

# SOUTHWESTERNpsychologist

**SWPA Newsletter**

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## Message From the President

By

Jonali Baruah, Ph.D.

Professor

Tarleton State University

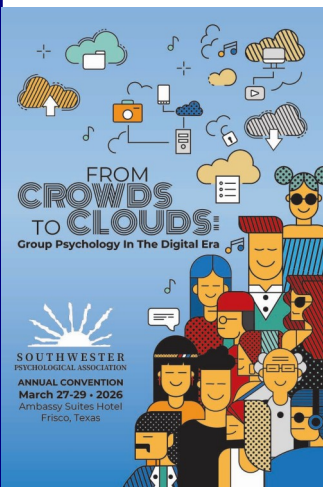
Hello everyone,

I hope you are all enjoying a wonderful summer. It is an honor to serve as your President for the 2025–2026 term and to represent our vibrant Southwestern psychology community. I am excited to invite you to the 71st SWPA Convention, to be held in Frisco, Texas, on March 27–29, 2026.

This year's theme, "From Crowds to Clouds: Group Psychology in the Digital Era," addresses one of the most pressing challenges of our time. As digital transformation reshapes how we connect, communicate, and collaborate, we find ourselves at a critical moment where online platforms, virtual interactions, and artificial intelligence are fundamentally altering human behavior, cognition and social structures. The research and insights we share at SWPA will help inform the policies, educational approaches, clinical practices, and industry standards that touch millions of lives.

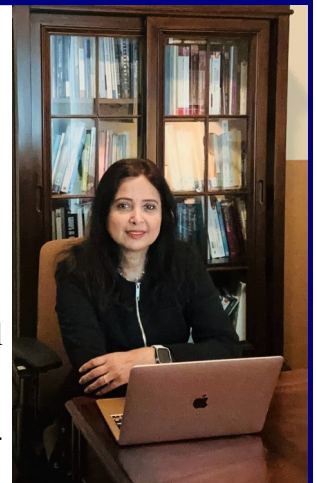
Our program showcases leading scholars whose groundbreaking work defines the forefront of our field. Shinobu Kitayama, the Robert B. Zajonc Collegiate Professor of Psychology from the University of Michigan is a luminary in cross-cultural psychology. His research reveals how self-construal shapes social behavior across different cultural contexts. Paul Paulus from UT Arlington is internationally recognized for his research on collaborative creativity, exploring how teams generate innovative solutions and navigate complex problems. He will discuss AI's potential benefits and challenges in collaborative innovation. Mahzarin Banaji, Richard Clarke Cabot Professor of Social Ethics, from Harvard University has revolutionized our understanding of implicit social cognition, uncovering the unconscious mechanisms that drive bias while developing evidence-based interventions to combat prejudice. Verlin Hinsz from North Dakota State University has advanced our knowledge of collective cognition through rigorous experimental work examining how groups think, feel, and make decisions. These distinguished speakers will challenge our current thinking and open new avenues for investigation.

SWPA's greatest asset is our diverse membership. From undergraduate students beginning their research careers to established scholars refining theoretical frameworks, from practitioners implementing evidence-based interventions to educators mentoring future psychologists. This breadth of experience and perspective strengthens our discipline and extends our impact beyond academia. I invite you all to join us at this convention to continue building on this collective strength.



I encourage you to participate in the convention activities that interest you most: student competitions, continuing education workshops, poster and oral presentations, symposiums, networking opportunities, and our exhibition hall featuring the latest psychological tools, services, and programs. We will be sharing the call for abstracts and detailed meeting information soon, so please start preparing your presentations to share with our community.

Thank you for entrusting me with this leadership role. I eagerly look forward to seeing you all in Frisco, TX this spring.



## Collaboration Is Great, but What About Working Alone?

By

**Tyler N. Livingston, Ph.D.**

**Assistant Professor & SWPA Professional Representative**

**Angelo State University**

Mr. Incredible of the movie *The Incredibles* declared confidently to his aspiring sidekick, “Fly home, Buddy: I work alone.” A tendency toward solitude is uncommon among superheroes and researchers alike. I can’t speak for superheroes, but perhaps researchers should keep an open mind to working alone.

The advantages of independent work and sole authorship are rarely acknowledged. The culture of academic research tends to emphasize the benefits of collaboration instead. There are good reasons to collaborate, including complementary skillsets among coauthors, the potential to learn from others, a divided workload, accountability on deadlines, and a broader professional network that can facilitate future projects. Consistent collaboration in our academic efforts, especially with a rotation of familiar coauthors, can demonstrate to our institutions and granting agencies that we are responsible and work well with others.

After all, our coauthors likely would stop collaborating with us after a single project if we did not maintain professional standards. Notwithstanding the merits of collaboration, it is worth exploring a few reasons why researchers should consider independence and sole authorship: that is, working on a project from idea generation to publication all on one’s own.

Sole authorship provides ultimate intellectual freedom. Someone once told me that a Ph.D. is “your license to do research.” Once you have one, you no longer need approval from a mentor or postdoc advisor, or a coauthor for that matter. How exciting is it to pursue a research idea in exactly the way you imagined it? Working independently means formulating the research question purely of one’s own invention and designing the study to deliver on that vision. Exercising one’s intellectual freedom can be professionally inspiring and personally fulfilling.

