with the Society for Humanistic Psychology to provide Continuing Education Certificates for approved training events. Division 32 (Society for Humanistic Psychology) of the American Psychological Association is approved by the American Psychological Association to sponsor continuing education for psychologists. Division 32 (Society for Humanistic Psychology) of the American Psychological Association maintains responsibility for this program and its content.

About the Live and Asynchronous Programs

The 9th Annual RMHCPA Conference will have a recorded, asynchronous portion of the program that will be available through Thinkific (rmhcpa.thinkific.com) beginning the day of the conference. The asynchronous portion of the workshop includes pre-recorded presentations and poster presentations.

Conference Schedule

Preconference: Friday, October 17, 2025

Rocky Mountain Humanistic Counseling and Psychological Association Building
1767 S. 8th Street, 2nd Floor, Colorado Springs

11:00 AM-12:00 PM	Registration and Lunch Provided (free with Preconference Registration)
12:00 PM-2:00 PM	Creating New Worlds as Clinicians: Developing Strategies for Collective Safety (CE) <i>Darius Green</i>
2:00 PM-4:00 PM	Case Formulation in a Global Society: A Humanistic and Liberatory Framework for Cross-Cultural Relationships in Psychotherapy (CE) <i>Alfredo Palacios & Louis Hoffman</i>

Conference Opening: Friday Evening, October 17, 2025

Mt. Carmel Veterans Center
530 Communication Cir., Colorado Springs, CO

6:00-7:00 PM	Keynote Address Creating Meaning and Becoming in Psychotherapy: Self Definition as a Personal and Sociopolitical Imperative (CE) <i>Alfredo Palacios</i>
7:00-8:30 PM	Poster Session & Social Posters: • Who's Laughing Now? Examining Gender Bias in Humor Perception <i>by Isabel Cameron</i> • Humanism to Evolutionary Psychology: A Metatheoretical Continuum <i>by Jounay E. Clinch</i> • Can Helms' White Racial Identity Model Be Adapted to Describe Neurotypical Identity Development? <i>by Samuel Kohlenberg</i> • History Repeats Itself: Analyzing Rain Ceremonies to Anticipate Client Reactions to the Climate Crisis <i>by Kaitlin Leahy</i> • Feeling His Way to Himself: Expanding Possibility and Cultivating Experiential Attunement in Young Men <i>by Mariah Menaker</i> • Dreams Through the Decade <i>by Lucy Redlich</i> • Organized Existential Resistance: Philosophy, Force, and Art <i>by Benjamin Taft</i> • Eco-Martyrdom: The Fight for Environmental Accountability <i>by Elysha York</i>

Main Conference: Saturday, October 18, 2025

Mt. Carmel Veterans Center

530 Communication Cir., Colorado Springs, CO

8:30-9:00 AM	Registration & Donuts	
9:00-10:00 AM	Possibility: Therapeutic Photography as Embodied Mental Wellness <i>Sarah Byrd</i>	2Pac, Bruce Springsteen, and Existential Therapy: Lessons for Social Justice and Clinical Practice <i>L. Xochitl Vallejos, Eden Vallejos, & Louis Hoffman (CE)</i>
10:00-11:00 AM	Storying Survival: Cultivating Healing from Racial Trauma After Experiencing Police Violence (CE) <i>Darius Green</i>	When the Ground Shifts: A Cross-Cultural Exploration of Awe and Boundary Experiences <i>Jeff Singer & Tyler Gamlen</i>
11:00-11:30 AM	Coffee & Tea Break	
11:30-12:30 PM	Multicultural Considerations in Adapting Therapeutic Presence (CE) <i>Louis Hoffman</i>	A Pragmatic Shift in Consciousness: A Psychology of Mindfulness <i>Ven. Sucandra (Alena Gripass)</i>
12:30 PM-2:00 PM	Lunch on your own	
2:00-3:00 PM	The Existential Psychology of Star Trek: Lessons for Therapy (CE) <i>Jason Dias</i>	Understanding the Glass Child: Sibling roles in families with chronic illness <i>Eden Vallejos</i>
3:00-4:00 PM	Program Evaluation of a Self-Defense Group Therapy Program and Considerations for Rethinking PTSD Treatment and Care (CE) <i>K. P. Hartman & Dan Hugill</i>	Early Career Perspectives on Practicing Existential-Humanistic Psychotherapy <i>Ash Lee, Edbury Enegren, Tyler Gamlen, Heidi Streicher, & Rebecca Wickersham</i>
4:00-5:00 PM	Awards & Recognition Ceremony Remembrances • Ilene Serlin • Erica Palmer • Jim Oraker Honoring Board Members • Brittany Varisco • Lindsay Edwards • Dan Johnson • H. Luis Vargas	

	Center for Humanistic & Interpersonal Psychotherapy Practicum Completion • Jeff Singer Awards • Undergraduate Student Poster Award: Lucy Redlich • Graduate Student Poster Award: Benjamin Taft • Lifetime Achievement Award: Brent Dean Robbins • Sandy Sela-Smith Humanistic Exemplar Award: Matt Thelen • Student Humanistic Exemplar Award: Edbury Enegren • Student Humanistic Exemplar Award: Olivia Michael
5:00-6:30 PM	Social Hour

Main Conference: Sunday, October 19, 2025

Mt. Carmel Veterans Center

530 Communication Cir., Colorado Springs, CO

8:30-9:00 AM	Donuts & Networking	
9:00-10:00 AM	Our Search for Meaning: Finding Solace Amid the Chaos (CE) <i>Nathaniel Granger, Jr.</i>	The Trouble with Myth: Updating Use of Literature in Therapy <i>Jason Dias</i>
10:00-11:00 AM	You Don't Own Me: Existential-Humanistic Perspectives on Relationship Anarchy and Liberation (CE) <i>L. Xochitl Vallejos</i>	The Zen of Camus and Sartre: Direct Experience at the Edge of the Absurd <i>Thiago Leão</i>
11:00-11:30	Coffee & Tea Break	
11:30-12:30	Reclaiming the Empathy and Resilience of Dissociation (CE) <i>Ian Wickramasekera, II</i>	Warrior in the Garden <i>Lacy Lavon McDonald III</i>
12:30-1:00	Conference Photo & Conference Closing	

Keynote Speaker



Dr. Alfredo Palacios is an Assistant Professor at the University of Colorado Colorado Springs. He serves as Clinical Mental Health Counseling Program Coordinator for the Department of Counseling and Human Services. He is Past President of the Association of Humanistic Counseling and has served as Guest Editor and Associate Editor for the *Journal of Humanistic Counseling*. He is an experienced clinician and supervisor with over a decade of practice. A graduate of The University of New Mexico, he works with both young adults and couples through an Existential Humanistic lens. As an educator he teaches counseling theory, counseling skills labs, fieldwork courses and multicultural issues in counseling and psychotherapy. As a scholar his research centers on social-emotional learning and mindfulness-based interventions for at-risk youth, while his conceptual scholarship expands existential and humanistic theories to better serve diverse communities and address complex ethical contexts within the profession of counseling.

Presenter Bios



Sarah Byrd is an MA Candidate studying Clinical Mental Health Counseling at Naropa University and an ALM Candidate studying Psychology at Harvard University. As both a portrait photographer and counselor-in-training, Sarah is interested in the psychology of identity, self-perception, and mindfulness. In 2024 she published *Unfolding: A Therapy Companion Journal*, and is the founder of *still / space Branding & Photography* offering therapeutic photography in Denver, CO and Austin, TX.



Jason Dias is a neurodivergent existential psychologist. He worked for 20 years with people who experience developmental disabilities, people in severe states, and people having both experiences at once. He has published extensively as a fiction author. These days, Jason teaches undergraduate psychology at a community college where he thinks he can do the most good.



Edbury R. Enegren is a third-year doctoral student in clinical psychology at the University of Denver's Graduate School of Professional Psychology, where he also works as a psychotherapist. Over the past three years, Edbury has been fortunate to train with mentors who have shaped his approach to humanistic practice. His presentation draws from his experience navigating the realities of practicing existential-humanistic therapy early in his career—including the questions, uncertainties, and learning moments that come with this work. When not seeing clients or in class, Edbury can be found tending his garden, hanging out with his cat, or spending time with the friends who have become his chosen family.



