

**10th Annual
Rocky Mountain Humanistic
Counseling & Psychological
Association Conference**

**Ten Years of Community Building
& Healing**



**Hybrid Conference
October 16-18, 2026**

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

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9th Annual Rocky Mountain Humanistic Counseling and Psychological Association Conference

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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 7-14 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 10th Annual RMHCPA Conference will have a recorded, asynchronous portion of the program that will be available through Onlineevents (www.onlineevents.co.uk) beginning the day of the conference. The asynchronous portion of the workshop includes pre-recorded presentations and poster presentations.

Conference Schedule

Preconference: Friday, October 16, 2026

12:00-1:00 PM	Registration and Lunch Provided (free with Preconference Registration)
1:00 PM-3:00 PM	Decolonizing Existentialism: From the Fourth World Congress to Clinical Practice (CE) <i>Nathaniel Granger, Jr. &</i>
3:30 PM-5:30 PM	Artificial Intelligence and Humanistic Psychology: Implications for Society and Clinical Practice (CE) <i>Louis Hoffman & Lakoda Hoffman</i>
5:30-7:30	Social Event

Main Conference: Saturday, October 17, 2026

8:30-9:00 AM	Registration & Donuts	
	Archives (Upstairs)	Rollo May Library (Downstairs)
9:00-10:00 AM	Therapeutic Uses of Meaninglessness (CE) <i>Matt Thelen</i>	A Humanism Worth Inheriting: Supervision as the Site of Philosophical Renewal (CE) <i>Alfredo Palacios & Rebekah Richey</i>
10:00-11:00 AM	The Power of Connection: Aging, Social Isolation, and Suicide Prevention (CE) <i>Vanessa Harris & Ian Wickramasekera, II</i>	The Trouble with Myth: Updating use of Literature in Therapy <i>Jason Dias</i>
11:00-11:30 AM	Coffee & Tea Break	
11:30-12:30 PM	Restoring the Sacred to the Psyche: A Humanistic-Transpersonal Framework for Embodied Psychological Integration (CE) <i>Salomeh (Sally) Nazari</i>	Existential-Humanistic Approaches to Working with Grief and Loss: Finding Meaning Beyond the Words (CE) <i>Faith Dunn, Payton Ward, & Louis Hoffman</i>
12:30 PM-2:00 PM	Lunch on your own	
2:00-3:00 PM	Developing Antiracist Civil Courage: A White Psychologist's Rehumanizing Journey (CE) <i>Margit Henderson, PhD</i>	The Mirror, the Mind, and the Family: How Self-Image Shapes Emotional Regulation, Relationships, and Resilience (CE) <i>Celia North & Jason Dias</i>
3:00-4:00 PM	We Have Been Here Before: An Existential Call to Black Hope, Resilience, and Encounter <i>Nathaniel Granger, Jr. (CE)</i>	Contact, Trance, and Encounter: Humanistic Values as Integrative Bridges Across Modalities <i>Robert Wickersham</i>
4:00-4:30	Break	
4:30-5:30 PM	Awards Ceremony	
5:30-7:00 PM	Poster Session Social Hour with D'oeuvres	

Main Conference: Sunday, October 18, 2026

8:30-9:00 AM	Donuts & Networking	
9:00-10:00 AM	Storytelling Archetypes for Wisdom: Awareness (CE) <i>Annabelle Nelson</i>	Michael Myers: The End and Beginning of Hope (CE) <i>Jason Dias</i>
10:00-11:00 AM	Art as an Existential Encounter: How Connecting Through Art Facilitates Relational Depth <i>Joseph Alexander Vanderhoff</i>	Existential-Humanistic Dimensions of Suicide Risk — Applying the IS PATH WARM Framework in Clinical Practice (CE) <i>Prashant Bhatt & Mamta Bhatt</i>
11:00-12:00	Rethinking Mindfulness: Wellbeing Beyond Stress-Reduction <i>Ven. Sucandra (Alena Gripass)</i>	Rollo May's Use of Encounter: Therapeutic Applications (CE) <i>Louis Hoffman</i>
12:00-12:30	Conference Photo & Conference Closing	

Asynchronous Presentations (Note: Asynchronous Presentations are Available Online Only)

- Culture Carries Healing: Ancestral Wisdom, Intergenerational Trauma, and De-Pathologizing Non-WEIRD Lives *Courtney Cabel*
- On Revenge *Burcu Tuncel*
- Unmasking Neurodiversity: Awareness and Belonging *Vanessa Harris*

Poster Presentations

- Nature as Language: Integrating Ecosystem Imagery, Metaphors, and Storytelling for Emotional Exploration *Arman Azmi* (In-Person)
- “How” to “Why”: Aetiology of Mental Illness Understood through Human Evolution (In-Person) *Journay Clinch*
- "To Myself, the One I Yearn": Youth Identity Formation Through Spoken Word Poetry *Rebekah Richey* (In-Person)
- Conceptualizing Taiwanese Han Racial Identity Development Through Helms' Model *Wen Yu Lee* (In-Person)
- Community College Students Experiences and Future Decent Work by *Ashley King, Sarah LaJoie, Zach Weller, Grace Bollinger, Patton Garriott.*
- Partner Reassurance Following Abandonment Fear in Borderline Personality Disorder: A Dyadic Daily-Diary Study (Virtual Only) *Zarin Safa*
- Women and Eco-Martydom: The Struggle of Environmental Justice and Community Resistance (Virtual Only) *Bella Quilon, Catherine Morales, and Richard Bargdill*
- Messages & Warnings: How Dreams Evolve Over Time (Virtual Only) *Nicholas Bianchi, Richard Bargdill, Lucy Redich, & Jenna Salah*
- Making Psychotherapeutic Research Accessible on Social Media (Virtual Only) *Ujwalla Sinha, Ben Taft, & Richard Bargdill*

Presenter Bios



Arman Azmi is a Master's student in clinical psychology and a clinical intern at the Benedictine University Counseling Center, nestled on a small Midwestern campus in Illinois, where he serves clients in emerging adulthood. Arman has a strong interest in ecopsychology and aims to create spaces where nature is not merely a backdrop, but a teacher offering opportunities for reflection, meaning, and learning. His personal experiences in nature, including hiking, freediving, and nature photography, have further shaped his appreciation for the relationship between people and the natural world. His clinical interests include honoring diverse cultural traditions of healing and introspection through storytelling, proverbs, nature-based metaphors, and a trauma-informed approach to therapy. Arman thoroughly enjoys learning from others in psychology and across ecological disciplines, reflecting his lifelong passion for the pursuit of knowledge.



Richard Bargdill received his PhD in Clinical Psychology from the Existential Psychology program at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, PA. He is currently an Associate Professor of Psychology at Virginia Commonwealth University. Dr. Bargdill is the author and co-editor of two UPP books: *An Artist's Thought Book: Intriguing Thoughts About the Artistic Process* and *Humanistic Contributions to Psychology 10: -Growth, Choice and Responsibility*. He has poetry in many of UPP poetry books and his artwork does the cover of UPP books *Silent Screams* and Amendo Goirgi's *Reflections*. He researches the assassination of environmentalists, aesthetic chills and dream.



Mamta Bhatt, MACP, BHMS, RYT, RP, is a Registered Psychotherapist based in Mississauga, Ontario, Canada. Her clinical practice focuses on supporting diverse, marginalized, and immigrant communities, with particular interest in trauma resilience, existential concerns, and holistic mental health. With a background in community medicine, grassroots community organizing, and psychotherapy across India, Libya, Malta, and Canada, Mamta brings a cross-cultural perspective to understanding social determinants of health, systemic stressors, migration, and familial separation. She has specialized training in the Gottman Method for couples therapy and integrates Western psychotherapeutic approaches with Eastern contemplative traditions, particularly Yoga Therapy and Yoga Philosophy. A Registered Yoga Teacher (RYT) trained through the Yoga Institute of Mumbai, she incorporates somatic and mind-body approaches into

clinical practice and currently provides yoga for mental health instruction at Brampton Civic Hospital, alongside her private psychotherapy practice. Mamta presented scholarly research at the International Association of Yoga Therapists (IAYT) conference in 2011. Her current academic interests explore the intersections of Yoga Philosophy and Western Existentialism, particularly in relation to existential suffering, agency, self-actualization, meaning-making, and human flourishing.