Conceiving of and conducting research is only half of the game; the behind-the-scenes prep work that only matters if the findings see the light of day. Dissemination is the goal, and another opportunity for an independent researcher to thrive. Once the results are in, the sole author is empowered to articulate the findings in his or her own voice without compromise: Make theoretical and practical applications to your heart’s content, leave out the ideas that you think undersell or overstate the study’s importance, and organize the paper so that it is the clearest expression of what you had in mind going into the project. The sole author can choose the publication outlet without back-and-forth discussions about impact factors, the type of readership (e.g., academics vs. practitioners), and who-had-what experiences with various members of the editorial board. Working alone enables us to disseminate the project in its purest form from the ideas, to their expression, to the publication outlet. There are few professional experiences more exciting than publishing a manuscript exactly as you intended.



Sole authors can move projects along quickly. Teams of research collaborators may bring novel perspectives and ideas to the discussion, but they also bring time delays. Academics' schedules are busy, variable, and they rarely synchronize. The odds that our coauthors are ready to review a draft the day we send it are low, and vice-versa. Independent researchers can move at lightning speed, reading reviewer comments, addressing them in a revision, and returning them to the editor in the same day if they choose: No one to wait on, no tracked changes to accept or decline, and no differences of opinion to discuss over a Zoom meeting. Time efficiency is valuable when we want to move our research program along while also attending to teaching and service opportunities.

The sole author develops mastery of all aspects of the research process. When we collaborate with others, we tend to yield to their perceived strengths and thus fail to develop our proficiency in those domains. For instance, I dislike writing literature reviews. This tendency might lead me to seek a coauthor who excels in this area so that I can focus my efforts on the parts of the paper that I enjoy. Complementarity is a benefit of collaboration, but it entails the risk that we will allow our skills in weaker areas to atrophy. Working alone means we must learn to love writing literature reviews, or designing conceptual models to test with appropriate statistics, or submitting IRB amendments. Strengthening our research skills across the board by conducting the entire study alone may help sole authors to become more well-rounded and thus serve as better peer reviewers, better mentors, and better teachers.

There are many virtues of collaboration, but independent work has its upsides as well that are less widely acknowledged. Recognizing those upsides does not preclude us from ever collaborating again. Instead, perhaps normalizing sole authorship will inspire a researcher to conduct that dream study no one else has time to prioritize, or it will challenge a junior faculty member to demonstrate autonomy to peers, tenure committees, and oneself. Pursuing independence on one or two papers might even elevate our skillset so we can serve as better coauthors on other projects.

I am not encouraging everyone to categorically reject prospective collaborators as did Mr. Incredible. Rather, the next time you have an interesting research idea, perhaps consider adopting his mantra of "I work alone" in its most positive and constructive sense. You may discover something new about the process and about yourself.



## **Bridging the Gap: Easing the Transition to Conferences for International and First-Time Graduate Students**

**By**

**Sophia Salamanca - SWPA Graduate Representative  
Texas A&M University-San Antonio**

Academic conferences are an important part of graduate training, and for many students, presenting their research marks a big milestone in their academic journey. Conferences are not just about sharing your work; they're also a chance to learn from others, connect with fellow students and faculty from different universities, and spark ideas that might turn into future collaborations. But for students attending for the first time, especially at a large conference, the experience can feel overwhelming, unfamiliar, or even a little scary. This is especially true for international students, who are also adjusting to new academic systems, cultural norms, and ways of communicating.



Without clear guidance, it can be hard to know what's expected in a conference setting. Writing and submitting an abstract or attending sessions might feel manageable when you have the support of professors or classmates. But presenting in front of scholars from other institutions can feel intimidating. A lot of students can also feel unsure about how to build their schedule, how to start a conversation professionally, or even when to ask a question. For international students, these challenges can be even more intense. As Hyden and Coryell (2023) point out, when cultural norms feel unfamiliar, students can experience academic anxiety or feel isolated, especially in interactive environments like conferences.

One of the most valuable parts of attending a conference is networking, but it can also be one of the hardest. A lot of students, especially first-timers, don't always feel confident introducing themselves or talking about their research, especially to faculty or professionals who've been in the field for a long time. It can feel even more stressful when you're still figuring out your place in the field. For international students, the experience can feel even more uncomfortable, especially if they come from academic cultures where formality is the norm, which can make the fast-paced networking style in the U.S. feel awkward or unclear. Without guidance, it's easy to overthink everything, which can make it harder to speak up or connect with others. But when a conference creates space for connection and inclusion, the entire experience shifts, something I experienced firsthand at SWPA.

As an international graduate student attending SWPA for the first time, I was genuinely moved by how welcoming and supportive the environment was. From the international student meet-up to the inclusive programming and friendly atmosphere, it was clear that SWPA values creating space for everyone. There was a strong sense of community with faculty, advanced grad students, and peers who were all approachable and willing to offer advice, answer questions, and share their experiences. That kind of support makes a real difference, especially for those navigating a conference in a new country.

Creating a more inclusive and welcoming conference experience just takes small, intentional steps to meet students where they are. When students feel supported, prepared, and included, they're more likely to show up, participate, and really make the most of the experience. And sometimes, that one positive conference, like attending SWPA, is exactly what a student needs to gain confidence, explore opportunities, or figure out what's next in their journey.