Tyler Gamlen, M.A. is a third-year doctoral student in clinical psychology at Saybrook University. He serves as the director of operations for the non-profit, The Corps of Depth Healers, and co-hosts the Depth Dialogues podcast, which explores the applications of depth psychology in therapy, coaching, and other fields. Tyler is also the clinical and chapter director of the Nevada chapter of A Home Within, a national organization that connects volunteer therapists with clients within the foster care system. He serves on several executive boards and committees, including APA Division 32 Society for Humanistic Psychology, the Existential Movement International Advisory Board, the World Congress of Existential Therapy Conference, and is a lifetime

member of RMHCPA. His clinical work encompasses individual, couples, and group therapy, as well as existential coaching and psychological assessment, drawing primarily on existential-humanistic, psychodynamic, and constructivist frameworks. Originally from the San Francisco Bay Area, Tyler now lives in Las Vegas, NV, with his wife, their four-year-old son, and their two cats, Bodhi and Blue.



Nathaniel Granger, Jr., PsyD is a past president of the Society for Humanistic Psychology (APA Division 32). He is an adjunct faculty at Saybrook University and is the founder and director of Be REAL Ministries, Inc., where he serves the community by working closely with marginalized groups as a pastor and psychotherapist. Along with several publications, presentations, workshops, and keynotes to his credit, it is his embodiment of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and his reenactment of the “I have a Dream” speech along with his oratory gifts that gives life to any topic that has rendered Dr. Granger a desired and sought after speaker. Among his published works are *Stay Awhile: Poetic Narratives on Multiculturalism and Diversity*; *Silent Screams: Poetic Journeys Through Addiction and Recovery*, *Rising Voices: Poems Towards a Social Justice Revolution*, and *Humanistic Approaches to*

Multiculturalism and Diversity in addition to his doctoral dissertation *Perceptions of Racial Microaggressions Among African American Males: A Heuristic Inquiry*. Additionally, Nathaniel is a co-founder and serves as the Treasurer at the Rocky Mountain Humanistic Counseling and Psychological Association and is an elated co-chair of the 2026 Fourth World Congress of Existential Therapy.



Dr. Darius Green (he/him) is a counselor educator and Assistant Professor at the University of Colorado Colorado Springs. He is also a Licensed Professional Counseling Candidate in the state of Colorado. He earned his Ph.D. in Counselor Education from James Madison University in 2020. As a researcher, he has scholarly and social justice interests that broadly includes integrating social justice into training psychotherapists, clinical practice, and research. Specifically, he is passionate about infusing abolition and other liberatory frameworks into psychotherapy. Dr. Green primarily engages in scholarship on the topics

of police violence, abolitionist praxis, racial trauma, and online racism for marginalized populations, notably Black Americans.



KP Hartman, MA, LPCC, ADDC is a clinician specializing in trauma-informed care, community mental health, and crisis intervention. With a Master's degree in International Disaster Psychology from the University of Denver, KP brings expertise in supporting individuals navigating acute distress, complex trauma, and post-disaster recovery. Clinically, KP has provided individual, group, and family therapy across outpatient and crisis settings, with experience in safety planning, de-escalation, and coordination of care for high-acuity clients. Their training includes EMDR Basic Training, Psychological First Aid, and advanced skills in program development using somatic and evidence-based approaches. KP has worked with diverse populations, including refugees, youth, and survivors of

violence, and is committed to providing culturally responsive care that fosters resilience and empowerment. Drawing on both clinical practice and applied research, KP emphasizes client-centered, strengths-based approaches that integrate evidence-based interventions with sensitivity to systemic and community contexts. Dedicated to reducing barriers to mental health services, KP continues to advocate for accessible, holistic care while supporting individuals through healing and growth.



Dr. Louis Hoffman is a licensed psychologist in private practice and the Executive Director of the Rocky Mountain Humanistic Counseling and Psychological Association. An avid writer, Dr. Hoffman has authored/edited 28 books, including *Case Formulation in Existential Humanistic Therapy*, *The Evidence-Based Foundations of Existential-Humanistic Therapy*, and the forthcoming *APA Handbook of Humanistic and Existential Psychology*. Additionally, he has written over 100 journal articles and book chapters. In 2021, was given the Rollo May Award from the Society for Humanistic Psychology. Due to his contribution to the field, Dr. Hoffman has been recognized as a Fellow of the American Psychological Association and seven of its divisions (1, 10, 12, 32, 36, 48, & 52)



Dan Hugill is a recovery leader, fitness coach, and nonprofit co-founder based in Colorado Springs. After overcoming addiction and incarceration, he has dedicated his life to helping others rebuild strength from the inside out—physically, spiritually, and emotionally. Since his release in 2016, Dan has become a CrossFit Level 2 trainer, boxing coach, and second-degree black belt in Shaolin Kung Fu. He co-founded The Bridge, a nonprofit that empowers justice-involved individuals through mentorship, fitness, and recovery support programs in partnership with the Department of Corrections and community organizations. With over a decade of sobriety, Dan blends personal experience, faith, and professional training to break stigma, build recovery capital, and inspire others to reclaim their lives.



Thiago Leão is a psychotherapist, burgeoning researcher, and educator. Originally from Brazil, he integrates the Dharma, psychodynamic models, and existential psychology into his work. With over 14 years of clinical experience, he teaches resilience and the neurobiology of trauma at the Denver Fire Academy and Colorado State Patrol. He is an adjunct faculty member at Naropa University, where he teaches humanistic and existential psychology, supervises graduate students, and leads special topics courses on human-machine interactions. Inspired by the Dharma, Thiago has been practicing formally for over 20 years. He holds a bachelor's degree in religious studies, Yoga, and Psychology, and a master's degree in Transpersonal Psychology with a Wilderness Therapy concentration from Naropa University. He founded *The Primary*

Witness, where he offers psychotherapy, integrative coaching, and courses on Buddhist Psychology and related topics.



Ash Lee is a third-year doctoral student in the clinical psychology (PsyD) program at University of Denver's Graduate School of Professional Psychology. They are primarily interested in providing depth psychotherapy from existential-humanistic, psychodynamic, and body-centered perspectives. Ash draws much of their inspiration from spiritual and contemplative practices as sources of wisdom to inform their professional work. Their clinical and research interests include authenticity and congruence within the therapeutic relationship, experiential and somatic therapies, and experiences of awe. Ash currently works at the Ardent Grove Foundation where they offer adult individual psychotherapy to underserved populations.



Lacy Lavon McDonald III *Founder & Executive Director, Outer Haven Commissioner, Healthy Food for Denver's Kids & Executive Director, DJ Chonz Foundation* Lacy Lavon McDonald III is a Father of Five boys, U.S. Army veteran, community leader, and passionate advocate for food justice and youth empowerment. As the Founder and Executive Director of **Outer Haven**, a Denver-based nonprofit, Lacy has dedicated his work to creating hands-on opportunities for young people to learn about gardening, environmental stewardship, healthy eating, and leadership. With more than a decade of community building experience, Lacy has brought together schools, local farms, nonprofits, and businesses to design projects that make fresh, culturally relevant food accessible to all. His partnerships include **Mo' Betta Green Marketplace**, **DJ Chonz Foundation / Denver DJ School**, and **Big Green**,

through which he has developed school gardens, hydroponic programs, food forests, and youth-led markets across Denver. As a **Commissioner for Healthy Food for Denver's Kids**, Lacy helps guide funding that supports local organizations working to end childhood hunger. His military service spans 13 years, including two deployments to Afghanistan, where he was awarded the Bronze Star, Meritorious Service Medal, and Military Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal. Lacy believes that *"food is not just fuel, but resistance, healing, and connection"* — and that by teaching children to grow their own food, we plant the seeds for stronger, healthier, and more connected communities.



