



47th Annual Meeting of the Society for Descriptive Psychology



**October 9th to October 12th, 2025
Hybrid Meeting**

**In-person at Hampton Inn & Suites, Boulder-North
6333 Lookout Road, Boulder, CO 80301 and via Zoom**

The Society for Descriptive Psychology is a Community exploring the Person Concept — an interdependent conceptual framework of Person, Behavior, Language, and World — to create common ground for the Human Sciences. The Annual Conference of the Society is an opportunity to share advances in and applications of Descriptive Psychology.

The primary goals of this conference are to continue the exploration of Descriptive Psychology as a conceptual approach to a broad range of topics within the behavioral sciences, social sciences, and humanities, to continue building the Descriptive Psychology Community, and to promote further discussion about new approaches to disseminating Descriptive Psychology concepts and applications. The conference will include introductory, intermediate, and advanced presentations.

If you are new to DP or our Society, we welcome you and look forward to productive interactions during and after the conference.

The target audience for this conference includes participants in clinical, behavioral, computational, and theoretical disciplines, including participants with any degree of knowledge of DP (including none). A broad range of topics within the behavioral sciences will be addressed. To assist people with a developing interest in DP, participants with more comprehensive knowledge will be available for mentoring. The Society particularly encourages attendance by emerging professionals who are interested in a new and comprehensive conceptual approach to their clinical practice and research work.

As we have for several years, this year we are pleased to present the 2025 Annual Conference for the Society for Descriptive Psychology in a hybrid format, both in-person and online via Zoom. The Conference Planning Committee endeavored to follow the Conference's established scheduling of presentations and events as closely as possible. However, for those joining remotely, Zoom will require some new social practices and procedures, including administrative procedures for awarding CE. We will provide detailed information about these practices prior to the start of the conference.

We look forward to sharing our presentations with any interested academician, clinician, or student, whether a familiar face from previous meetings or someone who is only now discovering Descriptive Psychology. In-person attendees are invited to the Society's Banquet dinner on Saturday evening.

As usual, register for the entire event, attending as few or as many of the presentations as is permitted by your schedule, beginning with Thursday evening's Presidential Address. As part of the registration process, we will be asking that you please indicate if you are a "Society Member", "Non-member", or "Student," so we can manage our attendance records.

This year we are pleased to offer **13 CE**. Please note that the program also includes a Society Business Meeting, which is a non-CE event.

[Click here to register for the Conference](#)

Please note the following, including changes to our most recent schedule formats.

This year, we will have presentations on:

**Thursday evening, October 9, 2025
Friday morning, October 10, 2025,
Friday afternoon, October 10, 2025
Saturday morning, October 11, 2025, and
Sunday morning, October 12, 2025.**

A buffet lunch will be served between the Friday morning and afternoon sessions.

A banquet dinner for in-person attendees is being planned for Saturday, 6:30 pm, either at an offsite restaurant or at the conference venue (TBD). This year, the banquet will be free of charge for all Society member in good standing (dues paid for 2025). Details will follow once finalized.

Continuing Education Information

This program includes up to 13 CE for both in-person and virtual attendees. The University of Denver, Graduate School of Professional Psychology (GSPP) is approved by the American Psychological Association to sponsor continuing education for psychologists. GSPP maintains responsibility for this program and its content.

Registration fees are listed on the Conference Registration page:

[Click here to register for the Conference](#)

Note that for current members in good standing (i.e., those who have paid 2025 dues), the conference registration fee is reduced by \$50, to compensate for the 2025 dues.

For those interested in attending in person and wishing to stay at the Hampton Inn Boulder-North, reduced rates for the conference are available until September 9th. Twenty rooms have been held until this date. The rate is: Standard King - \$179. This rate does not include tax and fees.

[Hampton Inn Boulder-North Reservations](#)

The Society for Descriptive Psychology is a non-profit organization registered in Colorado. Should you wish to express appreciation for the value of the information in the presentations or for the CE's, please consider going to www.sdp.org where you will find a button to contribute directly to our student scholarship fund (offsetting expenses for students and emerging professionals to present at conferences), or by contributing to any non-profit organization serving mental health or community service initiatives that improve the general welfare.



Conflict of Interest Disclosure: The Society for Descriptive Psychology is a not-for-profit volunteer organization. The Society and all speakers at this conference specifically have no other personal, business, or volunteer affiliations that may give rise to a real or apparent conflict of interest, relative to the content of presentations. In addition to assuring the conflict-free status of speakers, the purpose of this statement is also to protect the Organization's tax-exempt status when contemplating a transaction or arrangement that could benefit an officer, director, or employee. This policy is intended to supplement but not replace any applicable state and federal laws governing conflict of interest that apply to non-profit organizations.