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## Unpacking the Burnout-Depression Overlap in College Life

By

Hannah Young - **SWPA Undergraduate Representative**  
**Lyon College**

Undergraduate students often pursue their education during a transformative time of growing into adulthood following their teenage years. This period comes with unprecedented struggles, including shifts in career interests, evolving relationships, and increased personal responsibility. Recently, conversations surrounding young adults' mental health have emerged, especially as studies have found connections between academic and life pressures to the decline of this population's overall mental wellbeing, particularly in depressive symptoms (Barbayannis et al., 2022).

According to the Healthy Minds Study, during the 2023–2024 academic year, 38% of student participants reported symptoms of depression ranging from moderate to severe. In another study, over 22,000 students were surveyed regarding three common indicators of burnout: emotional exhaustion, reduced feelings of personal achievement, and cynicism (Liu et al., 2023; Pisarik, 2009). Over half of the participants reported experiencing some level of burnout in their time in education. (Liu et al., 2023). These studies and surveys show that a considerable number of undergraduate students struggle with their mental health.



The studies mentioned above focused specifically on depression and burnout. Burnout, often described as a feeling of emotional and physical exhaustion due to overwork or lack of stimulation, can lead to low motivation, depleted energy, and a sense of detachment. While burnout and depression share some overlapping symptoms, they are considered distinct in how they impact individuals (Institute for Quality and Efficiency in Health Care, 2006). Burnout is generally seen as related to career or academic stress, while depression tends to affect overall quality of life. Contrary to this, one study aims to connect burnout with depression, stating that burnout is likely a type of depression or even a precursor to a diagnosis of depression (Schonfeld & Bianchi, 2016).

In ongoing conversations about burnout and depression, there is a theorized phenomenon known as the burnout-depression overlap. In a recent literature review of 92 articles regarding this theory, there was little to no evidence to distinguish burnout as its stand-alone condition from depression (Bianchi et al., 2015). The review concluded that burnout can be viewed better as a form of mild depression (Bianchi et al., 2015). Regardless of this conclusion, a call for further research into the clinical application was encouraged from these articles to find practical evidence and possible prevention and treatment for burnout (Bianchi et al., 2015).

It's important to note that this article is not meant to minimize the seriousness of either depression or burnout. Rather, it aims to explore their similarities and bring attention to how both can significantly impact college students. While this article does not directly address the COVID-19 pandemic, it's worth mentioning that many of the sources cited point to the pandemic as a contributing factor in the mental health struggles of today's students.

Given the traits commonly associated with burnout, potential interventions should focus on managing overwhelming or underwhelming workloads and supporting students' sense of progress and achievement. Educating campus adults on the signs of burnout is a first step. A strong support system can provide students with access to therapy, academic advising, and experienced guidance. Many students have reported that therapy was helpful in navigating both personal and academic struggles (Barbayannis et al., 2022). Peer and self-awareness are also essential; when students learn to recognize their own limitations and capabilities, they're better equipped to manage stress and support one another.

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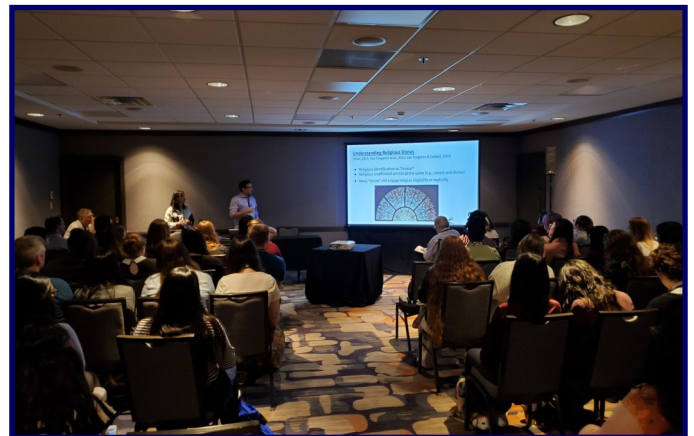


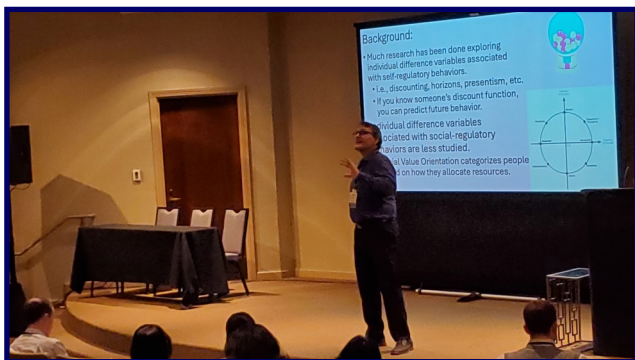
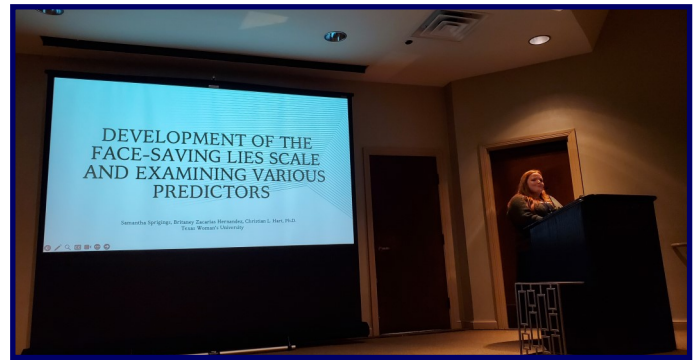
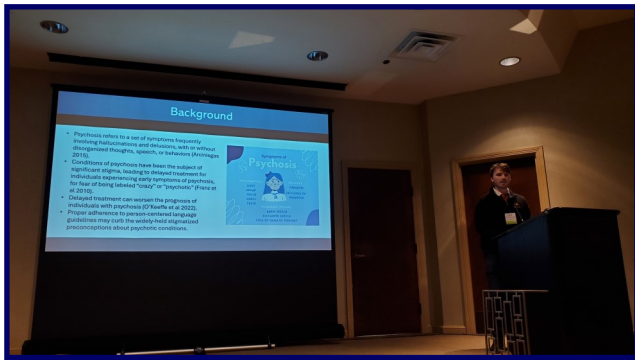
# SWPA 2025 Highlights!