Prashant Bhatt, MD, MA, RP, is a Registered Psychotherapist practicing within the existential-humanist tradition. Integrating over four decades of medical expertise with a clinical psychological framework, Dr. Bhatt offers a uniquely holistic approach to trauma recovery. His frontline service during the 2011 Libyan conflict deeply informed his practice, leading him to document oral histories on human resilience and the unseen psychological scars of war. Dr. Bhatt specializes in supporting historically marginalized and minoritized populations, particularly LGBTQ+ individuals, the South Asian diaspora, immigrants, and displaced communities navigating complex life transitions, identity, and intergenerational trauma.



Grace Bollinger is a PhD student at the University of Denver, where she studies counseling psychology. Her interests include how identity, meaning, and relational patterns shape our emotional lives. Her current work focuses on education and career equity.



Courtney D. Cabell, PsyD, LP, CCTP, is currently Core Faculty of the doctoral program at the Michigan School of Psychology (MSP). She is also Founder and President of Open Heart Communities, a nonprofit mental health organization that is dedicated to bridging the gap between social justice and mental health, where she practices as a licensed psychologist providing holistic approaches to healing and culturally adapted services including group therapy, healing circles, psychological assessments, community outreach, and consultation. Additionally, Courtney serves as an Associate Editor for The Humanistic Psychologist and as Conference Chair for APA's Division 32, Society for Humanistic Psychology. Courtney has a passion for serving communities experiencing marginalization.



Journey Clinch is a graduate student at the University of Colorado Colorado Springs in the Psychological Science track focusing on evolutionary psychology, environmental attitudes, and ecological identity. She is interested in bridging the distance between evolutionary science and psychology of the self, specifically using frameworks of reciprocity and relationship. She holds a minor in music and BS in Psychology from Virginia Commonwealth University.



Jason Dias, PsyD, 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.



Faith Dunn is a fourth-year doctoral student in the clinical psychology program at the University of Denver's Graduate School of Professional Psychology. She is currently completing her practicum training at the VA, focusing on meaning-centered psychotherapy for older adults and their caregivers navigating cognitive changes and medical diagnoses, and the Center for Humanistic and Interpersonal Psychotherapy, which specializes in existential, depth-oriented psychotherapy. She enjoys working

within interdisciplinary teams, as it allows her to address the full picture of a client's life rather than treating pieces in isolation, and feels honored to work with Veterans at this stage of life. She is passionate about long-term, depth work that allows her to go back in time with the person to understand their present. Outside of the therapy room, she is usually seen going on a walk and drinking coffee. As she grew up dancing, she enjoys continuing to watch, read, or listen to the arts in any form.



Pat Garriott, PhD, is a Professor at the University of Denver where he studies Counseling Psychology. His research interests include work psychology and first-generation college students.



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.



Vanessa Harris, LMFT, is currently a Clinical Psychology PhD student at Fielding Graduate University with a concentration in Neuropsychology. She has over 15 years of experience working as a federal civilian employee supporting military behavioral health services. Her professional work focuses on mental health care for service members and veterans, with an emphasis on improving access to care, supporting clinical teams, and fostering professional development and mentorship. She values nature's role in fostering reflection, balance, and well-being, particularly among the aging veteran population. Her doctoral research interests include equine-assisted therapy and its potential applications in veteran mental health. She is passionate about advancing trauma-informed, evidence-based

approaches that promote healing, resilience, and well-being among military-connected populations.



Margit Henderson, PhD, <https://www.margithenderson.com/> is a clinical psychologist and trauma therapist in independent practice. Margit supports progressive activism as a writer and speaker. Her personal political engagement emerged from seeing how unjust systems and prejudice drive the dis-ease she sees in herself, her clinical practice, and community. She works to build lasting civil courage especially for the disruption of racism in its myriad mutations. Margit's professional antiracism work includes developing the *Systemic Racism Power & Control Wheel* (2020), an approved adaptation of the DAIP's domestic violence wheel. In 2022, she was invited by the BIPOC leaders of *Race2Dinner* to create and facilitate a psychological curriculum for white women building emotional capacity for sustained antiracist action. During this 9-month program, Margit taught her conceptualization of *The Emotional Design of White Supremacy*, which included her formulation of *The Emotional Challenge Zones* exploring white comfort, fragility and ferality as well as expanded emotional capacity and maturity. This work draws from Margit's years of personal intensive embodied antiracism work within Resmaa Menakem's *Somatic Abolition* community.



Lakoda C. E. Hoffman is a student at the University of Colorado Colorado Springs, majoring in Computer Engineering. He is the co-author of "Artificial Intelligence and Being Human: Critical Thinking, Creativity, and Empathy," published in the *Journal of Humanistic Counseling*.



Louis Hoffman, PhD, is the Executive Director of the Rocky Mountain Humanistic Counseling and Psychological Association. An avid writer, Dr. Hoffman has written/edited 28 books, including the *APA Handbook of Humanistic and Existential Psychology* and *Case Formulation in Existential-Humanistic Psychology*. He has been recognized as a Fellow of the American Psychological Association and nine of its divisions (1, 10, 12, 24, 32, 36, 45, 48, 52) for his contributions to the field of professional psychology. Dr. Hoffman teaches at the University of Denver and Saybrook University. He offers a Certificate Program on Existential-Humanistic Case

Formulation and Evidence-Based Practice in Psychology through the Rocky Mountain Humanistic Counseling and Psychological Association and offers supervision and consultation through the Center for Humanistic and Interpersonal Psychology



Ashley King is a PhD Student at University of Denver, where she studies Counseling Psychology. Her research interests include education and career equity, humanistic counseling and racial trauma. Her current work focuses on counseling outcomes and education and career equity for first generation college students.



Sarah LaJoie is a PhD Student at University of Denver, where she studies Counseling Psychology. Her research interests include career equity, access to counseling for various populations, and workplace satisfaction as it relates to responsibilities in the workplace. Her current work focuses on exploring cultural wealth and career.



Wen Yu Lee, BS, is a graduate student in the Clinical Mental Health Counseling program at Florida Gulf Coast University and is currently completing her practicum at FGCU's Community Counseling and Education Center. Her professional interests include multicultural counseling, racial and cultural identity development, mental health prevention, and humanistic and existential approaches to counseling. Originally from Taiwan, her cross-cultural experiences have shaped her interest in understanding how culture and social context influence individuals' experiences and mental health. She hopes to integrate clinical practice, research, and advocacy throughout her career to promote mental health and well-being among the general public. Her current research interests include Taiwanese Han racial identity development, as well as models for mental health prevention and early support.



inclusive psychological practices that attend to the diverse experiences of Black individuals and communities.

Maia Y. Miller, MA, is a doctoral student in Clinical Psychology at the Michigan School of Psychology. Her research and clinical interests include culturally responsive practice, Black identity, intergenerational trauma, sexuality, and psychological well-being. Her work explores the ways culture, history, and lived experience influence mental health and healing. Maia's passions draw on existential-humanistic psychology and culturally grounded perspectives. She is particularly interested in approaches that recognize both individual and collective experiences of trauma, identity, and resilience. Through her research, clinical training, and professional work, Maia aims to contribute to culturally responsive,



Catherine Morales is a third-year Psychology and Sociology student at Virginia Commonwealth University. Her academic interests include child development, mental health, and the social and behavioral factors that influence children and adolescents. She is particularly interested in working with children experiencing emotional, behavioral, and developmental challenges and hopes to pursue a career in child psychology. Her research interests include mental health, child development, and the ways social environments can influence psychological well-being.



care. She is also the author of *All Is Love: How Our Bonds with Animals Can Help Heal the Heart, Mind, and Soul*.