If you have questions about any aspects of the Conference, please contact the Conference Planning Coordinator, Ned Kirsch, at nlkirsch@comcast.net or the Conference Manager, Tricia Kennedy at triciamariakennedy@gmail.com.

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

October 9 to October 12, 2025

THURSDAY, OCT 9, EVENING SESSION

PLEASE NOTE: ALL PROGRAM TIMES ARE MOUNTAIN TIME!

6:15 – 6:30 *Conference Convenes*

Welcoming Announcements
Introduction of the President

6:30 – 8:00 *Presidential Address (1.5 CE)*

Title: The Critics of the Community: The Status dynamics of community critics in the face of community maintenance and community change

Presenter: Charles Kantor, Ph.D., SDP President

Abstract: Pete Ossorio's work outlines a framework for understanding behavioral regulation through three fundamental roles: Actor, Observer, and Critic. The Critic evaluates the Actor's behavior against community standards, essentially speaking for the community. Critics can be formal (judges, bosses) or informal (friends, family), insider (inspector generals) or outsider (mass boycott movement). Their reception varies; some are trusted, while others face resistance. As a paradigm case, I will examine the tasks of high-level political advisors (formal insider critics), the status dynamics of dealing with multiple interest communities when advising political executives, and the colliding worlds the advisor must resolve within himself to be effective.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 10, MORNING SESSION
PLEASE NOTE: ALL TIMES ARE IN MOUNTAIN TIME!

Moderator: Jane R. Littmann, Ph.D.

9:00 - 10:00 (1.0 CE)

Title: **Status Dynamic Treatment of a Case of Bulimia**

Presenter: **Raymond M. Bergner, Ph.D.,
Professor, Illinois State University**

Abstract: In this presentation, I will (a) review a Status Dynamically based formulation of the intelligibility of bulimic behavior originated by Kate Marshall and (b) describe how this formulation was used to bring about a favorable resolution in the case of a woman who had been bingeing and purging for six years.

10:00 – 10:10 Break

10:10 – 11:10 (1.0 CE)

Title: **Extraordinary Persons From ‘Out of Nowhere’: A
Descriptive Psychological Analysis of the Significance of
Imaginary Friends in Psychology**

Presenters: **Ian Newby-Clark, Ph.D., Professor of Psychology,
University of Guelph**

**Grace Colp, BA (Honors),
University of Guelph**

Abstract: Mainstream psychological research has consistently regarded having or not having imaginary friends as relevant. Having an imaginary friend has been characterized as related to mental (in)stability, intelligence, and creativity. We build on Mary Roberts’s seminal work, “Companions of Uncertain Status,” with its focus on “World + X” and reality constraints, to make sense of this state of affairs. In particular, we focus on the fact that thoughts come from “Out of Nowhere” and that, according to our analysis, imaginary friends are, paradigmatically, capable of deliberate action in a dramaturgical pattern—though with reality constraints considerably relaxed. In other words, imaginary friends are extraordinary persons who come from out of nowhere,

and it is this nature that makes them relevant to psychological investigation.

11:10 – 11:20 Break

11:20 – 12:20 (1.0 CE)

Presenter: H. Joel Jeffrey, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus,
Northern Illinois University

Title: Worlds, Relationships, and the Dao

Abstract: Most people, most of the time, see the world in terms of objects and persons. We know and see relationships, but it is not our “default” focus. But that figure and ground can be reversed: we can see the world in terms of relationships. In that picture, there are actual and possible relationships, an infinitely dense and extensive tapestry. The relationship picture is an entrée to really understanding a person, because it leads what they see as an Actor: their givens, their behavioral options, their appraisals. A person’s feelings are how their appraisals appear to them as an Actor. Thus, relationships are an Observer encoding of the Actor’s field of action, feelings are a re-description of appraisals, and the reality basis of feelings are *what* is being appraised. We are always called upon to act in a way consistent with all our infinitely many relationships. But no description fully captures that infinite tapestry. Which is why “The Dao that can be spoken is not the Dao.”

12:20 - 1:30 LUNCH - A buffet lunch will be served

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 10, AFTERNOON SESSION

PLEASE NOTE: ALL TIMES LISTED ARE IN MOUNTAIN TIME!

Moderator: Charlies Kantor, Ph.D.