We had a great time in Little Rock in 2025!!

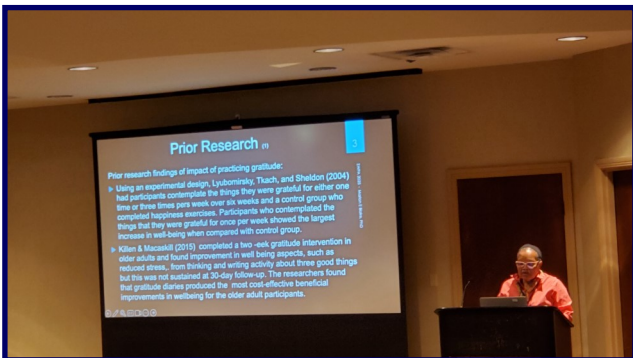
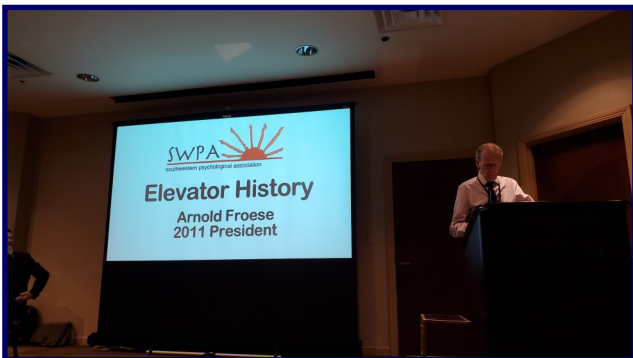


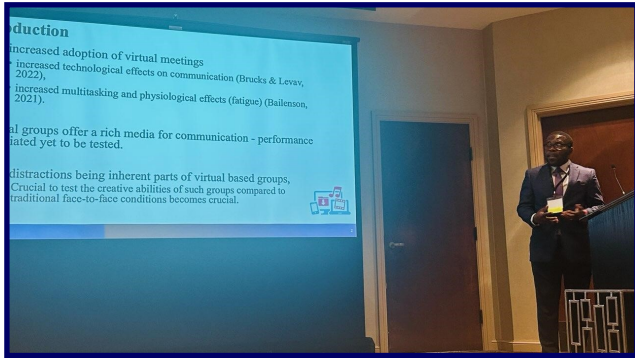
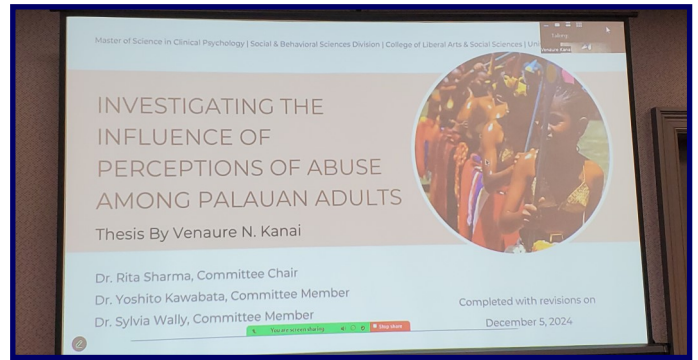
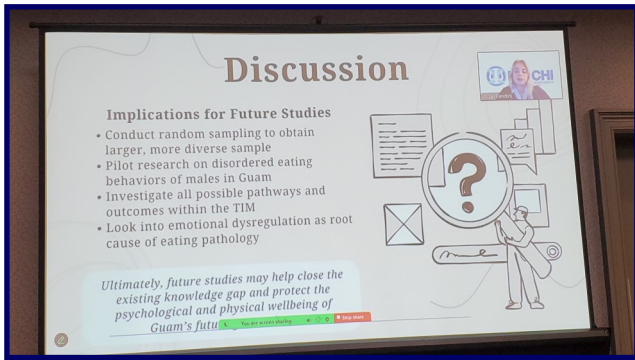
We had some great presentations...