Salomeh (Sally) Nazari, PsyD, is a licensed psychologist, educator, author, and founder of the Chrysalis Resonance & Resilience Method (CRRM), an integrative framework bringing humanistic, transpersonal, relational, somatic, contemplative, and culturally responsive perspectives into dialogue. Her work explores the intersections of psychological healing, spirituality, embodiment, meaning, culture, and the sacred, with particular attention to how clinicians can engage spiritually significant experiences with both openness and psychological rigor. Dr. Nazari has taught and presented for universities, healthcare systems, professional organizations, and national continuing education programs, with areas of focus including trauma, burnout, contemplative neuroscience, polyvagal-informed practice, and spiritually integrated



Annabelle Nelson, PhD, has a lifelong passion for understanding how humans learn and become whole. She has traveled the world, teaching in Gujarat, India as a Fulbright scholar and presenting in Cuba, UK, Japan, New Zealand and throughout the U.S. A yogi, Zen practitioner, cyclist, cross country skier, Annabelle's quest is to find natural ways for humans to expand consciousness for emotional health, creativity and spiritual insight. Her research examines natural psychodynamics from humanistic and Jungian psychology coupled with consciousness studies from Buddhist teachings. Her goal is to help humans make their lives work for happiness and clarity to solve daily and existential dilemmas. With a PhD in Developmental

Psychology, she has been a professor for 40 years at Prescott College and Fielding Graduate University. She also founded the WHEEL Council, a non-profit using storytelling and culture affirmation serving American Indian teens for health education. An author, storyteller, teacher, and program developer, she has published many research articles in journals like *Heroism Science* and *Humanistic Psychology*. Her last two were *Storytelling, Wisdom and Archetypes*, 2026, Mandorla Book and *Archetypal Imagery*, 2014, Jessica Kingsley. She has three children and lives in the Colorado Rocky Mountains.



Celia North is a Mental Health Therapist Graduate (this Fall) pursuing dual master's degrees and preparing for her PhD, bringing together rigorous clinical training, lived insight, and a profound calling to serve others. A former college instructor, she became known for reaching high-risk students facing complex trauma and neglect. Her transformative work earned her the "Mission Impossible" award for helping students others had given up on achieve extraordinary personal and academic outcomes. Celia's clinical focus includes trauma, attachment, relationships, parenting, childhood neglect, and strengthening the family unit including marriage rescue work. She is advancing her training in EMDR, Neurofeedback and Family Systems Therapy, and other evidence-based interventions which are profoundly transforming. "I have never seen anyone do what Celie has done" one client reported who had

seen countless therapists since age 3. Rooted in her Christian faith, Celia believes healing is both deeply personal and profoundly purposeful. Her second passion is speaking, she leads self-esteem trainings designed to turn clinical insight into meaningful, real-world transformation. She lives in Colorado and loves Country and Latin dancing.



Association for Humanistic Counseling and an inaugural member of the board of the Rocky Mountain Humanistic Counseling and Psychological Association in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

Dr. Alfredo Palacios is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Counseling and Human Services at the University of Colorado Colorado Springs. A graduate of the University of New Mexico, Dr. Palacios is a practicing clinician, educator, and researcher whose work is grounded in humanistic and existential approaches to counseling. In his clinical practice, he works with adult, couples and youth. His scholarship focuses on expanding humanistic and existential theory to better address diverse client populations, social and cultural contexts, and contemporary ethical concerns within the counseling profession. Dr. Palacios is the Past President of the



Isabella Quilon is a senior at Virginia Commonwealth University working towards her Bachelor's in Psychology. She is currently the Research Lead for Dr. Bargdill's Eco-Martyrdom lab. She is interested in social psychology and plans on going to graduate school for School Psychology. Her interests include environmental activism, community building, and creating a safe environment for all. She hopes to travel around the world and gain skills that will foster her future career.



the lifespan, humanistic counseling supervision, and the integration of spoken word poetry into counseling practice.

Rebekah J. Richey, BS, is a master's student studying Clinical Mental Health Counseling at the University of Colorado Colorado Springs. She serves as Vice President of the Executive Board for the university's chapter of Chi Sigma Iota, an international counseling honor society. Bekah is also a counseling intern in Colorado Springs, where she practices from an existential-humanistic lens emphasizing embodiment, meaning-making, and here-and-now work. Bekah is passionate about making existential-humanistic counseling accessible and meaningful for clients of all ages. Her research interests include identity development and meaning-making across



Zarin Safa earned her Bachelor of Science in Psychology from the University of Texas at Arlington in May 2026. During her undergraduate training, she worked as a research assistant in UTA's Employee Assessment, Selection, and Training (EAST) Lab, contributing to research on emotional labor, workplace stress, and ethical decision-making. She also works as a Registered Behavior Technician, providing direct behavioral support to children and adolescents with developmental needs. Her research interests include borderline personality disorder, interpersonal processes, trauma-informed assessment, and the ways relationships shape emotional experiences and mental health. Her current work examines partner reassurance following abandonment fear among adults with borderline personality disorder using a dyadic daily-diary framework. Zarin plans to pursue graduate training in clinical mental health counseling and hopes to integrate research, culturally responsive practice, and evidence-based care in her future work.



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.



Ben Taft is a senior at VCU studying Psychology. A major part of his life right now is music! He's in a band, and also is a percussion instructor. The instruments he knows how to play is Piano and Percussion. He tries to make sure he always has a smile on his face. He believes keeping a positive attitude is one of the most important things in life! A lot of great experiences in his life have come from sticking with things, even when they were hard. And keeping that positive attitude has helped with that. Although he is unsure where the future will lead him, he is excited for whatever the world throws at him!



Dr. Matt is a licensed psychologist working in private practice for 16 years. 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. Currently, Dr. Thelen is a peer review editor for *The Humanistic Psychologist*. Dr. Thelen is also the chairperson for the Board of Directors for RMHCPA.



Burcu Tuncel is a doctoral student in existential psychotherapy at the New School of Psychotherapy and Counseling (NSPC), London. She is particularly interested in motherhood studies, embodiment, liberation psychology and the lived experience of transition, loss, and identity transformation. Burcu brings an interdisciplinary perspective to her academic and clinical work. Alongside her doctoral research, she maintains a clinical practice both in Istanbul and London. Her broader interests include phenomenology, attachment, and dance and movement therapies.



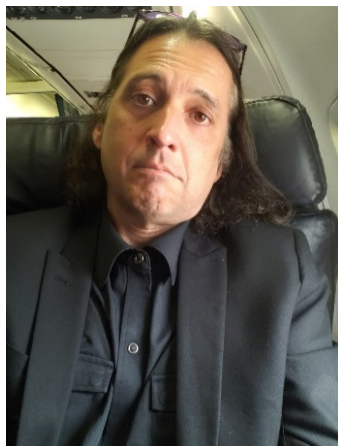
Payton Ward is a fourth-year doctoral student studying clinical psychology at the University of Denver's Graduate School of Professional Psychology. He is currently completing his practicum training at the Center for Humanistic & Interpersonal Psychotherapy (CHIP) and at the University of Denver's Health & Counseling Center, where he works with adults of all backgrounds and university students, respectively. His areas of clinical interest include anxiety, OCD, trauma, grief and loss, and existential concerns, which he approaches from an integrative depth-oriented perspective. When he isn't working on doctoral internship applications, he enjoys writing, cooking, jamming on his guitar, playing tabletop roleplaying games, and planning his wedding.



Zach Weller is a PhD student at the University of Denver, where they study counseling psychology. Their research interests include environmental psychology, health disparities, and community based participatory methods. Their current work focuses on using food as methodology in exploring the immigrant experience.



Robert Wickersham, MA, LPC, CCTP-II, is a licensed professional counselor practicing in Colorado and a fourth-year Ph.D. student in Clinical Psychology at Saybrook University. He is a co-founder of Eclipse Integrative Therapy, a private practice supporting individuals navigating complex trauma, grief, and dissociation. Robert brings an existential-humanistic, trauma-focused, person-centered, and gestalt-based approach, offering specialty services including eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR) and ketamine-assisted psychotherapy. His dissertation uses interpretative phenomenological analysis to explore how older adults living with chronic pain experience their own aging. He lives and practices in Boulder, Co with his wife and two cats. When he is not working, you can find him swimming, hiking, and dancing.



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.

Award Recipient

Dr. Pat Tunning: Emory G. Cowan, Jr. and Susan Cooper Lifetime Service Award

Daniel E. Johnson, PsyD: Outstanding COSPP Alumnus Award

Tyler W. Gamlen, MA: Sandy Sela-Smith Humanistic Exemplar Award

Dr. L. Xochitl Vallejos: Social Justice in Psychology Award

Pre-Conference Workshops

Decolonizing Existentialism: From the Fourth World Congress to Clinical Practice

Nathaniel Granger, Jr., PsyD

The Fourth World Congress of Existential Therapy brought together more than 500 participants from approximately 40 countries with a shared commitment to globalizing and decolonizing existential therapy. This two-hour presentation extends that conversation from the Congress into clinical practice by asking a fundamental question: If existentialism concerns the human condition, whose experience of being human has historically defined that condition?