Jeff Singer is a fifth-year PsyD student in Clinical Psychology at the University of Denver's Graduate School of Professional Psychology. He is currently completing his clinical internship at the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs Counseling Center. Jeff is a member of Division 32 (Society for Humanistic Psychology), the Rocky Mountain Humanistic Counseling and Psychology Association (RMHCPA), and serves on the organizing committee for the Fourth World Congress of Existential Therapy. He has presented at multiple conferences on topics including *Polarization and Social Healing*, *Existential Shattering*, *Awe and Culture: Implications for Psychotherapy*, and *Working with Existential Shattering and Trauma in Psychotherapy*. He is also a coauthor of a published paper titled *Existential Shattering and Trauma* in the

Journal of Existential Analysis. His passion for existential-humanistic psychology deeply informs his clinical work, which spans substance use, emerging adulthood, group therapy, college counseling, and long-term depth psychotherapy. Jeff previously trained at the Center for Humanistic and Interpersonal Psychology and is currently writing his doctoral paper on the **Phenomenology of Awe Within a Therapeutic Dyad**.



Heidi Streicher is a third-year Psy.D. student in clinical psychology at the University of Denver's Graduate School of Professional Psychology. She provides integrative psychotherapy informed by humanistic approaches and mindfulness-based, third-wave cognitive behavioral therapies. Heidi is passionate about helping clients reconnect with themselves, their relationships, and their communities in the face of trauma, suicidality, and isolation. She works with adolescents, adults, couples, and groups, and is particularly interested in integrating art and music into the therapeutic process.



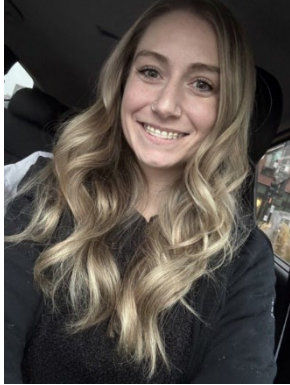
Ven. Sucandra (Alena Gripass) is a Ukrainian-born American Buddhist nun in the Mahāyāna tradition of Vietnam. As a dedicated scholar-practitioner, she strives to advance the fields of contemplative sciences and mental health education. Her determination can be seen upon her role as co-founder of Mind-Brain Contemplative Lab and as President of Chung Huong Institute. Ven. Sucandra's commitment to integrating ancient wisdom with modern scientific insights is evident in her passion for making transformative teachings accessible to all, especially communities that have been historically marginalized or excluded from such opportunities. Her past clinical experience supporting individuals with traumatic brain injuries has deepened her understanding of the mind's resilience and refined her practice of person-centered care and compassion. Ven. Sucandra strives to enhance accessibility for contemplative data-based education in the Eastern and Western hemispheres. At Chung Huong Institute, Ven. Sucandra leads initiatives that bridge gaps between modern psychology and Buddhist contemplative traditions, fostering inclusive education, research, and healing. Her leadership reflects a vision of holistic well-being rooted in both inner development and social responsibility. In addition, Ven. Sucandra is a researcher with Brown University and University of Wisconsin-Madison, and a Mindfulness Instructor at the California Institute of Integral Studies.



Eden Vallejos is a competitive swimmer and long-time volunteer with Donor Alliance, where she has spent over a decade promoting awareness about organ and tissue donation. She has served on the Youth Advisory Council for Children's Hospital Colorado, contributing to initiatives that center youth voice in healthcare. In 2022, she was selected as the Youth Liaison for the Pediatric Gaming and Technology Summit, helping integrate patient perspectives into pediatric innovation. A certified lifeguard with first aid and CPR credentials, she brings a commitment to safety, service, and empathy to all areas of her work. This presentation marks her first contribution to the field of psychology.

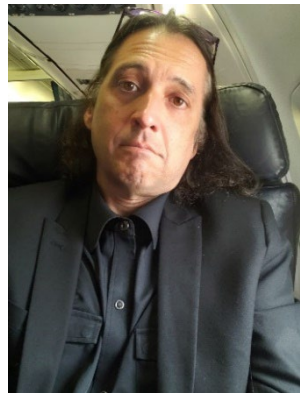


Dr. L. Xochitl Vallejos is a liberation psychologist, professor, and founder of LiberationU.org, a people-powered university dedicated to collective, decolonial education. Her work lives at the intersection of decolonial psychology, relationship anarchy, and existential practice. She invites people to unlearn systems of domination and remember what it means to relate with freedom, consent, and integrity. A single mother, activist, and storyteller, Dr. Vallejos bridges academic rigor with embodied wisdom. She has completed two yoga teacher trainings and practices meditation, spiritual integration, and decolonial methodologies as pathways to healing and transformation. Her teaching and clinical work are grounded in the belief that healing is not compliance or adaptation, but the reclamation of our full humanity. Through LiberationU, the Liberated Love Lab, community work, therapy and her writing, she offers a vision of a world where love is practiced as an act of freedom, self-awareness, and collective care.



Rebecca Wickersham is a doctoral student in clinical psychology at Saybrook University with a specialization in existential-humanistic psychology. She earned a Bachelor of Science in psychology with a minor in sociology from Georgia State University and a Master of Arts in clinical mental health counseling from Naropa University, where her training emphasized mindfulness and transpersonal psychology. She is involved in APA Division 32 and Division 56, the Rocky Mountain Humanistic Counseling and Psychological Association (RMHCPA), and the Fourth World Congress of Existential Therapy (WCET) where she serves as the social activities coordinator and speaker liaison on the organizing committee. Rebecca is currently completing her doctoral practicum at the

Center for Humanistic and Interpersonal Psychology. Her clinical and research interests focus on dissociation, complex PTSD, sleep disorders, and the role of existential-humanistic psychology in fostering healing across diverse cultural contexts. She is particularly interested in how existential themes of authenticity, freedom, and meaning making intersect with lived experiences of suffering and resilience.



Dr. Ian Wickramasekera, II has a lifelong fascination with topics such as Affective Neuroscience, Biofeedback, Bon-Buddhism, Empathy, Hypnosis, Lucid Dreaming, Mind/Body Medicine, and Transpersonal Psychology. He enjoys helping people connect with their mind and body using meditation and hypnosis to heal from all kinds of psychological and medical challenges. His research into these areas has won him a number of awards such as the Clark L. Hull Award for Scientific Excellence in Hypnosis and the Milton H. Erickson Award for Scientific Excellence in Clinical Hypnosis from the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis. Dr. Ian also won the Distinguished Early Career Contributions to Hypnosis award from the American Psychological Association as well as from the

American Society of Clinical Hypnosis. He was confirmed to be a Fellow of the American Psychological Association in 2018 by the Fellows Committee of APA. Dr. Ian enjoys hiking, making music, meditating, and running when he isn't at work and/or reading an obscure tome of ancient lore.

Poster Presentation Bios



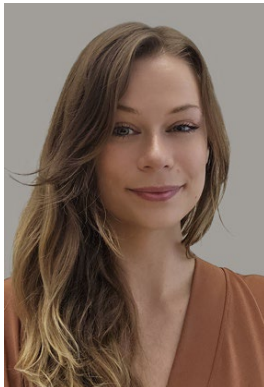
Isabel Cameron is a Texas native who graduated with her bachelor's degree in psychology from Manhattan University in 2023. She is currently a first year Clinical Mental Health Counseling master's student at the University of Colorado – Colorado Springs. During her undergraduate career, her personal research interests centered on social psychology with a focus on interpersonal relationships and gender bias. Additionally, she worked as a research assistant studying aesthetics. In the future, Isabel hopes to start her own private practice and integrate her research interests into her work as a practitioner.



Journey Clinch is a graduate student at the University of Colorado Colorado Springs in the Psychological Science track focusing on evolutionary psychology, language formation, and cognitive archeology. She is interested in bridging the distance between evolutionary science and positive existential psychology using attitudes towards nature. Journey's work as a children's pedagogical researcher for the University of Virginia, as well as her time working in the adolescent psychiatric units, has shaped her focus to specifically how relationships with natural environments can benefit youth's mental health. She holds a minor in music and BS in Psychology from Virginia Commonwealth University.



Dr. Samuel Kohlenberg (Sam) is a Board-Certified Biofeedback & HRVB Provider, a Diplomate of the American College of Lifestyle Medicine, an Approved Consultant of the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis, and a Fellow of the Association for Applied Psychophysiology and Biofeedback. Sam is an Assistant Adjunct Professor of Psychophysiology at Saybrook University and an Adjunct Faculty member in the MEHP program at Johns Hopkins University. He is also in the process of respecializing in clinical psychology with a second doctorate at the University of Denver's Graduate School of Professional Psychology with specialty foci in Health Psychology and Military Psychology.