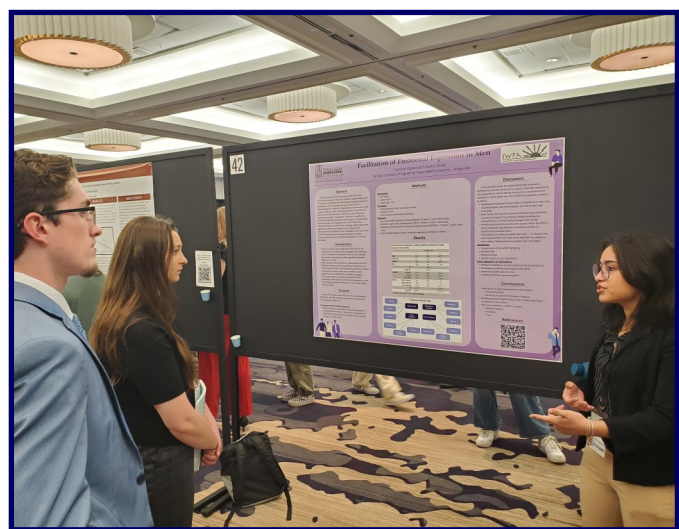
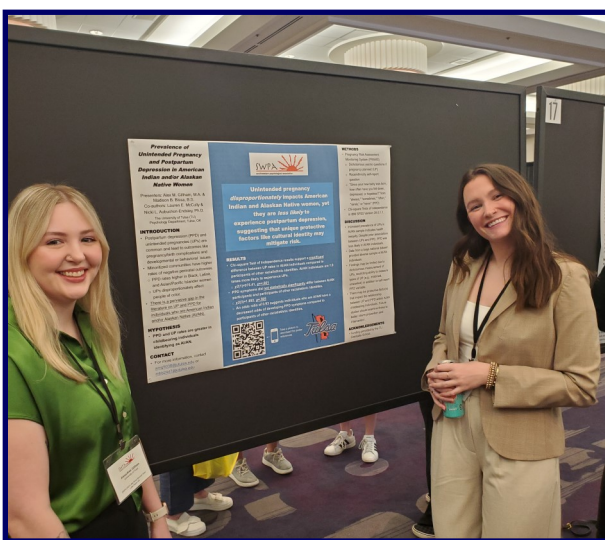




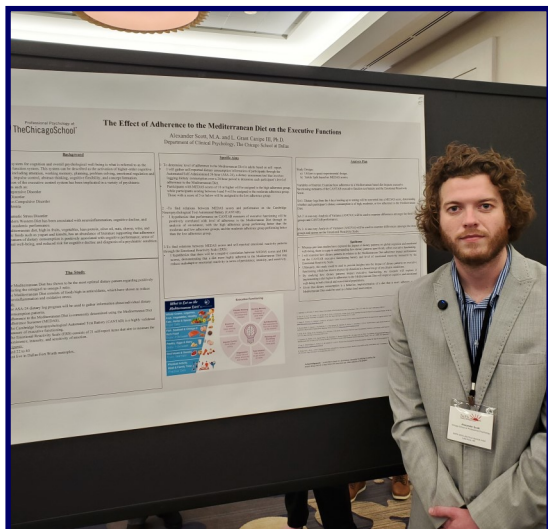
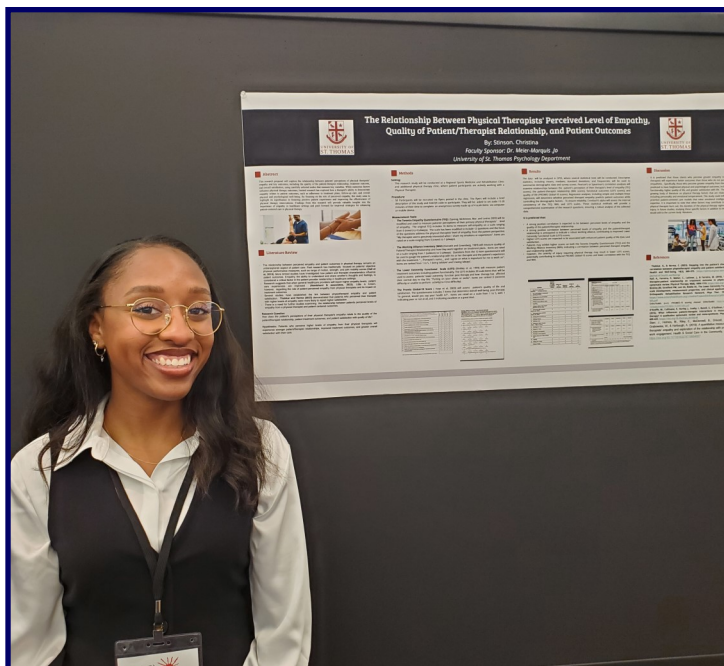
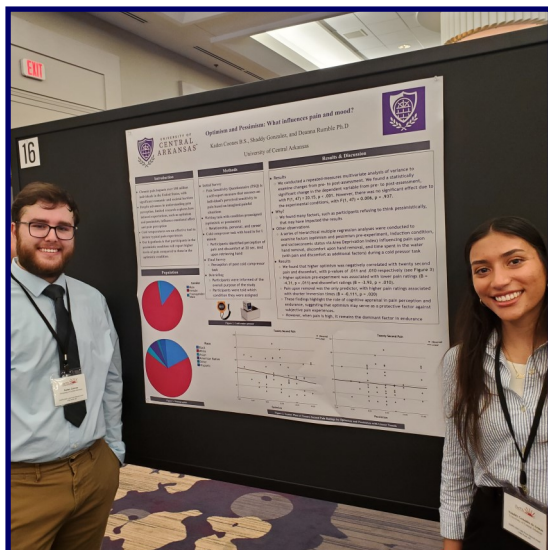
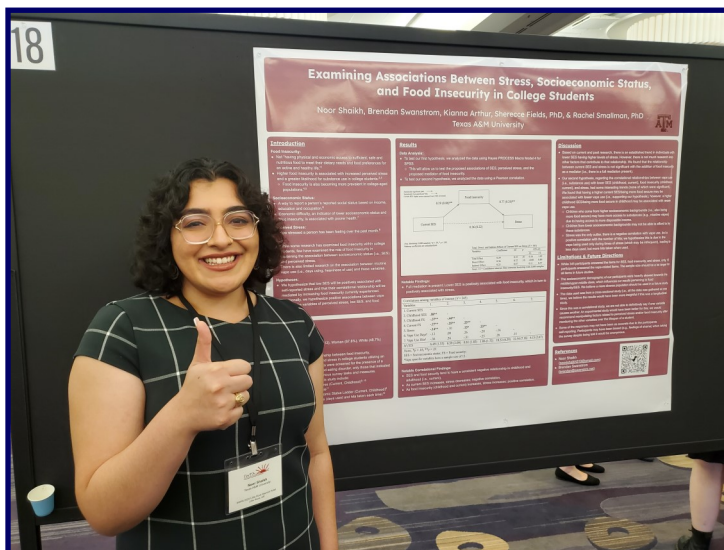