Existential therapy has traditionally explored universal concerns such as freedom, responsibility, anxiety, death, isolation, meaning, and authenticity. Yet these existential realities are always experienced within a cultural, historical, relational, and social world. Death may be universal, but cultures understand death differently. Anxiety may be universal, while its sources may include racism, displacement, poverty, oppression, or cultural alienation. Freedom may be an existential given, but the possibilities available for exercising that freedom are not equally distributed. Drawing upon existential thinkers including Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Buber, Sartre, Frankl, and Rollo May, while placing them in dialogue with Frantz Fanon, Paulo Freire, bell hooks,

and multicultural and liberation perspectives, this presentation explores how existential therapy can become more culturally responsive without abandoning its philosophical foundations.

Particular attention will be given to existential freedom, cultural humility, and Buber's *I-Thou encounter* as foundations for clinical practice. Through reflection, experiential dialogue, and clinical application, participants will examine how therapists can recognize their own cultural assumptions and enter more authentically into the lived worlds of their clients.

Decolonizing existentialism does not require discarding the existential tradition. It requires expanding the circle of voices permitted to interpret the human condition. Before we interpret another person's existence, we must first be willing to encounter their world.

Artificial Intelligence and Humanistic Psychology: Implications for Society and Clinical Practice

Louis Hoffman & Lakoda C. E. Hoffman

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has been rapidly evolving over the last several years. As more people rely on AI in various ways, it is vital to consider its societal and mental health implications. To begin, we discuss the various models of AI and how these have evolved over time. For example, some AI models have been sycophantic, or excessively agreeable, leading to deleterious implications for some users. Even less sycophantic models tend to customize answers to the individual's interaction history, thereby distorting responses. Next, the presentation considers the implications of AI for being human and aspects of human behavior. AI has a complex relationship with both potential benefits and harms, depending in part on how it is used. For example, AI can enhance creativity and critical thinking; however, overuse tends to negatively affect both (Hoffman & Hoffman, 2026). Empathy and other foundational aspects of human relationships are also being impacted, particularly with overuse. All people, including psychotherapists and counselors, ought to learn how to use AI responsibly beyond the therapy room. This includes how to use AI in education, scholarship/research, fact-checking, and general usage. The implications for psychotherapy are diverse, including consideration of the client's use of AI, individuals using AI to supplement or replace aspects of therapy, and the integration of AI into psychotherapy. As AI rapidly evolves, most therapists struggle to keep up with its implications. Yet, it remains vital that clinicians are aware of AI's implications for clients and how this is changing.

Presentations

Art as an Existential Encounter: How Connecting Through Art Facilitates Relational Depth

Joseph Alexander Vanderhoff

The existential-humanistic tradition has long appreciated the importance of art in psychotherapy (Serlin, 2025; May, 1975). Utilizing visual art, music, poetry, and dance in therapy has been shown to have salubrious effects; however, what I intend to show in this presentation is a phenomenological examination of how talking about and connecting with clients about these topics bolster relational depth, fortifies therapeutic rapport, and engenders interpersonal and intrapersonal understanding. I will provide specific clinical examples with clients and engage in a collaborative discussion with participants (audience members) about how and why we believe this is transpiring. Additionally, I will have a slideshow with specific examples of visual art (Rothko, van Gogh, Picasso), lyrics of music (Adrianne Lenker), and photography (Sally Mann) to discuss

my phenomenological experiences with these pieces and the importance of encountering them. Throughout our lives we have experienced the weight of these topics, but have not always embraced them in the therapy room—when connecting with potential partners, how often are our first curiosities and questions: What kind of music are you inspired by? What kind of films are you drawn to? Which artists speak to you? This presentation will provide a space to understand and participate in the discussion of art as a topic to augment relational depth and connect more deeply with our clients and fellow human beings.

Contact, Trance, and Encounter: Humanistic Values as Integrative Bridges Across Modalities

Robert Wickersham, MA, LPC

Humanistic psychology has been inspired by phenomenology and existential philosophy, and it represents a set of values that have been operationalized differently by several clinical modalities. Two of those expressions are Gestalt therapy and existential-humanistic therapy, which share core values of focusing on the here and now, encountering the other, and believing in the organism's desire to become whole. Though these sibling traditions found different ways of speaking and accentuating, they share a philosophical common source: Buber's I-Thou, Husserl's phenomenological approach, and the existential call to freedom and responsibility. In both traditions, it is the therapeutic relationship itself, not technique, that is the medium of change.

This presentation explores these convergences and takes them one step further by adding a third modality: clinical hypnosis. Though Fritz Perls was clear about his opinion that hypnosis was the opposite of awareness and self-support, what was developed over the years was an approach to hypnosis that was in contrast to hypnosis as it had been practiced until then and remarkably similar to humanistic values: permissive rather than authoritarian, phenomenological rather than scripted, client-centered rather than therapist-directed.

The main thesis is that all three forms of therapy (Gestalt therapy, existential-humanistic therapy, and modern clinical hypnosis) share common humanistic values and thus this is why they can all be integrated. This implies a general relationship for our community: The common philosophical ground serves as integrative bridges between modalities. So, rather than seeing various humanistic approaches as different schools, one can see them as different expressions of shared phenomenological, presence, authentic encounter, and organismic trust. Participants will gain theoretical insight and understanding of convergences across traditions, as well as practical applications for integrating the ideas into their own humanistic practice.

Culture Carries Healing: Ancestral Wisdom, Intergenerational Trauma, and De-Pathologizing Non-WEIRD Lives (Asynchronous)

Courtney Cabel, Dennis Brown, Jr., & Maia Miller

Psychological understandings of trauma and grief have historically been shaped by Western, individualistic frameworks that may inadequately recognize how suffering, resilience, and healing are experienced within non-WEIRD cultural contexts. Intergenerational trauma and existential grief, in particular, may be transmitted through relationships, family systems, embodiment, storytelling, music, ritual, and collective memory. When these culturally embedded processes are interpreted primarily through individualistic diagnostic frameworks, culturally coherent expressions of distress and healing risk being misunderstood or pathologized.

This presentation examines intergenerational trauma and existential grief as relational, developmental, and culturally embedded phenomena. Drawing from decolonial psychology, liberation-oriented perspectives, and research concerning historical and racial trauma, presenters will examine how dominant psychological frameworks can obscure the cultural meaning of experiences associated with loss, oppression, survival, and resilience. Participants will also consider ancestral practices, music, and spoken word as forms of psychological knowledge through which communities transmit meaning, regulate emotion, preserve identity, and sustain connection across generations.

Content will be taught through brief didactic presentations, slides, and culturally situated examples. Participants will apply the material to clinical, educational, research, and other psychological contexts by examining how professional assumptions can contribute to cultural misrecognition and considering approaches that more intentionally honor relationality, cultural context, and ancestral knowledge. The program is intended to expand psychologists' conceptualization of intergenerational trauma beyond individualized models and provide practical considerations for recognizing culturally grounded expressions of grief, resilience, meaning-making, and healing.

Developing Antiracist Civil Courage: A White Psychologist's Rehumanizing Journey

Margit Henderson, PhD

In this session, the Helms (1990) White Racial Identity Development Model will be explored through an Existential-Humanistic (EH) lens. The presenter will offer her personal experience as a case study of grappling with whiteness (Smith et al., 2026) and building her embodied capacity for civil courage (Williams et al., 2023). Existential-Humanistic themes discussed include defensive alienation, facing the monstrous, existential shattering (Hoffman & Singer, 2025; Hoffman & Vallejos, 2018), grief and re-humanization. Changes in meaning making across the developmental stages will be addressed. Dr. Henderson will share how this journey has deepened her capacity for antiracist work, changed her as a therapist, and—to her surprise—offered a liberating experience of life-wide authenticity.