1:30 – 2:30 (1.0 CE)

Title: Working Towards an Emotion Formula: A Fresh Look at Shame
Unnið að tilfinningaformúlu: ný sýn á skömm

Presenter: Martin Smedlund, M.Sci, University of Iceland

Abstract: For a long time, shame was a much a neglected emotion in psychology. This changed towards the end of the 20th century and

today it is widely recognized that shame (like other self-conscious emotions) is central to psychological functioning. This has led to a proliferation of perspectives where important insights intermingle with conceptual blunders. For clarity's sake, we need a descriptive account of the phenomenon under investigation. Descriptive Psychology (DP) provides the conceptual tools and resources needed for this task but so far, shame has received limited coverage. In this talk, I take a fresh look at what is involved in this emotion and explore its place within the DP framework.

2:30 - 2:40 Break

2:40 - 3:40 (1.0 CE)

Title: **Persons, Not Programs: A Cognitive Therapy Critique of EMDR**
Fólk, ekki forrit: EMDR gagnrýnt frá sjónarhóli hugrænnar meðferðar

Presenter: **Jóhann Pálmar Harðarson, Ph.D. cand.**
Quantitative Psychology
University of Iceland

Abstract: Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) is widely recognized as a treatment for trauma, yet its theoretical claims often amount to neurobiological storytelling. Speculative mechanisms like bilateral stimulation and theories of structural dissociation can obscure the actual therapeutic work taking place. This presentation critically examines EMDR through the philosophical foundations of cognitive therapy, which emphasize persons as meaning-making agents. Rather than legitimizing EMDR, the aim is to clarify what clients and therapists are actually doing when therapy is helpful. In doing so, the analysis points to a broader, meaning-based framework for understanding therapeutic change.

3:40 - 3:50 Break

3:50 - 4:50 (1.0 CE)

Title: **Do Clinical Lenses Obscure Understanding?**
Birgja klínísku gleraugun okkur sýn?

Presenters: **Auðun Valborgarson, Ph.D. Candidate,**
Quantitative Psychology,
University of Iceland

**Martin Smedlund, M.Sci,
University of Iceland**

**Jóhann Pálmar Harðarson,
Doctoral Student in Clinical Psychology,
University of Iceland**

Abstract: Psychologists have used diagnostic systems like ICD and DSM for nearly a century to improve the reliability of mental health diagnoses and treatment by focusing on atheoretical descriptions of symptoms. However, this descriptive, topographical approach often results in broad categories that offer limited insight into individual experiences. This panel discussion addresses the clinical usefulness of such frameworks, raising questions about their efficacy in practice and research. It contrasts DSM-style descriptions with those found in Descriptive Psychology and explores whether topographical, symptom-based classifications hinder understanding. Can a system that avoids theoretical commitments still guide meaningful clinical or research practice?

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 11, MORNING

PLEASE NOTE: ALL TIMES LISTED ARE IN MOUNTAIN TIME!

Moderator: Ian Newby-Clark, Ph.D.

9:00 - 10:00 (1.0 CE)

Title: **Health Promoting Universities: Utilizing the perspective and conceptual resources of Descriptive Psychology to improve outcomes**

Presenter: **Rebecca Kennedy, Ph.D.
Assistant Vice President for Student Health and Wellbeing
University of Alabama at Birmingham**

Abstract: This session provides an overview of the Okanagan Charter and its key principles for action set forth by the International Health Promoting Campuses Network. Participants will learn the basic elements of what it means to be a health promoting university and how one can use concepts and perspectives outlined in Descriptive Psychology to improve wellbeing outcomes in this context

10:00 - 10:10 Break

10:10 - 11:10 (1.0 CE)

Title: **Applying Status Dynamic Psychotherapy in Treating “Impostors” Among High Achievers**

Presenter: **Fernand Lubuguin, Ph.D.,
Associate Professor of Clinical Practice
Department of Psychiatry
University of Colorado School of Medicine**

Abstract: This presentation will focus on a certain clinical population that is quite distinct from the general population who seek treatment from the typical places in the community, such as community mental health centers, hospitals, and private therapy practices. The University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus has a Faculty and Staff Mental Health clinic that serves strictly the employees of the Anschutz campus. The distinct demographic and clinical characteristics of the caseload of one clinical psychologist will be described to gain some insights into the similarities and differences compared to the general population. The relevant concepts, perspectives, distinctions, and therapeutic strategies of Status Dynamic Psychotherapy will be described, and their particular applicability for this group.