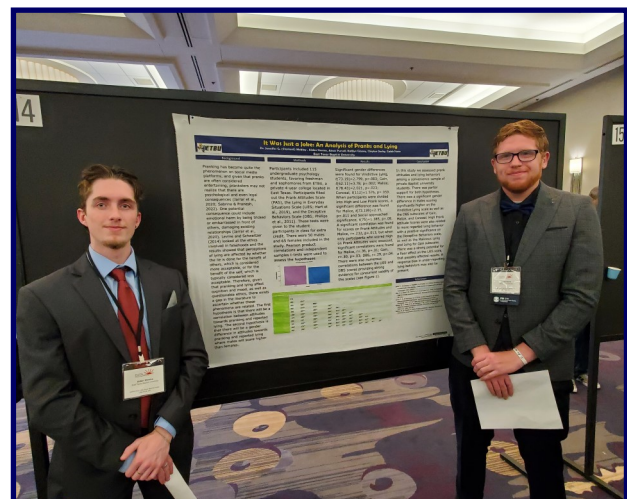
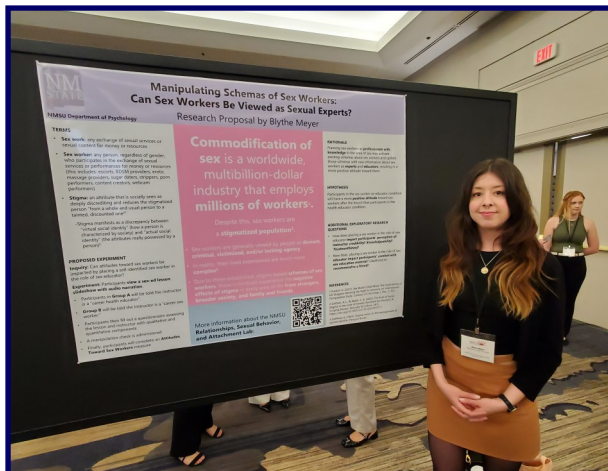
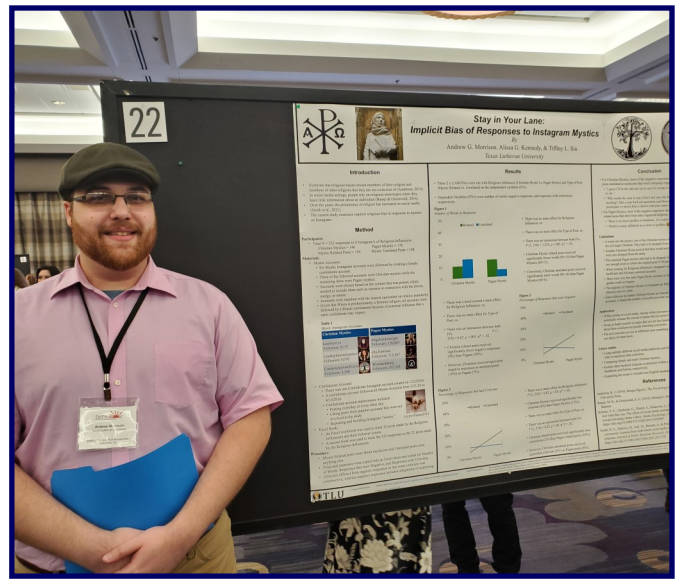
# ...and posters!