Clinical applications for serving clients struggling with moral injury and politicized grief will be addressed. This program also offers an example of how social justice oriented psychologists can engage EH themes to support their advocacy and activism work, crucial especially now as resourced and fortified psychologists are needed to stand in solidarity against reemerging authoritarianism (Follmer et al., 2024).

This presentation will teach antiracist and EH concepts via didactic presentation with slides and personal sharing. Drawing upon clinical neuroscience (Lanius et al., 2025), experiential somatic grounding exercises are woven throughout this program to show how sensory practices can support embodied antiracism (Menakem, 2017) as well as to build expanded emotional capacity for client and therapist.

Existential-Humanistic Approaches to Working with Grief and Loss: Finding Meaning Beyond Words

Faith Dunn, Payton Ward, & Louis Hoffman, PhD

The experience of grief is often difficult to encapsulate in words. Even for many experienced therapists, this makes responding to and working with grief challenging. At times, more structured

and superficial responses, such as metaphors and clichés that minimize the pain, cause harm. This presentation explores ways that symbols, metaphors, rituals, and myths can be used to engage on a deeper level that honors the grief process while facilitating processing through grief, connecting with others, and finding meaning. When words feel insufficient, often the use of various forms of symbolic communication are better able to encapsulate the complexity of a client's experience. Therapists can assist clients with this by giving permission and encouraging them to explore meaning through symbols, metaphors, and various types of expressive arts. Often, clients will feel less alone through the discovery of artistic expressions, such as songs, poems, artwork, creative dances, or other forms of creativity that better capture their experience. These more abstract forms of expression can also facilitate connecting with meaning, including through the felt continued connection with the person or aspect of themselves that they are grieving (i.e., continuing bonds). As the presentation concludes, practical strategies for being with grieving clients are discussed, including the use of presence and silence.

Existential-Humanistic Dimensions of Suicide Risk: Applying the IS PATH WARM Framework in Clinical Practice

Prashant Bhatt & Mamta Bhatt

Suicide remains one of the most profound and philosophically charged confrontations in clinical practice. Within an existential-humanistic framework—drawing from the seminal contributions of Viktor Frankl, Rollo May, Irvin Yalom, and Carl Rogers—suicidality is not merely a neurochemical dysregulation or behavioral emergency, but a crisis of being: a collapse of meaning, relatedness, freedom, and authentic self-continuity.

The American Association of Suicidology's IS PATH WARM mnemonic provides a structured, clinically validated framework for recognizing warning signs of suicide. When integrated with existential-humanistic principles, this framework transcends checklist utility and becomes a phenomenological lens through which clinicians may encounter the suffering person in full human complexity—honoring their lived experience while engaging evidence-based risk stratification.

A composite clinical narrative surfaced within a therapeutic group context, wherein a member disclosed the death by suicide of a community contact approximately ten days prior. The case involves convergent psychosocial stressors including complicated grief, immigrant identity disruption, unemployment, neurological family caregiving burden, compulsive pornography use, and relational ambivalence—a constellation that exemplifies the multi-axial vulnerability landscape encountered in contemporary clinical populations. A clinical vignette is used to illustrate the clinical substrate for the IS PATH WARM application across an existential-humanistic interpretive framework.

A Humanism Worth Inheriting: Supervision as the Site of Philosophical Renewal

Alfredo F. Palacios, PhD, LPC, & Bekah Richey, BA

Counseling, as a profession, stands at a vital crossroads. Contemporary practice is increasingly shaped by diagnosis, measurable outcomes, brief treatment, behavioral interventions, and expectations for efficiency. Many of these developments represent important advances in clinical practice and accountability. The presenters' concern, however, is what may become less visible when these frameworks become the profession's dominant ways of understanding therapeutic work. Meaning, relationship, subjectivity, freedom, becoming, and the irreducibility of the person

can remain present in counseling language while gradually disappearing from the philosophy underneath it.

This presentation invites psychotherapists to consider: How can supervision keep the humanistic tradition alive while creating space for a new generation of counselors to transform what humanism becomes? Philosophical traditions are not permanent. They emerge in response to earlier traditions, encounter contradictions and changing conditions, and are subsequently revised and transformed into something new entirely. Humanism and existentialism themselves developed through such philosophical resistance and renewal. Their continued place within counseling should therefore not be assumed. Yet preservation cannot mean simply returning to the humanistic thinkers and practices of the mid-twentieth century. A living humanism must respond to contemporary critiques, cultural and systemic realities, new clinical contexts, and the questions posed by emerging generations of counselors.

Supervision may be one of the profession's most important locations for this work. It is where counselors reproduce not simply techniques, but ways of seeing: what we notice, what we wonder about, what we value, what questions we ask, and what we are willing to leave unresolved. Supervisors therefore participate in the transmission of a philosophical orientation toward persons. This presentation reframes preservation as generativity. The task is not to protect humanism from change, but to preserve its philosophical commitments while extending to humanism itself the freedom to become that it has historically extended to the people it seeks to understand.

The Mirror, the Mind, and the Family: How Self-Image Shapes Emotional Regulation, Relationships, and Resilience

Celia North, MA & Jason Dias, PsyD

Self-image has a huge impact on everything we do. It influences more than how individuals see themselves; it can shape how they interpret experiences, regulate emotions, navigate relationships, and so much more. Research on self-esteem and self-concept suggests meaningful associations between self-perception, psychological well-being, and interpersonal functioning (Orth & Robins, 2014).

This presentation will examine how self-image, emotional regulation, and relational patterns interact within individuals and families. Participants will learn how to start the process to "know thyself" better and how to use imagination alongside clinical methods. They will also learn the clinical distinction between self-esteem, self-concept, and self-compassion, and consider how a client's internal narrative may influence boundaries, communication, attachment, and coping. Research suggests that self-compassion is associated with lower psychological distress and that emotion regulation may be one mechanism connecting self-compassion with mental health (Inwood & Ferrari, 2018; Chio et al., 2021). Recent research also suggests an association between self-concept clarity and self-injurious thoughts and behaviors, providing an important clinical consideration without reducing self-image to a single risk factor (Liao et al., 2026). Establishing and building a better self-image and better self-esteem translates to positive relationships in all areas (end goal). The title's three parts organize this content: the mirror refers to self-image and self-concept; the mind refers to emotional regulation and the interpretation of experience; and the family refers to how self-perception and emotional regulation shape relationships and family resilience.

Through didactic presentation, research-informed slides, clinical examples, guided discussion, and experiential self-reflection, participants will identify connections between self-image and

emotional regulation and apply practical and IMAGINATIVE strategies for supporting healthier self-perception, relational functioning, and resilience. Throughout the presentation, participants will connect the mirror (self-image and self-concept), the mind (emotional regulation), and the family (relationships and family resilience).

On Revenge (Asynchronous)

Burcu Tuncel

People's appraisal of a transgression is a strong indicator of the likelihood of taking revenge (Jackson et al., 2019). According to Amir (2022), revenge is one of the four responses to political violence, whereby its meaning is often reduced to the revenge-forgiveness dichotomy. Murzi & Rossi (2020) argue that revenge is a response, ignited by the paradox of truth, to the classical logic of Kripke's (1975) Liar paradox. Whether it comes from psychoanalysis, philosophy, or existential humanistic psychology, revenge is a shared macro-aggression that is more prevalent in some societies than in others. This article aims to look at both the origins of and the responses to this phenomenon and investigate why it is easier to share revenge collectively, but not hope, or desperation, determination, fear, sadness and so on? And how is it to grieve collectively for the impossibility of a dignified life? The article argues that revenge at a societal scale points to non-being. We tend to think of marginalized examples to define "inhuman"; perhaps, in this work, we can hone in on the not-good-enough example and witness how it destroys humanity through silence and inaction. The entry point to this philosophy is Black existentialism, as it is concerned with the liberation of people who are not viewed as human (Vereen et al., 2017). Participants can expect to learn how revenge, at a societal scale, relates to a society's level of maturity, whether rights are givens or earned, the impact of civil rights movements, and a society's creative ability to develop peaceful, non-conventional protests. The phenomenon of revenge will be looked at through a clinical example of a dream where the victim becomes the perpetrator, and two Turkish proverbs which define the culture's prominent emotion in one sentence each, taking Gordon's suggested solution about the institutionalization of humanization (Heter, 2022) further by adapting it to the case of Turkey.