Kaitlin Leahy graduated from Virginia Commonwealth University with a B.S. in Psychology in 2024. As a student, she worked as an undergraduate research assistant for VCU's Social Psychology and Neuroscience Lab and as an undergraduate clinical intern for a local community services board. She also founded the Rain Lab with Richard Bargdill, Ph.D., where she continues to lead a team of students investigating the potential clinical implications of global rain ceremony practices. She volunteers her time as a committee member for the Anomalous Cognition and Occurrences Research Network and as a crisis counselor for the Crisis Text Line.



Mariah Menaker is a Research Assistant at the Institute of Relationship Science at the University of Denver. She previously earned a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy from Pitzer College (2024). Broadly, Mariah is interested in understanding how relational experience shapes selfhood and psychological functioning. She is currently involved in research on interpersonal perinatal mental health interventions, and has experience with the philosophy of loneliness. She has also worked in clinical, residential settings with young adults struggling with substance abuse and other mental health challenges. She is particularly interested in

working with and relating to people with a broad range of lived experiences. In her free time, Mariah enjoys reading, writing, teaching adaptive skiing, and spending time in nature.



Lucy Redlich is an undergraduate student at Virginia Commonwealth University in the Honors College. She is currently completing a dual degree in Psychology and Criminal Justice while also working with Dr. Richard Bargdill in his research lab. Her current research interests include dreams, as well as looking at how the intersection of Psychology and Criminal Justice can help victims of crime recover and heal. After graduating in Spring 2026, she plans to attend graduate school and obtain her M.S.W.



Ben Taft is a sophomore at VCU studying Psychology. He was adopted from birth, but doesn't see this as a negative event. Instead he believes it has lead to the opportunities he has today. Since getting back in contact with his biological family, he now has to outlets of support. He tries to always keep a positive outlook on life, even during trying time.



Elysha York is a junior at Virginia Commonwealth University pursuing a bachelor's degree in Psychology along with a minor in Business. She currently serves as the lead student researcher in the Eco-Martyr Lab under the guidance of Dr. Richard Bargdill, where she explores topics related to environmental justice and eco-heroism. After completing her undergraduate studies, she plans to pursue a master's degree in clinical psychology with the goal of becoming a licensed therapist dedicated to helping others achieve personal growth.

Award Recipient Bios

Lifetime Achievement Award

Brent Dean Robbins, Ph.D., is a licensed Psychologist in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and a professor of psychology and director of the Psy.D. in Clinical Psychology at Point Park University. Over the years, Dr. Robbins has served in various leadership roles at the University, including chair of the Department of Psychology, program director of the M.A. in Community Psychology, undergraduate coordinator for the B.A. in Psychology, chair of the Graduate Programs Committee, chair of the Core Outcomes Assessment Committee, and chair of the Internal Review Board (IRB). He is a fellow of the American Psychological Association and past president of the Society for Humanistic Psychology (Division 32 of APA) and Society for Theoretical and



Philosophical Association (Division 24 of APA). He also serves on the editorial board of various peer-reviewed academic journals, including *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, *The Humanistic Psychologist*, *Qualitative Psychology*, *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology*, *Integratus* and *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*. He is co-founder and editor-in-chief of the interdisciplinary journal, *Janus Head*, and an author of *The Medicalized Body and Anesthetic Culture: The Cadaver, the Memorial Body and the Recovery of Lived Experience* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018). He is also a fellow of the Beatrice Institute. Dr. Robbins' areas of expertise include, for example, humanistic, existential and interpersonal approaches to psychotherapy and diagnosis, the phenomenology of emotion and embodiment, coping with death and dying, neurophenomenology, enactive cognition, metaleptic phenomenology, cultural therapeutics, mindfulness, mystical and religious experiences, indigenous psychologies, the cultural history of mental illness, resiliency, virtue theory, human dignity, objectification of women and nature, psychology of non-violence and scapegoat theory.

Sandy Sela-Smith Humanistic Exemplar Award



Dr. Matt Thelen uses conversations to change lives. He earned a B.A. in psychology from Augustana University. During his undergraduate degree program, he completed an internship at a suicide hotline where he developed an interest in suicide prevention. To learn more about psychology and suicide, he earned Doctorate in Psychology from the University of the Rockies. Dr. Thelen completed his internship at the Center for Growth and his post-doctorate at the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs. Throughout his graduate education and training, Dr. Thelen developed his interest in humanistic and existential psychology. The title of his dissertation is *A Bibliometric Study of the Journal of Humanistic Psychology*. Working as a psychologist, Dr. Thelen specializes in suicide prevention, history of suicide, and existential/humanistic psychology. He has demonstrated that the nexus of suicidology with humanistic/existential psychology is an effective modality for changing lives. Previously Dr. Thelen was a Board of Directors member for Pikes Peak Suicide Prevention Partnership for six years. Currently, Dr. Thelen is a peer review editor for *The Humanistic Psychologist*. He has worked in independent practice since 2014. He is grateful for the support of his wife Lonna, and inspired by his children Kirwin and Eulalia.

Student Humanistic Exemplar Award



Edbury R. Enegren is a third-year doctoral student in clinical psychology at the University of Denver's Graduate School of Professional Psychology, where he also works as a psychotherapist. Over the past three years, Edbury has been fortunate to train with mentors who have shaped his approach to humanistic practice. His presentation draws from his experience navigating the realities of practicing existential-humanistic therapy early in his career—including the questions, uncertainties, and learning moments that come with this work. When not seeing clients or in class, Edbury can be found tending his garden, hanging out with his cat, or spending time with the friends who have become his chosen family.

Student Humanistic Exemplar Award



Olivia Michael, MA, is daughter, sister, aunt, friend, and lover of life. Professionally, she is a third-year clinical psychology PsyD student and works as a psychotherapist at the Center for Humanistic and Interpersonal Psychotherapy, a subsidiary of the Rocky Mountain Humanistic Counseling and Psychological Association. Olivia has had a supervisory and mentorship relationship with Dr. Louis Hoffman for just under one year.

Pre-Conference Workshops

Creating New Worlds as Clinicians: Developing Strategies for Collective Safety

Darius Green

This session will focus on the practice of developing strategies to enhance collective safety of clients, particularly those who are vulnerable to the violence of oppression. Oftentimes, psychotherapists may use their roles to utilize police and law enforcement systems to manage matters of client safety despite the systemic nature of police violence that impacts numerous marginalized populations. Thus, the focus of this session is to provide an overview of the scope of community violence, police violence, and the role of psychotherapist in both perpetuating threats to safety and in developing alternatives for collective safety from an abolitionist social justice praxis. A common criticism and inhibitor in envisioning a social justice praxis of abolition in clinical settings and roles is an assumption that abolition is utopian and not realistic. Oftentimes, this criticism functions to limit creativity of psychotherapists that results in the maintenance of the status quo of systemic harm and institutional violence driven by oppressive systems. This session will introduce psychotherapists to the value of an abolitionist praxis in therapy while also providing a framework and live practice to support in the development of strategies to address matters of safety that impact marginalized and otherwise vulnerable client populations.

Objectives

1. Examine the connections between client safety, oppressive systems, and police violence.
2. Analyze tenets of an abolitionist praxis for psychotherapists.
3. Construct at least 1 strategy to facilitate client safety via psychotherapy and advocacy.