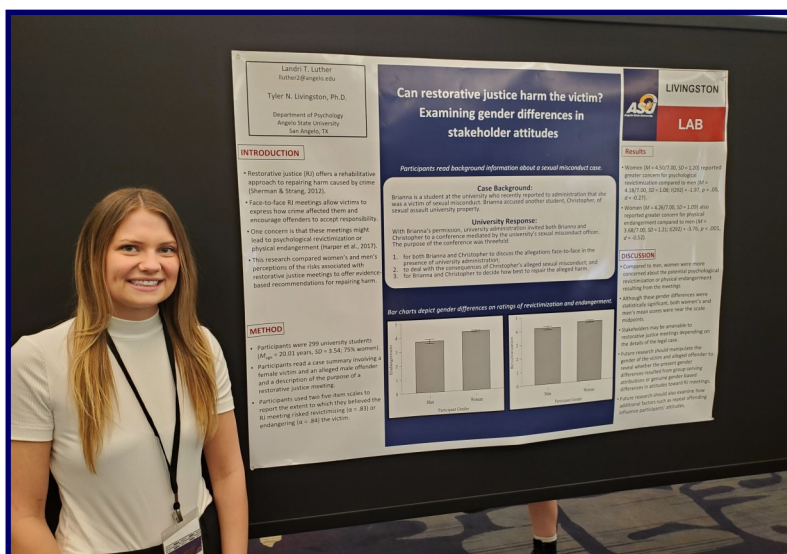
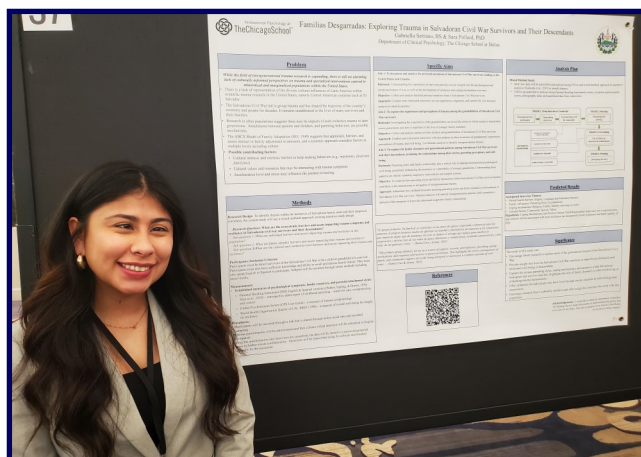
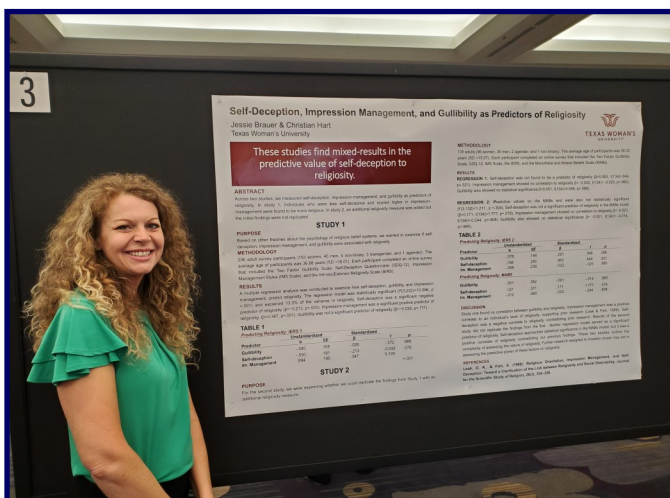