The Power of Connection: Aging, Social Isolation, and Suicide Prevention

Vanessa Harris & Ian Wickramasekera, II

As individuals age, changes in health, mobility, independence, relationships, and social roles can significantly affect psychological well-being and social connection. This presentation examines the intersection of gerontology, social isolation, loneliness, depression, and suicide risk among older adults. The presentation explores how chronic illness and pain, dementia, loss of independence, financial and housing challenges, transportation barriers, and major life transitions can accumulate and contribute to vulnerability. Thomas Joiner's Interpersonal Theory of Suicide provides a framework for understanding how thwarted belongingness, perceived burdensomeness, and acquired capability may contribute to suicide risk. The presentation also considers practical approaches to prevention, including regular check-ins, consistent volunteer relationships, befriending programs, peer and intergenerational support, transportation assistance, community activities, faith-based support, and mental-health screening.

This presentation focuses on suicide prevention in later life, which is more than identifying individual risk factors and responding to mental-health symptoms. Prevention can also involve

creating environments in which older adults experience a sense of belonging, purpose, autonomy, and continued value throughout each stage of life. From a humanistic and existential perspective, meaningful relationships and opportunities to contribute can support a person's sense of identity and purpose during periods of transition and loss. The presentation will highlight the importance of looking beyond what may be lost with aging and recognizing the strengths, experiences, wisdom, and capacity for connection. By viewing older adults within the context of their relationships, communities, and environments, and community members can reduce isolation, strengthen protective factors, and promote meaningful engagement. This broader perspective reinforces the idea that prevention is not only about responding to crisis, but also about encouraging connection and purpose before a crisis.

Restoring the Sacred to the Psyche: A Humanistic-Transpersonal Framework for Embodied Psychological Integration

Saloomeh (Sally) Nazari

Modern psychology can speak fluently about symptoms, cognition, behavior, and diagnosis, yet the sacred, symbolic, and existential dimensions of human experience are still often left outside the clinical room. People describing mystical, contemplative, synchronistic, ancestral, near-death, grief-related, or other spiritually significant experiences may be pathologized too quickly—or spiritually romanticized without adequate assessment, grounding, and integration.

This presentation introduces sacred psychology as a humanistic-transpersonal middle path. “Sacred” does not prescribe religion or doctrine; it refers to experiences of profound meaning, awe, connection, symbolic knowing, conscience, and relationship with something larger than the isolated self. Drawing from person-centered, existential-humanistic, relational, Jungian, and transpersonal, somatic, contemplative, and trauma-informed perspectives, the session presents an integrative movement from threat, through regulation, toward wholeness.

Participants will learn a practical sequence for assessing context, functioning, culture, consent, and risk; establishing enough relational and physiological safety for exploration; supporting symbolic and narrative meaning-making without imposing interpretation; and translating insight into agency, relationship, community, and daily life. A composite case will illustrate the difference among spiritual emergence, contemplative destabilization, dissociative coping, and clinical urgency.

The session will also address practitioner power, spiritual bypass, spiritual erasure, psychosis vulnerability, scope of practice, and referral. A brief experiential reflection will help participants distinguish interpretive certainty from grounded, phenomenological inquiry.

In keeping with RMHCPA's emphasis on community building and healing, the presentation locates healing not solely within the individual, but within relationship, belonging, meaning, and responsible participation in community. Attendees will leave with a clinically useful framework for honoring the sacred dimensions of experience while preserving psychological rigor, humility, and ethical care.

Rethinking Mindfulness: Wellbeing Beyond Stress-Reduction

Ven. Sucandra (Alena Gripass)

Mindfulness has gained significant momentum across wellness programs, healthcare, education, and pop-culture. As mindfulness becomes more mainstream, it is reduced to techniques for stress

reduction, emotional regulation, and individual wellbeing. Long-term outcomes may require more than modern representations allot.

What is lost when a ancient tradition is translated primarily into brief wellness benefits? What are the implications of separating mindfulness from its ethical, philosophical, and cultural foundations? What happens when mindfulness is conflated with compassion, rather than understood as a distinct mode of awareness?

Rethinking Mindfulness: Wellbeing Beyond Stress-Reduction examines these questions through a humanistic East-West psychological perspective. The presentation explores how contemporary psychology has conceptualized mindfulness, where those interpretations align with or depart from traditional understandings, and why those differences matter for research, clinical practice, and human flourishing.

This presentation invites a broader and more critical understanding of what mindfulness can offer. It concludes by considering how we might move beyond symptom reduction toward a more culturally grounded, ethically informed, and psychologically complete account of mindfulness and well-being across individual, relational, and collective dimensions of human experience in contemporary life today.

Rethinking Mindfulness invites you into an intellectual yet engaging and interactive experience.

Rollo May's Use of Encounter: Therapeutic Applications

Louis Hoffman, PhD

Encounter was central to Rollo May's thought. For May (1967, 1983), encounter was a type of meeting between a person and another person, an aspect of themselves, or an aspect of the world around them. To be an encounter, this meeting had qualities of openness, participation, and meaning. Similar to Buber's (1923/1970) I-Thou, the person was open to being changed by and through the encounter. Encounter influenced many of May's other ideas, including beauty, creativity, courage, and love, amongst others.

This presentation begins with an overview of May's concept of encounter. Comparison with similar ideas is used to elucidate May's perspective. Next, it is demonstrated how May's concept of encounter influences several of his other ideas, including beauty, creativity, and courage. For May, encountering another person, an aspect of oneself, or an aspect of the world is critical for the encounter to be genuine and transformative. An interaction, without encounter, remains lacking in its ability to impact the individual.

Finally, the relevance of encounter for psychotherapy is considered. For May, encounter is an essential aspect of psychotherapy. In particular, the encounter between the therapist and client serves as a foundation for therapy. The therapist, however, also works to facilitate a deeper encounter between the client and themselves, others, and the world around them. The encounter serves various purposes, including facilitating deep meaning, authentic living, living consistent with one's values, and facilitating deeper connection in one's relationships.

Storytelling Archetypes for Wisdom: Awareness

Annabelle Nelson, PhD

Hearing stories and telling stories prompt archetypal identification that can open awareness, heal emotional wounds, and help make lives work. The main characters in stories are archetypes, or energy patterns that convey a given characteristic. Archetypal identification opens the collective unconscious to humans' ancient patterns of mapping adversity to create a wise life. Livability, or making one's life work, is a term Thomas Aquinas used to define wisdom, a state that archetypal identification can create. Using the imaginal realm, humans can bring an archetype into everyday events to find clarity. Nelson will tell stories to kick off the presentation. Then, experiential activities and imagery will help participants learn an archetypal imagery technique yielding a story of an archetype transmutating difficult emotions. Data from a study will show the effectiveness of this method. Tips on its use will show participants how to help their clients find the wisdom to transform a test in their life to awareness. The session's storytelling activities will apply Joseph Campbell's hero/heroine cycle, coupled with Jung's theories on archetypes, and the psychological dynamic of imagery. Besides helping participants find an archetype and create a story, Nelson will share data on the effectiveness of the technique showing that the storytelling activities with previous participants prompted feelings of peace and calm and created new perspectives on life's issues. Perspectives ranged from an "aha," to a healing, to an acceptance towards wellness and wisdom. Storytelling is in the imaginal realm, creating liminal spaces, allowing people to be playful and issues to emerge in a safe manner. This application can enhance awareness for people to find inner peace and touch the well of wisdom in the collective unconscious. This has both practical and theoretical implications. Participants will experience the storytelling archetype technique to open awareness and find applications for their practice.

The deep psychological mechanisms associated with myths, stories, and storytelling facilitate the development of not only self-knowledge but also social and communal knowledge (Cajete, 2017, p. 114). Consideration will be given to how this can be applied with clients. Professional skills include leading imagery, using clients' imagination to find an archetype and bringing the archetype into a current present time interpersonal difficulty.

Terror Management Theory, Trauma, and Hope: Existential Lessons from Michael Meyers and the Horror Genre

Jason Dias, PsyD

Hope is more than wishful thinking. It is active, costly, and forged in confrontation with despair. This workshop uses the horror genre—and the Halloween film series in particular—as a ready-to-hand lens for expanding attendees' understanding of hope in both existential and clinical terms. In these films, Michael Myers functions as a shallow metaphor for death: he cannot ultimately be escaped or outrun, but he can be fought. That struggle, and the tragedy it entails, opens a space for considering what hope means when suffering, trauma, and mortality cannot be erased.