Case Formulation in a Global Society: A Humanistic and Liberatory Framework for Cross-Cultural Relationships in Psychotherapy

Alfredo Palacios & Louis Hoffman

Until recently, there has not been a comprehensive, structured approach to existential-humanistic (EH) case formulation and treatment planning. This has been a limitation for training and research on EH therapy. This workshop provides an overview of Hoffman and Cleare-Hoffman's (2025) approach to EH case formulation. The workshop begins by providing an overview of case formulation, including EH critiques of case formulation. The approach to EH case formulation in this workshop attempts to address these critiques while providing a fluid, phenomenologically-based approach to case formulation. Next, the workshop goes through the four primary aspects of EH case formulation: 1) holistic narrative, 2) concern/problem identification, 3) theoretical aspects of EH case formulation, and 4) treatment planning. The holistic narrative emphasizes who the client is beyond their presenting problems or concerns, and it serves as a framework to maintain a holistic view of the client. The concern/problem identification section provides ways to integrate mainstream approaches to concern/problem identification with an EH approach. The theoretical aspects of case formulation also integrate generalist aspects of case formulation with EH specific aspects, including the here-and-now, the existential givens, and the daimonic, amongst others. Finally, the treatment planning section integrates a generalist approach (i.e., treatment goals, integrative interventions) with EH approaches (client narratives of how they would like life to be, client goals, EH interventions). In addressing EH interventions, the workshop discusses research that categorizes the different EH interventions. A brief overview of these interventions is discussed. Last, the workshop discusses how to align EH therapy with evidence-based practice and use case formulation to guide the treatment progress.

This program will explore sociological and philosophical considerations for marginalized populations. Overall, presenters will explore agency, ambiguity and essentialism that shape case conceptualization and treatment planning. Attendees will learn an Existential Humanistic Framework on how to integrate liberatory concepts into counseling relationships. This framework emphasizes introspection, reflection, and self-regulation. Case examples and breakout discussions support learning and practice of this framework.

Objectives

1. Participants will be able to identify and discuss 2 critiques of traditional case formulation.
2. Participants will be able to identify 2 strategies for case formulation in humanistic case formulation.
3. Participants will be able to identify 2 ways that case formulation can be colonizing.
4. Participants will learn a framework for integrating Existential Humanistic values into case conceptualization and treatment planning.

Keynote Address

Creating Meaning and Becoming in Psychotherapy: Self Definition as a Personal and Sociopolitical Imperative

Alfredo Palacios

Counselors continually enter spaces where clients grapple with hard truths, injustice, and choices that highlight a tension between who they are and who they are becoming. This program will explore our ontological process of becoming by drawing from the work of existential, pragmatic, and critical thinkers. First, attendees will deeply consider how freedom, self-creation, and value formation can offer a pathway for counselors to help clients, and ourselves, affirm the full potential of our lives. Second, attendees will learn interventions, attitudes and theoretical foundations for case conceptualization in psychotherapy. Engaging tangible suggestions to help clients return to their creative capacity can enhance the work of clinicians across a range of theoretical orientations. Attendees will explore principles of the therapeutic relationship that will further foster client's innate striving for self-actualization. Implications for treatment planning and process development and training will be provided. Finally, attendees will be encouraged to reflect on larger sociological contexts of our lives and consider how the process of meaning making and value formation contribute to our societal landscape. A larger dialogue on the role of clinicians in the fray of social change will further contextualize our individual work into the collective experiences. This program will reaffirm the values of humanistic counselors and position our process of becoming and value formation as essential sociopolitical imperative.

Presentations

Possibility: Therapeutic Photography as Embodied Mental Wellness

Sarah Byrd

In today's mental health landscape, practitioners increasingly recognize the limitations of purely verbal therapeutic approaches. Many clients struggle to articulate complex internal experiences through words alone, particularly when addressing trauma, identity formation, or embodied concerns. Therapeutic photography offers an alternative modality that engages clients through visual expression, mindful awareness, and the profound experience of being authentically witnessed.

This presentation explores therapeutic photography as an innovative approach to mental wellness that transcends traditional talk therapy boundaries. Rooted in the principles of contemplative psychology, therapeutic photography establishes a "photographic alliance," a therapeutic relationship mediated through the lens that parallels the traditional therapeutic alliance. The modality encompasses three approaches: therapeutic photography (self-directed), phototherapy (clinician-facilitated), and photo art therapy (structured artistic intervention). Research demonstrates its effectiveness across diverse populations: children and adolescents who struggle with verbal expression, individuals processing substance use or sexual trauma, and clients working through gender transition or body image concerns. Photography bypasses cognitive barriers allowing unconscious, metaphoric, and symbolic meaning to emerge organically. It also

provides an approachable alternative to other visual arts, as clients capture existing reality rather than creating from scratch.

The therapeutic power of photography extends beyond the moment of image capture. Viewing oneself through photographs can catalyze profound shifts in self-perception and identity formation. However, these moments often occur outside formal therapeutic contexts leaving individuals to navigate significant psychological shifts in isolation. Therapeutic photography addresses this gap by providing structured support throughout the entire photographic journey. The modality supports both clinician-facilitated interventions and self-directed wellness practices.

This presentation will explore therapeutic photography's theoretical foundations, review current research, and explore practical clinical applications. Participants will engage in experiential exercises to experience the phenomenology of being photographed and viewing self-images, while exploring ethical considerations and learning therapeutic strategies for using this powerful modality.

2Pac, Bruce Springsteen, and Existential Therapy: Lessons for Social Justice and Clinical Practice

L. Xochitl Vallejos, Eden Vallejos, & Louis Hoffman

2Pac and Bruce Springsteen are popular music artists who strove to reflect nonjudgmental lived experience of people's lives through their lyrics and music. Additionally, both artists discuss many themes relevant to existential thought. However, there have been strikingly different reactions to the portrayal of controversial characters by the two artists. While Springsteen has often been lauded for his portrayals of struggling individuals, 2Pac has often been accused promoting violence and crime through doing the same. In this presentation, we provide examples of how the lyrics and songs of 2Pac and Springsteen can help therapist deepen their understanding of the lived experience of people who are suffering due to the impact of poverty, capitalism, marginalization, and racism. Building from this, we examine the social justice implications of the different critical reactions to 2Pac and Springsteen. Drawing from the understanding of the lived experience of people struggling, we consider how this is relevant to psychotherapy applications, including empathy, authenticity, genuineness, the real relationship, and cultural humility.

Objectives

1. Participants will be able to define "lived experience."
2. Participants will be able to identify 2 ways the lyrics of 2Pac and Bruce Springsteen can help therapist better understand the lived experience of individuals from marginalized groups.
3. Participants will be able to identify 2 ways that understanding lived experience can inform therapeutic interventions.

Storying Survival: Cultivating Healing from Racial Trauma After Experiencing Police Violence

Darius Green

Police violence refers to the inherently violent use of force by various forms of law enforcement officers and it exists as a racially traumatic stressor for People of the Global Majority

in the United States, notably Black Americans, Southwest Asian and North African, Latiné, and immigrant populations. Despite receiving increased attention following the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, fatal police violence has steadily increased in the United States, indicating an ongoing trend and concern for mental health professionals to attend to via clinical work and advocacy.

Emerging research and scholarship have noted the traumatic impact of direct and indirect exposure to police violence on vulnerable populations. Despite this connection to mental health and wellness, recent research has indicated an awareness of police violence encounters on client populations, but also a lack of training in responding to these encounters and racial trauma more broadly, by mental health professionals through counseling (Green & Evans. 2021; Hemmings & Evans, 2018).

This session intends to support clinician skill development in supporting radical healing from racial trauma associated with police violence. Specifically, this session will introduce attendees to storying survival – a healing and relational tool of counterstorytelling through use of stories, critiques, and testimonies to promote liberation, advocacy, survival, and collective action (McNeil-Young et al., 2023) – as a process and intervention to support healing for clients with experiences of police violence. Moreover, this session will support mental health professionals in conceptualizing ways to implement and facilitate storying survival across contexts, to include in individual counseling, group therapy, and via activism. Lastly, this presentation will provide a demonstration of storying survival along with an analysis of the process and impact of crafting and sharing a counternarrative as a tool for healing from and resisting the impact of racial trauma through police violence encounters.

Objectives

1. Describe 3 mental health outcomes affiliated with exposure to police violence.
2. Analyze 3 strategies for implementing storying survival with clients.
3. Identify 2 intrapersonal and interpersonal impacts of storying survival on clients and communities.