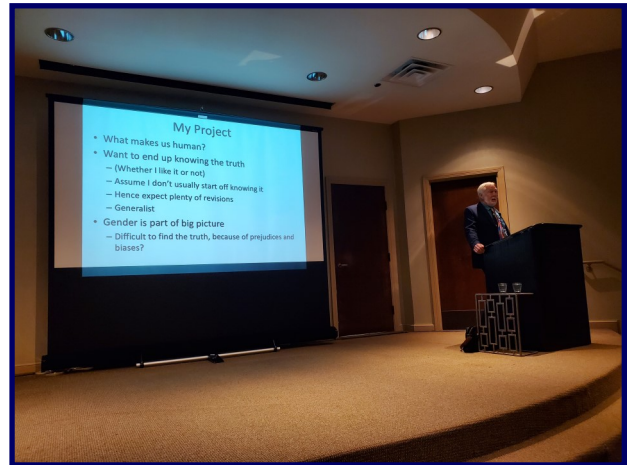


## We also had some great invited talks...

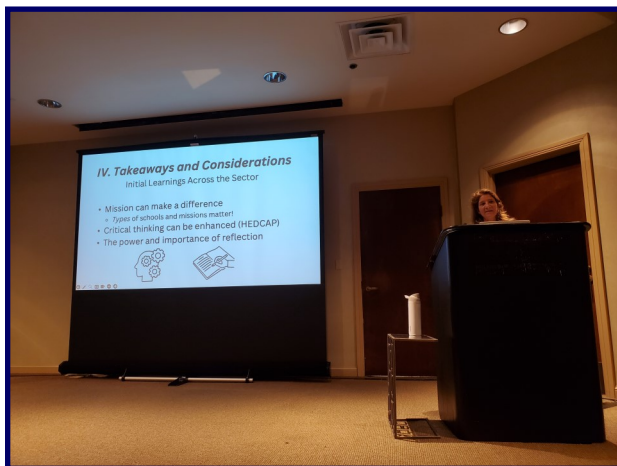


**Dr. Kurt Gray**

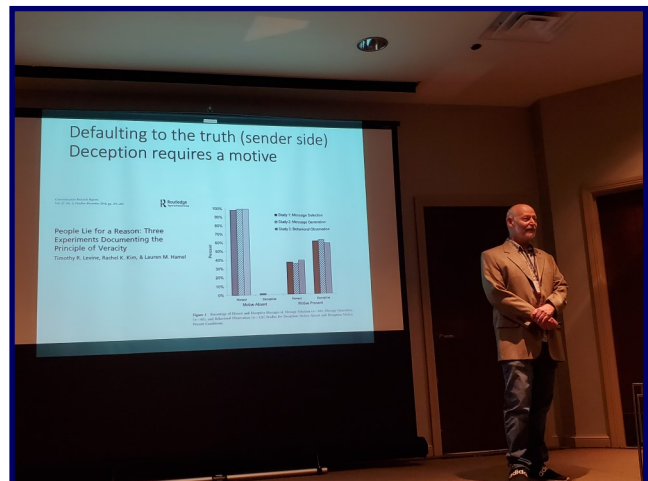
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**Dr. Timothy Levine**



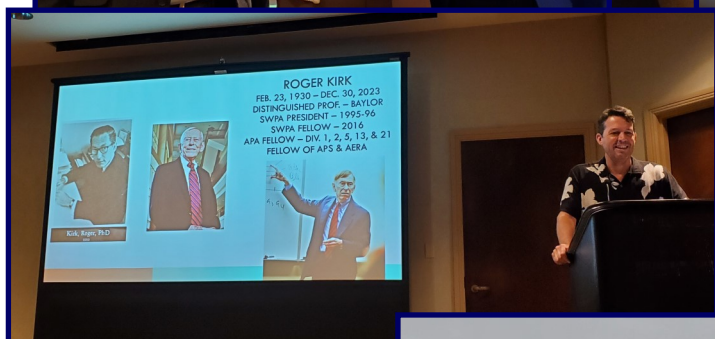
**Wendy Fischman**



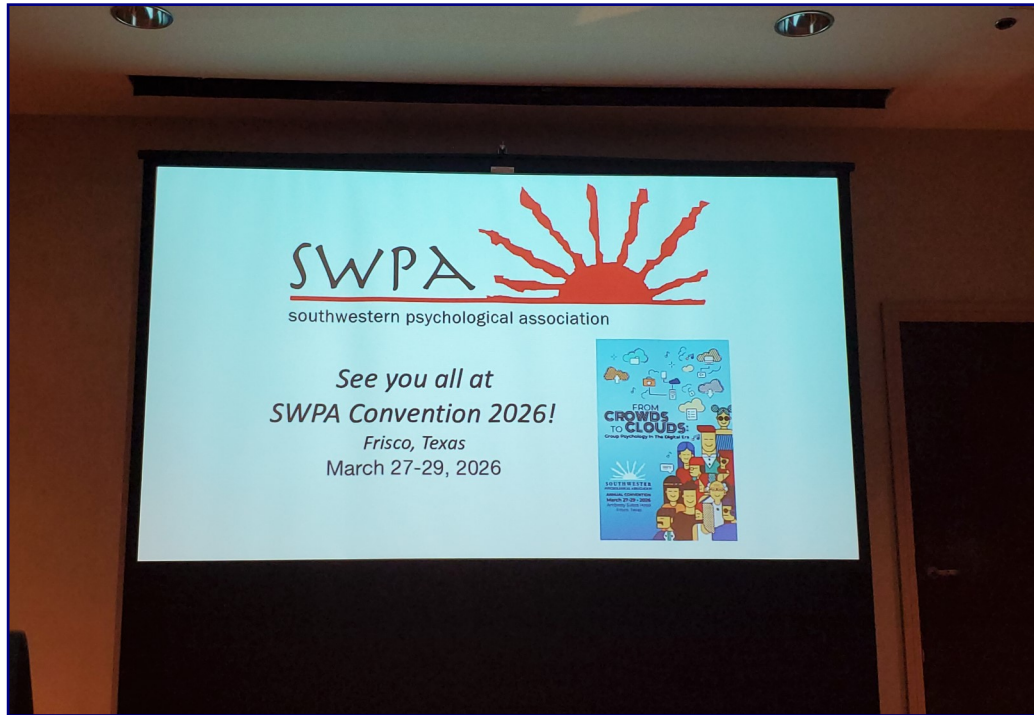
**Dr. Leslie Kelley**  
**SWPA Presidential Address**



...and made some good memories!



We hope to see everyone next year in Frisco for  
**SWPA 2026!**



**We'll see you there!**

**SWPA 2026**

**Frisco, TX**

**March 26 - 29, 2026**



# Join us for SWPA 2026!



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**From shopping to sports, art, and history, there are a variety of experiences you can enjoy when visiting Frisco.**

**Home to multiple professional sports teams, including the Dallas Cowboys, FC Dallas, and the Frisco RoughRiders, and the future home of PGA of America, Frisco is Sports City, USA, and the ultimate sports destination.**

**Love to shop and dine? Frisco features more than 9 million square feet of retail and over 400 restaurants to choose from.**

**When it comes to arts and culture, Frisco offers a growing public art trail, as well as the Texas Sculpture Garden, and a growing muse-**

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## **Southwestern Psychologist Editor**

**Dr. Jeff Seger**

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