The presentation begins with a brief introduction to horror as a genre, including its possible psychological value, before turning to the workshop's central question: how can horror illuminate a deeper, more honest account of hope? Existential themes within horror are then explored alongside Terror Management Theory (TMT), which serves as a conceptual framework for understanding how human beings respond to death awareness, fear, and meaninglessness. Through this dialogue between horror and TMT, attendees will examine the tension between meaninglessness and meaning, and consider how individuals construct, defend, or rediscover meaning in the face of mortality.

The workshop concludes by applying these insights to psychotherapy. Drawing from horror narratives, existential thought, and TMT, the session will explore how clinicians can help clients engage hope not as optimism or denial, but as a courageous stance that faces finitude, trauma, and despair directly. In this way, horror becomes the medium through which a more robust understanding of hope can emerge.

The final portion of the workshop draws from the lessons of horror films and Terror Management Theory and applies them to the process of psychotherapy.

Therapeutic Uses of Meaninglessness

Matt Thelen, PsyD

Existential psychology makes use of meaning to affect therapeutic change. Meaning and its opposite, meaninglessness, is a paradox that is frequently the incipience for investigating what is the purpose of one's existence. Existential philosophers like Heidegger, Camus, and Sartre suggest that meaninglessness is the preemptive condition of existence. Existential psychologists, like Frankl, May, and Yalom describe the primary task of living is to create a meaning that has a protective function. Altogether these approaches make the assumption that meaninglessness should be minimized and meaning should be maximized for a fulfilled existence. This paper challenges the assumption that there isn't a therapeutic use for meaninglessness. That is, to embrace meaninglessness for its contribution to a complete existence rather than tolerate meaninglessness among a culled existentialism. This paper will describe reasons why the concept of meaninglessness is a valid therapeutic intervention that has potential to heal.

The Trouble with Myth: Updating Use of Literature in Therapy

Jason Dias, PsyD

The presentation addresses the challenges of using myth in psychotherapy (Dias & Underwood, 2026). Old analytic methods unduly dictate meaning to the visitor or client, including Rollo May's *The Cry for Myth* (1991). The presentation begins with an overview of several views on myth, including May's. Following this overview, a critique of May's approach to myth is provided. The critique provides a basis for advancing May's ideas in a way that addresses the limitations, including the potential danger of using myth to impose meaning and worldviews upon the client. This presentation proposes new methods for integrating myth into psychotherapy that are more consistent with existential psychology and therapy and phenomenology. The new methods draw, in part, from other humanistic and existential scholars, such as Van Kaam and Rogers, as well as Freudian and other depth psychology approaches to dreamwork. A key advancement considers how empowering clients to write their own myths can be used to deepen their connection with personal meaning while potentially also connecting them with others in new ways. The presentation will include examples of analyzing myths in a more culturally and personally sensitive way. Additionally, the presentation will consider ways to integrate this approach to myth into psychotherapy.

Unmasking Neurodiversity: Awareness and Belonging in Neurodiversity Saves Lives (Asynchronous)

Vanessa Harris

Neurodiversity describes the natural variation in how human brains develop, process information, communicate, regulate emotion, and experience the world. Understanding neurodivergence is increasingly important because neurodivergent clients encounter clinical, educational, occupational, and social environments shaped by neuro-normative expectations. These experiences can contribute to stigma, masking, shame, isolation, and mental health concerns. Research has linked autistic camouflaging with poorer psychological well-being and identified social connection and belonging as important considerations in suicide prevention. This 50 minute presentation is designed to help expand the clinical understanding of neurodiversity and apply a neuro-informed, strengths-based perspective to assessment, treatment, prevention, and referral. Participants will examine neurodivergence, its potential strengths and challenges, neuro-normative bias, masking and its psychological costs, shame and self-criticism, and the importance of belonging. The presentation will emphasize the therapeutic relationship and the importance of creating environments in which clients can experience genuine acceptance and greater freedom to be authentic (Rogers, 1957). The presentation will use a didactic 30 slide presentation clinical examples, and an applied case exercise. Participants will be encouraged to reflect on how clinical assumptions and practices can either reinforce stigma or promote dignity, belonging, authenticity, and psychological growth.

We Have Been Here Before: An Existential Call to Black Hope, Resilience, and Encounter
Nathaniel Granger, Jr., PsyD

African Americans have repeatedly faced historical realities that could reasonably produce despair—enslavement, racial violence, segregation, economic exclusion, educational inequity, and persistent discrimination. Yet the Black experience is not solely a narrative of suffering. It is also a profound story of creativity, community, meaning-making, resistance, faith, resilience, and the remarkable capacity to imagine possibilities beyond present circumstances.

“We Have Been Here Before: An Existential Call to Black Hope, Resilience, and Encounter” examines contemporary experiences of apathy, pessimism, disillusionment, and hopelessness through an existential-humanistic lens. Rather than asking, “What is wrong with us?” this presentation asks a more compassionate and existential question: What happens when people begin to lose their capacity for meaningful encounter?

Drawing upon Rollo May, Martin Buber, Viktor Frankl, Howard Thurman, Martin Luther King Jr., James Baldwin, Black existential thought, and contemporary research on collective resilience, this presentation explores how historical consciousness can become an existential resource. Resilience is not presented as an expectation that Black people should simply endure more suffering, but as evidence that circumstances, however oppressive, do not possess the exclusive authority to determine who we become. Central to this presentation is encounter—with our history, with one another, and with ourselves. Remembering those who came before us becomes more than looking backward; it becomes an invitation to rediscover meaning, agency, responsibility, and the possibility of renewed relationship.

Ultimately, We Have Been Here Before challenges participants to move beyond naïve optimism and immobilizing despair toward existential hope: the courage to face reality as it is while refusing to surrender our participation in what it can become.

Poster Presentations

Community College Students' Experiences and Future Decent Work

Ashley King MS,Ed., Sarah LaJoie MS, Zach Weller MS, Grace Bollinger MS., & Patton Garriott, PhD

Background: Community colleges have historically expanded higher education access for marginalized and low-income communities, providing opportunities for educational and workforce advancement. Examining students' experiences is important for understanding how education and counseling shape preparation for decent work, possibility, agency, and vocational futures.

Objective: This study examined how educational experiences shape community college students' understandings of attaining meaningful, decent work, with attention to how students from historically marginalized backgrounds perceive its attainability.

Methods: This qualitative study employed Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) to explore the lived experiences of eight currently enrolled community college students across the United States. Participants represented diverse racial, socioeconomic, immigration, and college-generation backgrounds. Questionnaires established eligibility and collected demographic information. Semi-structured interviews explored educational experiences and understandings of attaining decent work. A CQR research team reached consensus on domains, core ideas, and cross-analysis, with an auditor reviewing the analysis.

Results: CQR analysis identified eight domains reflecting how experiences shaped participants' understandings of decent work. Academic quality, career preparation, and hands-on learning expanded career knowledge and possibilities, while resource disparities and identity-based barriers constrained opportunities. Counselors, supportive teachers, mentors, and peers fostered belonging, safety, guidance, and persistence. Previous work experiences shaped expectations for future employment. Participants developed expectations about their ability to attain decent work and what decent work should look like.

Conclusion: These findings suggest that community college students develop understandings of decent work through cumulative educational, relational, structural, and work experiences. These experiences shape perceptions of whether decent work is attainable and expectations of what decent work should look like. Findings highlight the importance of counseling relationships that help students recognize their strengths, possibilities, and meaningful educational and vocational futures. This work contributes to counseling and community college research by highlighting how relational and experiential contexts shape perceptions of possibility, agency, and decent work.