When the Ground Shifts: A Cross-Cultural Exploration of Awe and Boundary Experiences

Jeff Singer & Tyler Gamlen

This presentation explores the intersection of awe and Karl Jaspers' concept of "limit situations" through a cross-cultural lens, offering new insights into mental wellness and the restructuring of social systems. Jaspers' limit situations, such as death, suffering, guilt, and existential conflict, confront individuals with the boundaries of human existence. These moments can be destabilizing, but also open pathways for profound personal insight and psychological growth. Drawing on recent empirical research, including cross-cultural studies on how awe is experienced differently in Western and Eastern contexts, this presentation highlights how cultural frameworks shape emotional responses to boundary experiences. For example, awe is often viewed positively in Western cultures, inked to nature, personal achievement, or spirituality, while in East Asian contexts, it may evoke reverence, humility, and even fear, especially in response to social or moral authority. These culturally shaped experiences of awe are particularly relevant during limit situations, where individuals seek meaning, coherence, or connection beyond the self. By integrating psychological, philosophical, and cultural perspectives, this talk argues that awe can

be a valuable emotional response to existential disruption. Moreover, it suggests that rethinking mental wellness through the lens of awe and limit situations allows for more culturally inclusive and human-centered approaches to care.

Multicultural Considerations in Adapting Therapeutic Presence

Louis Hoffman

Therapeutic presence has been identified as a core factor in existential-humanistic therapy (Schneider, 2015). Krug and colleagues (2025) have demonstrated that qualitative and quantitative research both support the value and effectiveness of therapeutic presence. Despite the importance of presence, there has been limited attention given to how presence may need to be adapted in multicultural contexts. Presence can be experienced differently due to various personal, cultural, and relational factors, including power dynamics and other social factors. As with any therapeutic stance or intervention, it is important that therapists do not idealize or universalize the application. After defining presence, this presentation discusses strategies for helping therapists identify when therapeutic presence may need to be adapted or attenuated. Next, the presentation discusses ways that therapists can adapt therapeutic presence and, as appropriate, discuss this with clients. Clinical examples are used to illustrate how therapeutic presence can be adapted.

Objectives

1. Participants will be able to define "therapeutic presence."
2. Participants will be able to identify two considerations about when it may be necessary to adapt or attenuate therapeutic presence.
3. Participants will be able to identify two process considerations when adapting or attenuating presence.

A Pragmatic Shift in Consciousness: A Psychology of Mindfulness

Ven. Sucandra (Alena Gripass)

Problems cannot change from the same consciousness that created them. Transformation begins with a shift in how experience is perceived and understood. This presentation advances a pragmatic account of consciousness grounded in humanistic psychology and oriented by the Eastern philosophy of the **three perceptions**—here articulated as **pure perception, impure perception and luminous perception**.

In this participatory turn, attendees have an opportunity to get a glimpse of what it means to explore gratification to its end through actionable steps. Mindfulness will be synthesized beyond the modern neo-mindfulness movement. Participants can expect to walk away with an enriched understanding of mindfulness from its original meaning, why it is important in one's own life, and how such an understanding enhances both, clinical and research skills.

The Existential Psychology of Star Trek: Lessons for Therapy

Jason Dias

When I encountered existential psychology for the first time in graduate school, it clicked right away. It felt like home. Later, I re-watched some old episode of Star Trek and The Next Generation and discovered several lessons I knew about existential psychology I learned first from Star Trek. This talk will unpack a couple of episodes and use them as exemplars for concepts in existential psychology and existential psychotherapy, including facing death directly (The Wrath

of Khan), the value of pain, suffering, and guilt (The Final Frontier) and the value of awkwardness, of not fitting in (Hollow Pursuits). This latter idea plays well with Martin Luther King's notions of creative maladaptation or functional non-conformity. In unpacking these themes, a discussion of the difference between analytic and phenomenological approaches to psychology and therapy will be discussed and illustrated. This serves as a foundation for developing a model that utilizes art and film to explicate psychological concepts, including those central to existential psychology and psychotherapy.

Objectives

1. Attendees will be able to identify two aspects of a model for using art and film to explicate concepts in existential psychology and therapy.
2. Attendees will be able to identify two differences between analytic and phenomenological psychologies.
3. Attendees will be able to identify 2 aspects of the value of suffering in ordinary existence.

Understanding the Glass Child: Sibling Roles in Families with Chronic Illness

Eden Vallejos

The term glass child refers to siblings of children with chronic illnesses and disabilities, often perceived as resilient but, in reality, struggling with invisibility, hyper-independence, and unacknowledged grief. While parental and professional attention centers on the ill child, these siblings may internalize loneliness, fear, perfectionism, people-pleasing, and resentment. Over time, these adaptive roles can harden into long-term patterns associated with anxiety, depression, and relational difficulties. This presentation draws on lived experience and research to examine the psychosocial and developmental impact of growing up as a glass child. It explores the tension between genuine desire to help and the weight of obligation, as well as the risks of excessive responsibility that undermine a child's own developmental needs. Intervention strategies will be provided for both mental health and medical professionals. For therapists, this includes screening for Glass Child Syndrome, facilitating sibling-focused therapy groups, and integrating creative modalities such as play therapy, art, and storytelling. For medical teams, practical recommendations include inviting siblings into care discussions, offering age-appropriate explanations, and treating them as integral members of the family's support network. A dual approach is emphasized: direct sibling support coupled with systemic changes in family and care practices. Recognizing and addressing the needs of glass children benefits the entire family—strengthening cohesion, enhancing coping capacity, and promoting long-term psychological well-being.

Program Evaluation of a Self-Defense Group Therapy Program and Considerations for Rethinking PTSD Treatment and Care

K. P. Hartman & Dan Hugill

Targeted self-defense courses for women with Posttraumatic Stress disorder (PTSD) have demonstrated promising outcomes, including increased feelings of empowerment, self-efficacy, and perceived personal safety (Rosenblum & Taska, 2014). Additional research indicates that participation in self-defense training may reduce victimization and revictimization experiences, as well as decrease PTSD symptoms (Johnson & Cole, 2025).

Building upon this research and integrating insights from the somatic trauma literature of Judith Herman, Bessel van der Kolk, and Peter Levine, the presenters developed an experiential, somatic, and action-oriented group therapy program for women and non-binary individuals who have experienced interpersonal and/or domestic violence. A comprehensive program evaluation was conducted to assess its intended outcomes, underlying assumptions, and program fidelity. Data collected inform ongoing modifications to enhance the program's effectiveness, while a process evaluation verified whether the program was implemented as designed to elucidate mechanisms of change.

Presenters will be sharing the data of the initial program evaluation, plans for future development of the program. Attendees can expect to participate in an experiential segment demonstrating the somatic interventions utilized in the group sessions. They can also expect to engage in discussion focused on development and considerations for future implementation within their own practices and agencies.

Objectives

1. Participants will be able to describe 3 aspects of the structure, components, and theoretical foundations of the developed somatic, action-based group therapy program for trauma survivors.
2. Participants will be able to identify two sources of evidence supporting the program's effectiveness in reducing PTSD symptoms and promoting trauma recovery.
3. Participants will be able to identify strategies for integrating self-defense, somatic approaches, and trauma-informed practices that can enhance mental health interventions for women and non-binary individuals affected by interpersonal and domestic violence.

Early Career Perspectives on Practicing Existential-Humanistic Psychotherapy

Ash Lee, Edbury Enegren, Tyler Gamlen, Heidi Streicher, & Rebecca Wickersham

Although ultimately a lifelong and career-long process, the early stages of forming an identity as a psychotherapist are especially dynamic and seem to invite a great degree of self-reflection. In particular, the existential-humanistic perspective is unique in that it intentionally places personal growth at its center. It almost appears impossible to truly incorporate existential-humanistic values into one's practice without introspection and heartfelt engagement. In this way, working with this philosophy of psychotherapy is not a tool to employ or an action to "do", but rather a way of being with oneself and with the human experience at large. This presentation offered by a panel of early career graduate psychology students will therefore focus on the person of the psychotherapist and their sources of meaning, direction, and wisdom. These reflections will be presented through personal and professional narratives that capture the diversity of experiences that have brought and kept each student to this work. The authors hope this presentation will invite audience members to similarly introspect and contemplate the origins and evolution of their own relationship to practicing existential-humanistic psychotherapy. To facilitate the reflective and conversational spirit of this presentation, an opportunity for open discussion will also be provided.

Our Search for Meaning: Finding Solace Amid the Chaos

Nathaniel Granger, Jr.