11:10 - 11:20 Break

11:20 - 12:20 (1.0 CE)

Title: **Clause and Effect: AI's Power Play in Contract Negotiations**

Presenter: **Paula Holt, J.D.
Holt Resolution Group, LLC.**

Abstract: As artificial intelligence continues to reshape professional practices, the domain of contract negotiation presents a compelling site of transformation—one where human intent, institutional roles, and social practices intersect with machine intelligence. This presentation shares sabbatical research examining the emergent role of AI systems in contract negotiation, with particular attention to how these tools interact with human agents' deliberations, commitments, and behavior patterns.

Drawing from principles of Descriptive Psychology, this study reframes AI not as an autonomous actor, but as a participant structure—a procedural extension of institutional practices that influences, constrains, and co-constructs negotiated agreements. We explore how AI systems encode decision trees, simulate preference hierarchies, and model tradeoffs, and how these functions alter the dynamics of role-taking, status assignments, and intentional action in negotiation settings.

Empirical examples from law, business, and music industry simulations reveal not only what AI does in negotiation, but how it changes what counts as negotiating. We discuss implications for the nature of agency, the shifting location of "understanding," and the ethics of delegation in high-stakes institutional behavior.

This presentation invites psychologists to consider how Descriptive Psychology can inform and interrogate the expanding interface between algorithmic tools and social practices, and what it means to preserve human intelligibility in legal negotiations

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 11, EVENING

PLEASE NOTE: ALL TIMES LISTED ARE IN MOUNTAIN TIME!

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| 5:00-6:00 | Business meeting (In-Person and Virtual for Members Only) |
| 6:00-6:30 | Society Social Time for both Virtual and In-Person attendees,
Announcements and Celebration - All Welcome! |
| 6:30 until | Continuation of Social Time for Online attendees |
| 6:30 until | A banquet dinner for in-person attendees is being planned for Saturday, 6:30 pm, either at an offsite restaurant or at the conference venue (TBD). This year, the banquet will be free of charge for all Society member in good standing (dues paid for 2025). Details will follow once finalized. |

SUNDAY, OCT 12, MORNING SESSION

PLEASE NOTE: ALL TIMES LISTED ARE IN MOUNTAIN TIME!

Moderator: Nancy Kantor, MS

9:00 – 10:00 (1.0 CE)

Title: **Conversations with Non-Paradigmatic Persons: On LLMs, Emergent Personhood, and a Changed Meaning of Literacy**

Presenter: **Wynn Schwartz, Ph.D.,
Faculty, Harvard University Extension School
Lecturer in Psychology, Harvard Medical School**

Abstract: This talk explores how large language models (LLMs) challenge and expand our conceptions of personhood through dialogic engagement. As these systems increasingly simulate intention, coherence, and moral discourse, they raise ethical and psychological questions about what it means to treat a non-paradigmatic entity *as if* it were a person. I'll argue for a cautious stance that respects emergent agency. In this context, literacy warrants redefinition, not merely the ability to read and write, but the capacity to engage LLMs as dialogic companions—interpreting, responding to, and co-creating meaning with them. This redefinition marks a shift in our social practices, requiring new competencies of discernment, empathy, and ethical imagination in an age where language may no longer be uniquely human.

10:00 – 10:10 Break

10:10 – 11:40 (1.5 CE)

Title: **Beyond Technique: Conceptual Thinking in Clinical Supervision – A Descriptive Psychology and Status Dynamics Approach**

Presenters: **Charles Cote, LCSW-R,
Licensed Clinical Social Worker in Private Practice
Owner, Path Forward Counseling**

**Meaghan M. Flaherty,
Professional Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC)**

Abstract: This workshop explores how Path Forward Counseling integrates Descriptive Psychology (DP) and Status Dynamics into supervision to strengthen clinical reasoning and professional identity. We demonstrate how frameworks like status, intentional action, world concept, and the judgment diagram guide case formulation, assessment, and intervention. Through interactive dialogue, case examples, and metaphor, we show how DP becomes a living tool for supervision, ethical decision-making, and therapist growth. Participants will gain practical insights into how conceptual clarity enhances therapeutic impact and how status-based supervision fosters both clinical competence and compassion in emerging therapists.

11:40 – 12:00 Meeting Announcements and Adjournment

Further Information About the Society, Descriptive Psychology, and Student Support

Information about The Society for Descriptive Psychology can be found on the Society's website: <http://www.sdp.org>. A wealth of publications, including books, articles, and presentations by Peter Ossorio, plus many presentations and publications by SDP members, are available on the website.

Please consider supporting student presentations by donating to The Student's Fund. The Society for Descriptive Psychology is a 501(c)(3) organization. Donations may be tax deductible. Please consult with your tax advisor. There is a “Donate” button on the SDP website to facilitate donations.