Conceptualizing Taiwanese Han Racial Identity Development Through Helms' Model

Wen Yu Lee

Helms' White Racial Identity Development Model provides a framework for understanding how individuals from a racially dominant group develop awareness of race, privilege, and their relationship to racialize social systems. Although the model was developed within the racial context of the United States, its framework raises questions about how racial identity may develop among dominant racial groups in other cultural contexts. In Taiwan, Han Taiwanese constitute the dominant racial and ethnic population, and some aspects of their racial identity development may share similarities with the developmental processes described in Helms' model. This conceptual

poster explores the potential application of Helms' White Racial Identity Development Model to Taiwanese Han racial identity development. It examines possible similarities and differences between the experiences of White individuals in the United States and Han Taiwanese individuals. The poster uses the model as a conceptual starting point for examining how dominant group racial identity may be understood in Taiwan. Attendees will gain an introductory understanding of Helms' racial identity framework, its potential relevance to Taiwanese Han identity development, and important limitations of applying this racial identity model to a Taiwanese context. The poster also aims to encourage further discussion and research toward developing culturally responsive frameworks for understanding Taiwanese Han racial identity development.

“How” to “Why”: Aetiology of Mental Illness Understood through Human Evolution

Journey Clinch

Contemporary psychological practice largely conceptualizes mental illness through diagnostic frameworks such as the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5), alongside therapeutic models including Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), and neurobiological accounts of psychological distress. These approaches can provide valuable proximate explanations of mental illness—describing how symptoms develop and how they may be treated—yet they may provide less insight into the ultimate question of why particular forms of psychological distress exist within the human species. An evolutionary perspective offers a complementary framework for examining this question.

From an evolutionary perspective, emotions such as anxiety, fear, sadness, and other forms of psychological distress may be understood not solely as symptoms to be eliminated, but also as experiences that emerged within environments in which they could serve functional purposes. This perspective does not negate the reality of suffering or the clinical significance of mental illness; rather, it invites consideration of how adaptive processes, environmental mismatch, and the conditions of contemporary life may contribute to psychological distress.

This poster reviews preliminary research concerning the evolutionary aetiology of mental illness and explores the potential role of evolutionary psychoeducation within counseling and psychotherapy. Integrating ultimate explanations with established proximate models may offer clients an additional framework for understanding their experiences, potentially supporting greater self-acceptance, reducing shame surrounding negative emotional states, and fostering a more coherent understanding of human nature. The poster concludes by identifying directions for empirical research examining whether evolutionary explanations of psychological distress can meaningfully influence clients' interpretations and acceptance of their own emotional experiences.

Making Psychotherapeutic Research Accessible on Social Media

Ujwala Sinha, Ben Taft, & Richard Bargdill

This poster reports on methods on how to make psychological or psychotherapeutic research translate to suit a social media audience. Scientific presentations often are delivered in a long form either being 25 minutes or 50 minutes. While this is the standard for the academic community, this is not appropriate for most significant social media platforms which emphasize short one, two, and three minute clips. In this case, such videos were taken and altered to be with the researchers assessing the most profound moments from a particular talk. The researchers viewed the video in their entirety to assess insightfulness and potential level of interest. At least one clip and up to

three clips were chosen from the video, depending on length. If presentations did not have multiple moments of significance as determined by the evaluators then only those profound clips were included. The editing and posting process prioritized ease of digestibility and adapted to fit current social media trends while aiming to keep the academic material at the forefront. Results displayed that shorter clips and trend based videos performed better and yielded more engagement. This suggests that research does not always need to be simplified, worded differently, or made to include less complexity of thought in order to appeal to younger audiences but rather it can be more accessible by restructuring of the format and incremental delivery to work within the bounds of the social media saturated environment.

Messages & Warnings: How Dreams Evolve Over Time

Nicholas Bianchi, Richard Bargdill, Lucy Redich, & Jenna Salah

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 a heuristic study design, 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 20s through their 50s. 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.

Nature as Language: Integrating Ecosystem Imagery, Metaphors, and Storytelling for Emotional Exploration

Arman Azmi

Nature as Language is a proposed therapeutic exercise that utilizes experiential learning. Specifically, clients begin by selecting one image from a range of ecosystem photographs and use nature-based metaphors to express their internal feelings through the biotic and abiotic elements of the chosen ecosystem. In this process, narrative therapy elements may be applied, as clients can use their creativity to tell a story about a character or themselves as they traverse through environments. At the same time, the clinician guides the process by inviting the client to notice what they see, hear, smell, and feel in the imagined environment, to support present-moment awareness. How clients describe ecosystem elements in relation to themselves may provide clinicians with useful insight into the meanings clients assign to those symbols and how those meanings relate to their inner worlds. As clinicians help clients navigate these ecosystems through a beginning, middle, and end, the remainder of the session can include a recap of the imagined journey, during which the clinician inquires about what the guided-imagery experience was like for the client. Further conversation about what certain symbols meant to the client and the use of person-centered reflections can help hold up a metaphorical mirror to the client's inner world and show that the ecosystem they curated through the photograph has enabled them to explore their

emotions. This may be particularly useful for clients who have difficulty confronting emotions and experiences directly. Attendees will gain an understanding of how guided storytelling, nature-based imagery, and person-centered reflections may encourage emotional expression while honoring client autonomy, as each client may freely interpret environmental symbols in relation to their own lived experiences.

Partner Reassurance Following Abandonment Fear in Borderline Personality Disorder: A Dyadic Daily-Diary Study

Zarin Safa

Fear of abandonment is a central interpersonal feature of borderline personality disorder (BPD). In romantic relationships, abandonment fear may prompt reassurance seeking from a partner. Although reassurance may increase feelings of security, little is known about whether its effects persist beyond the immediate interaction. The proposed study will examine whether partner reassurance following abandonment fear predicts subsequent relationship security and reassurance seeking among adults with BPD. Couples in which one partner reports a BPD diagnosis from a licensed mental health professional will complete baseline measures followed by one daily survey for 14 days. The participant with BPD will report abandonment fear, reassurance seeking, and felt relationship security; the romantic partner will independently report reassurance provided. Multilevel models will test within-person associations across days. The study will clarify whether partner reassurance is associated with increased relationship security and whether it predicts changes in subsequent reassurance seeking.

"To Myself, the One I Yearn": Youth Identity Formation Through Spoken Word Poetry

Rebekah Richey

Adolescence is notable as a time for identity exploration. As youth near their transition to adulthood, they are faced with countless decisions concerning the rest of their lives. Teenagers must endeavor to address their own sense of identity, meaning, and responsibility. This struggle to discover their identity and purpose in life may often result in a crisis of identity. Understanding how to engage in identity formation with youth in psychotherapy is key. It then becomes a crucial mission to diminish the damaging effects of a potential identity crisis on the adolescent clients we counsel. This poster examines the use of spoken word poetry to foster identity exploration and formation in youth from an existential-humanistic counseling lens. Spoken word poetry as a genre of poetry is designed to be performed as a way to share experiences, and it is embedded with a history of speaking out against politics and injustice in our society. Youth can utilize the genre of spoken word poetry to examine their lived experiences and perspectives as they write poems individually or in collaboration with others. After they've prepared their poems, the act of performing them can provide an additional avenue by which to investigate meaning, purpose, identity, and authenticity. By employing writing, reading or listening to spoken word poetry as an instrument in our counseling sessions, we can connect to our clients developing identity process.

Women and Eco-Martyrdom: The Struggle of Environmental Justice and Community Resistance

Bella Quilon, Elise Cridland, Catherine Morales, & Richard Bargdill

Over the course of history, women have been deemed silent and timid, with their sacrifices overlooked by their male counterparts in times of strife. This underrepresentation persists in the annual list published by the Global Witness Project, in which men constitute the majority. The contributions of the men recognized on the Global Witness list remain significant, the gap between men and women on the list highlights its underrepresentation of women. The primary focus was to recognize the women who embody the qualities of an Eco-Martyr, defined as an environmental activist who was killed while defending the environment. Five characteristics are associated with traits of an eco-martyr: altruistic self-sacrifice, depersonalization of goals, an ecological self-view, identity fusion within a group, and self-actualizing tendencies (Bargdill et al, 2022). For this poster, we will cover three women who best represent all these characteristics by examining their accomplishments and impact in their communities. Each woman initiated and participated in environmental activism to make change despite knowing the risk it may have on her life. In their activism, they have transcended gender barriers through perseverance, resilience, and taking leadership. These women's contributions deserve to be shared and acknowledged, creating greater awareness of environmental atrocities taking place around the world.

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- Coming Soon: The Rocky Mountain Humanistic Archives & Library

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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 have 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.

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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.

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