Terrible as it was, Viktor Frankl's experience in Auschwitz reinforced what was already one of his key ideas: Life is not primarily a quest for pleasure, as Freud believed, or a quest for

power, as Alfred Adler taught, but a quest for meaning. The greatest task for any person is to find meaning in his or her life (Frankl, 2014). This task has become exceptionally daunting in the times in which we live. With climate change lending to insurmountable death tolls through hurricanes, floodings, earthquakes, tsunamis and other natural disasters, suicides and homicides at record highs, political divisions and upheaval in the United States, widening the socioeconomic chasms between the poor and the wealthy, minoritized groups and whites; begging the question of how we exist in a world where absurdities outweigh clarities. Several times in his book *Man Search for Meaning*, Frankl quotes the words of Nietzsche: “He who has a Why to live for can bear almost any How.” It is on this wise why existentialism must reexamine its cardinal themes of freedom, anxiety, and the search for meaning amid a world congested with chaos. Drawing from Frankl’s book *Man Search for Meaning*, this symposium endeavors to extrapolate ways to find solace amid the chaos by illuminating the relativity of suffering and how spirituality, love, and even humor can ameliorate the pangs of suffering and enliven the possibility to practice the art of living even in a concentration camp, or any unendurable situation, although suffering is omnipresent (p.42).

Objectives

1. Participants will understand the relativity of human suffering.
2. Participants will identify ways to transcend suffering by finding meaning in the suffering.
3. Participants will be able to express the art of living in unendurable situations.

The Trouble with Myth: Updating Use of Literature in Therapy

Jason Dias

The presentation addresses that challenges of using myth in psychotherapy. (Dias & Underwood, 2026). Old analytic methods unduly dictate meaning to the visitor, including the Rollo May’s *The Cry for Myth* (1991). This presentation proposes new methods for integrating myth into psychotherapy that are more consistent with existential psychology and phenomenology.

You Don’t Own Me: Existential-Humanistic Perspectives on Relationship Anarchy and Liberation

L. Xochitl Vallejos

Mainstream relationship norms—rooted in colonialism, patriarchy, racism, and religious dogma—often reproduce systems of domination within our most intimate bonds, constraining authenticity, autonomy, and connection. Relationship anarchy (RA) offers a liberatory alternative, dismantling hierarchies in love and connection while centering autonomy, mutual consent, and ethical interdependence. This presentation examines RA through the lens of existential-humanistic psychology, aligning its principles of authenticity, freedom, responsibility, and meaning-making with liberation psychology’s call to decolonize relational life. By tracing the historical roots of current relationship norms and their function as social control, we uncover how “normal” relationship structures maintain the status quo. Participants will engage in guided reflection to explore their own relational ethics and consider how existential-humanistic practice can support clients—and ourselves—in building relationships grounded in justice rather than domination. They will leave with a deeper understanding of how systemic forces shape intimate life, how RA’s values integrate with existential-humanistic principles, and practical tools for fostering relational liberation in therapeutic contexts.

Objectives

1. Identify three historical forces shaping dominant relationship norms.
2. Identify two aspects of Relationship Anarchy's alignment with existential-humanistic principles.
3. Analyze how "normal" relationship models reinforce oppression.

The Zen of Camus and Sartre: Direct Experience at the Edge of the Absurd

Thiago Leão

The presentation reflects on Zen's capacity to dissolve conceptual frameworks and offer Sisyphus a path beyond revolt or resignation. It examines the philosophical convergence between Zen Buddhism and Existentialism through the works of Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Zen masters Shunryu Suzuki, Chōgyam Trungpa, and Dōgen. While existentialism relies on negation and conscious revolt, the presentation suggests Zen offers a third way through direct, non-conceptual presence. By comparing existentialist insights with Zen's nondual awareness, this work suggests that freedom lies in imagining Sisyphus in a stillness of being that liberates him from the attachment to the task itself and beyond.

Reclaiming the Empathy and Resilience of Dissociation

Ian Wickramasekera, II

Most psychologists are aware of the pathological nature of dissociative disorders such as dissociative identity disorder. However, a long line of research has shown that dissociation is an ability that many people possess who have never met criteria for a dissociative disorder. Several lines of research have shown that many of these people who do not experience the pathological nature of dissociation may simply be high in hypnotic ability, empathy, and/or mindfulness. We will focus on these resilient aspects of dissociation and the research which has demonstrated that dissociation is not an inherently pathological phenomenon. Humanistic psychologists are particularly well suited to help clients capitalize on the surprisingly empathic and resilient nature of dissociation. We will begin with a didactic presentation of the research which has uncovered the non-pathological nature of dissociation as a human ability. Then we will proceed to discuss the clinical implications of this research for humanistic psychotherapy. The author will present a case of a person who was quite high in dissociative abilities such as hypnotic analgesia that was used to help the patient cope better with their chronic pain condition using self-hypnosis. The patient was also quite high in empathy and mindfulness as measured by standardized instruments. These aspects of their character aided their ability to make progress in psychotherapy. The audience will be encouraged to participate through offering questions and insights into this area of psychological research and practice.

Objectives

1. Audience participants will be able to describe 3 non-pathological aspects of people high in dissociation.
2. Participants will be able to describe 3 ways to utilize dissociative talents in psychotherapy.

Poster Presentations

Who's Laughing Now?: Examining Gender Bias in Humor Perception

Isabel Cameron

Gender bias is a prevalent issue in many facets of human interaction and the manifestation in humor perception is one area that is vastly underexplored. Through the lens of the similarity attraction effect, I hypothesized that preference for humor presenters would come as a result of the interaction of gender between the humor receiver and presenter rather than an overarching gender bias. In the study, 56 participants were presented with a written and video funny story presented by different genders and were asked to fill out a series of preference questions about the humor of the story and its presenter. Results indicated that in the video condition, a greater preference was shown when gender was matched, supporting the hypothesis. The findings of this study can be used to understand how we digest media as well as understanding the misconceptions about humor and preference as it relates to gender.

Humanism to Evolutionary Psychology: A Metatheoretical Continuum

Journay E. Clinch

This review synthesizes the literature of classic humanist philosophy with that of the burgeoning field of evolutionary psychology to suggest a more integrative approach to the study of human flourishing. Psychology's ongoing theory crisis calls for greater cooperation of previously disparate branches in order to triangulate meaningful theoretical frameworks and deconstruct unfounded dichotomies that exist between traditionally isolated disciplines. By drawing from foundational humanist texts in conjunction with more recent conceptual evolutionary psychology publications, overlapping themes of naturalism, purpose, evolving potential, and existential contextualization emerged. These themes were compared across the respective domains and categorized into levels of theoretical analysis as ultimate, proximate, or both. The result of this analysis showed a continuous paradigm of thought that unites the mechanisms of evolutionary theory with the value systems of humanism. Since the Renaissance, humanism has continued to function as the underlying philosophical foundation of post-modern social science, while more recently, evolutionary psychology increasingly is posited as the cohesive conceptual framework for fields such as cognitive, developmental, and behavioral psychology. While the metatheoretical nature of humanism and evolutionary psychology offer a cohesive conceptual spectrum, more studies are needed to determine how the theory can be applied.

Can Helms' White Racial Identity Model be Adapted to Describe Neurotypical Identity Development?

Samuel Kohlenberg

Scholarship on neurotypical (NT) identity remains largely unexamined as a developmental process. Drawing from Helms's White Racial Identity Development model, this work introduces a novel framework describing NT identity development that parallels Helms's model as it progresses from unexamined privilege to the evolution of a non-ableist neurotypical Identity. It is hoped that this model will serve as a cursory framework that provides a foundation for empirical research and practical clinical application.

History Repeats Itself: Analyzing Rain Ceremonies to Anticipate Client Reactions to the Climate Crisis

Kaitlin Leahy

This poster explores how cross-cultural reactions to adverse weather and climate change within the context of rain ceremonies might prepare psychologists facing an unprecedented and worsening climate crisis. Data is derived from archaeological, anthropological, and historical literature as well as contemporary psychological and empirical sources of 100 cultures represented across all 6 historically inhabited continents. A series of guiding questions involving the methods, beliefs, and scientific explanations of rain ceremonies inform data collection and memo creation for a content analysis of archival data, with 10 primary themes emerging thus far. Rain ceremonies often occurred in reaction to adverse weather (i.e. storms or drought), with escalations observed throughout prolonged weather events or climate change. Today, the climate crisis increasingly threatens our society's sense of security in relation to the weather as its effects begin to exceed the protection of our technology. The researchers are interested in understanding the motivations behind the common practices of these ceremonies, and how these motivations might offer insights to prepare psychologists treating clients in the coming years. Through the analysis of the themes that appear within the research, this poster explores suggestions for improving cultural sensitivity, addressing inaction and helplessness to the climate crisis, and managing climate anxiety. It also affirms the necessity of considering the impacts of weather, both mild and extreme, on individual and group psychology.

Feeling His Way to Himself: Expanding Possibility and Cultivating Experiential Attunement in Young Men

Mariah Menaker

The last half century has seen tremendous success for feminism, and the broadening of conceptions of womanhood. Integral to the process of dismantling patriarchy has been opposing traditional ideas about male power and toughness. This has been liberating for young women, but it has also left many young men in an identity vacuum. Recent empirical and anecdotal evidence suggest a generation of young men that is underperforming academically and professionally (Brooks, 2022) and feels increasingly lonely and rejected (Lear & Dorstyn, 2024) (Harvard Public Opinion Project, 2025). This poster will draw on existentialist and feminist theory, in particular Rollo May, Carl Rogers and Simone de Beauvoir, to offer an account of how society and psychologists might help 21st century young men toward a more sensitive, attuned and developed sense of self. In particular, it will lay out a) how society might change norms and policies to expand the horizon of possibility for young men, b) how cultural ideals about manhood have left many men disassociated from their emotional experience of themselves, making them underequipped to develop authentically, and c) how we could use humanistic principles to provide a guiding structure for young men as they navigate their identity formation. It will suggest a focus on attunement to experience (including internal and relational congruence, and recognizing anxiety that might previously have manifested as anger) as a foundation for authenticity. For the next generation of young men, self determination will require changes internally (in how they relate to themselves), interpersonally, and societally (we must create a contextual structure that provides permission to explore, and a broad set of available options for male being-in-the-world). In helping young men envision the scope of identity possibility, and giving them the tools to sort out what feels authentic to them, we can help equip them to identify less with a limited paradigm of masculinity, and more with their own experience.

Dreams Throughout the Decades

Lucy Redlich

This research aims to examine the evolution of one person's dreams over multiple decades in an attempt to empirically show how dreams evolve throughout one's life. To do so, a detailed longitudinal content analysis of those dreams is being conducted. Content analysis is a systematic approach that counts various objects and actions that occur within the dream narratives (Van de Castle. 1994). Dream elements are being divided into six core categories: objects, actions, people, emotions, settings, and complexes. This allows for a structured and highly reliable analysis of coding of dreams. By utilizing autoethnography, the principal investigator (PI) serves as both researcher and participant in an attempt to understand how the content of dreams shifts over chronological age. The study analyzes the PI's dreams from their 20's till their 50's. Sleep scientists have long believed that dreams contain hidden messages, but we have yet to uncover the deeper meanings embedded in dream narratives (Fogli, Aiello, and Quercia. 2020). So what are our dreams trying to tell us? The dissemination of our findings will enhance the academic discourse on dream analysis and provide an advancement in theory for dream interpretation.

Organized Existential Resistance: Philosophy, Force and Art

Benjamin Taft

This poster will report research based on the French philosophers, psychologists, freedom fighters, and artists who fought against fascist occupation during WWII. There are three parts to this research: First, the essential themes of existentialism that arose as acts of resistance. We identified six major themes within this part: 1. Radical Freedom and Responsibility, 2. Meaning Making amid Suffering, 3. Solidarity and Intersubjectivity, 4. Revolt and Revolutionary Consciousness, 5. Courage, Anxiety and Moral Risk, and 6. Creative Expression as Liberation. The following thinkers will be used to describe the meanings of those themes: Sartre, Camus, De Beauvoir, Merleau-Ponty, Fanon, Arendt, May, Frankel, Marcel, Levinas and Martin-Baro. Second, we will look at the actions of three French freedom fighters as their heroic deeds exemplified the existential theories described above. We will share the story of Lucie and Raymond Aubrac who risked their lives on a daily basis to resist Nazi occupiers. When Raymond was captured, Lucie organized a daring group effort to retrieve Raymond from a Nazi Gulag. Their friend and colleague, Jean Moulin, who was also captured with Raymond, showed steadfast determination by not divulging information to the Nazis despite being tortured to death. Third, we will return an earlier theme of creative expression as liberation by looking at the role of art in resistance. We will examine the actions of French resistance artists defaced Nazi propaganda and distributed resistance materials as the risk of their lives. We will present the works of German born John Heartfield who used his art to attack Nazi ideas. The purpose of this work is to provide mentalities to resist and encourage resistance to fascism as it spreads across America.

Eco-Martyrdom: The Fight for Environmental Accountability

Elysha York

"To be a martyr is to die for a superpersonal cause. Superpersonal means beyond the immediate, concrete interests of the individual, concerning a project or social movement that benefits a community of people, the natural world, or humanity and the planet as a whole" (Bargdill et al, 2022). Every year, an extensive list of individuals around the world who have been killed for their commitment towards the environment and the rights of indigenous populations is released by the Global Witness Project. As researchers, our goal is to share the stories of these individuals and

to recognize their contributions to reducing climate change, as well as to analyze their self-sacrifice in an Eco-Martyr perspective. Eco-Martyrdom is a term coined for when environmental activists are killed for their work in defending the environment. Some individuals are so committed to their beliefs and land that personal safety becomes secondary. For this poster, each of these individuals was selected out of many activists who exemplified what it means to be an EcoMartyr. This selection was based on qualities they possessed, such as demonstrating altruistic self-sacrifice, depersonalization of goals, an ecological self-view, identity fusion within a group, and self-actualizing tendencies. Many of these individuals are threatened or attacked for their work, yet they persevere in their fight for the environment in their respective regions. By understanding their legacies, we can acknowledge their stories, foster awareness of ongoing environmental violence, and contribute to the growing discourse around environmental justice and eco-heroism.

Conference Sponsors



University Professors Press is publishing company whose mission is to published high quality scholarship humanistic, existential, and transpersonal psychology and creativity studies. University Professors Press is providing a 10% discount to individuals registered for the confernece. Visit the online portion of the conference to access the coupon.

Why Join the Rocky Mountain Humanistic Counseling and Psychological Association?

RMHCPA is creating a vibrant humanistic community in the heart of the Rocky Mountains. By joining you gain access to our membership benefits listed below and help support the development of humanistic psychology in the Rockies and beyond.

<https://rmhcpa.org/join/>

Membership Benefits

- Discount on local continuing education and training opportunities, including our annual conference
- Networking events
- Opportunities to present on your research and expertise
- Opportunities to promote your scholarship and publications
- RMHCPA Listserv (with announcement of local events) and Facebook page
- Mentoring Network for students and early career counselors and therapists
- Coming Soon: The Rocky Mountain Humanistic Archives & Library

Getting Involved with the Rocky Mountain Humanistic Counseling and Psychological Association

The Rocky Mountain Humanistic Counseling and Psychological Association is a growing organization, and we are looking for individuals looking to get involved and help us grow. We openings for people to serve on the board and many of our committees. We have opportunities for students to serve on the board and many committees as well. If you are interested in becoming involved with RMHCPA, please email the RMHCPA Executive Director, Dr. Louis Hoffman, at lhoffman@rmhcpa.org.

Why Support RMHCPA

RMHCPA is in the process of developing the Rocky Mountain Humanistic and Existential Institute (RMHEI), which will include an archive, library, training center, and clinic with practicum sites. RMHEI will provide many additional membership benefits while serving the local community and the field of humanistic and existential psychology.

Follow RMHCPA On Social Media

RMHCPA's Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/RockyMtHumanistic>

RMHCPA's Facebook Group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/RMHCPA>

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/rocky-mountain-humanistic-counseling-and-psychological-association>

Twitter: https://twitter.com/rmhcpa_psych

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCqhtuTNpiyly0vjXe948WvA>

Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/user125416359>



www.rmhcpa.org