

EMERGING IDEAS FOR HUMAN SCIENCE RESEARCH

# SPARC 2025

STUDENT PSYCHOLOGY ANNUAL RESEARCH CONFERENCE

# DIGITAL PROGRAM GUIDE

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# WELCOME TO SPARC 2025!

SPARC (Student Psychology Annual Research Conference) is a forum for honoring our work together. It is a place for honoring our questions and our discoveries.

At its heart, good research involves throwing light. It involves throwing light into the inchoate spaces of our experiences and our wonderings. The beauty, resonance, and clarity that this light throws off is, hopefully, of a continuing ring of brightness, and within that ring of light the hands that hold the insights are also lit. There is personal and communal transformation.

It is in this encounter with light that learning is birthed. The poet Jane Hirschfield put it nicely: “an oar moves a boat by entering what lies outside it”. Movement, like growth, involves a relationship and communion with an outside Other. Our research extends our inner curiosities into a world of others and their experiences. There, in that sacred collision, we change and are changed, moved by the encounter’s supporting buoyancy, and also, though challenging at times, by its useful resistance. This oscillation lies at the heart of all good work. It is its signature. To our students: thank you for courageously throwing light. We hope that your experience here at SPARC, and more broadly in our Psychology community, is one of continuing buoyancy between support and helpful resistance.

To our community: thank you for being a part of SPARC. We hope that every one of you enjoy, and benefit from, the substance and spirit of our work together. Also make sure to [click here to visit our website](#).

# Overview of Program

- **Rooms #207 and #218 are presentation rooms** (Second Floor)

We will have 45 minutes for each session, with 2-3 presentations per session, organized by theme. There will be 10 minutes for questions/discussion and 5 minutes to rotate to next session.

**11:00** AM: Lunch and Conversation in Melson Lobby

**12:00** PM: Presentations Begin

**5:00** PM Awards and Celebrations

11:00 – 12:00

## LUNCH AND CONVERSATION IN THE FOYER OF MELSON HALL

12:00-12:45

#207

SESSIONS 1 &amp; 2

#218

## Language, Culture, and Psychology

Sade Jayeola:  
*My Body Is Strong' Exploring West African Idioms of Distress in Psychological Practice*

Jay (Ava) Fasone:  
*Bodily Controversies: Reconciling the Ethical Discourse of Remains in Scientific Custody*

Charity Paschall:  
*The Linguistic and Criteria Evolution of the DSM Editions*

## Trauma and Intervention

Gabrielle Williams:  
*Emotions Carried Outwards*

Rafael Oquendo:  
*Dangerous, Deviant, and Dysfunctional: Approaches to Trauma-Induced Behavior*

Jazmin A. Dominguez: *Scent Exposure Reprocessing for Navigating Trauma*

1:00-1:55

SESSIONS 3 &amp; 4

# 207

## Mental Health and Therapeutic Practice

Malkam Kraft:  
*The Crucial Study of Child Abuse and  
Preventions*

Megan Allinson:  
*How Do You Feel: Exploring the Influence of  
Attitudes Towards Mental Health Care on Help-  
seeking Behavior in College Students*

Kathleen Pine:  
*Anxiety in Female College Students*

#218

## Media, Society, and Behavior

Hannah Butler:  
*Correlation Between Digital Media Violence and  
Violent Behaviors in Adolescents*

Eddie Angeles:  
*How can social expectations psychologically  
affect men's approach to the dating landscape?*

Cody Clark:  
*Cult Leaders: Delusional or Manipulative?*

2:00-2:55

SESSIONS 5 &amp; 6

# 207

## Gender, Culture, and Experience

LaShun Taylor:

*Cultural Influences on Emotional Expression and its Impact on Mental Health for Men*

Eshkar Kaidar-Heafetz:

*Cuts, Bruises, and Pretty Words: Queer/Trans Non-Reproduction as Gender Affirming "Care."*

Mckinzie Wright:

*Propaganda and Transgender Experience*

#218

## Identity, Community, and Challenge

Chris Scoggins-Wilson:

*Community Based Approach to the Double Empathy Problem*

Serena Lewis:

*Navigating Imposter Syndrome: The Unique Struggles of Black Women in Sports*

Sandy Paillant:

*Social Identity in an Unhealthy Organizational Culture*

3:00-3:55

SESSIONS 7 &amp; 8

# 207

## Transpersonal and Subconscious Exploration

Erica Omokemi Olaniyan:  
*Where Land Meets Water: Exploring Transpersonal Experiences and Their Impact on Self and Others with Human Design*

Alora Ford:  
*Do You Recall That Event too?*

Khanh Hoang  
*The Power of Subconscious Mind*

#218

## Aesthetics of Therapeutic Practice

Artemiy Leonov:  
*Qualitative Psychology, Aesthetics of Bakhtin, and Projective Tests*

Noah Robertson  
*Unsurpassable Richness: Ambiguity as Relation in Psychotherapy*

4:00-4:55

SESSIONS 9 &amp; 10

# 207

#218

## Toward Personal and Cultural Transformation

Natalie Pena:

*Cultural Voices: How People Navigate Change within Value Systems*

Jo O'Donnell Fredrickson:

*Reclaiming Pleasure: Mindfulness Masturbation under MDMA as a Healing Modality for Female Sexual Assault Survivors*

## Philosophy of Science and Inquiry

Nikki Johnson:

*Grounding Transcendent States in Neurophysics: The Neural Correlates of Peak & Plateau Experiences*

John Bessis: *Teleological Naturalism*

# 5:00 PM – Awards and Celebrations!

Melson Lobby



# ABSTRACTS

\* Based on alphabetical order of presenter

## **Megan Allinson:** *Exploring the Influence of Attitudes Towards Mental Health Care on Help-seeking Behavior in College Students*

Research has shown that attitudes toward professional mental health care have a significant influence on help-seeking behavior, particularly in college students. A positive attitude toward mental health care, being open to and seeing value in seeking professional help, can increase the likelihood of individuals seeking help. However, while many individuals may recognize the value of mental health care and trust its efficacy, they may still be hesitant to seek help. Despite increased awareness and education about mental health, many socioeconomic and attitudinal factors hinder help-seeking behavior both for people with mental illness and, as this study demonstrates, college students. Stigma surrounding mental health care often plays a crucial role in deterring students from seeking professional help, even if they acknowledge its potential benefits. This presentation explores the influence of college students' attitudes towards mental health care on their help-seeking behavior, the correlation between prior experience seeking professional help and its perceived value.

## **John Bessis:** *Teleological Naturalism*

A truly scientific worldview, if it wishes to remain scientific, must not limit its affirmations to what is merely derived from science but must expand its purview to comprehend what is presupposed by the practice of science, and all that entails. So far, scientists have reserved their best thinking for the results of science, speculating what the world must be like for this or that particular piece of evidence to be real, and have scarcely begun to think through the pre-conditions of their practice, asking what the world must be like for science to be real.

## **Eddie Angeles:** *How can social expectations psychologically affect men's approach to the dating landscape?*

A growing area of interest in human research is the always-changing dating scene, with the use of technology opening new avenues on how to approach a date. This has created some noise in recent years, where people hear many stories that can range from success stories to bad experiences. The presence of social movements and attitudes have also influenced the expectations of dating for both men and women. The purpose of this research is to focus on the male population and how the current practices of the dating landscape has affected them psychologically when approaching a potential date.

## **Hannah Butler:** *Correlation Between Digital Media Violence and Violent Behaviors in Adolescents*

This research project delves into correlations between screentime with violence in adolescents, as completed by AACAP (American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry), John Hopkins Medicine, and Michigan Youth Violence Prevention Center specifically. Each reference revealed that brutality viewed online directly increased hostility of all aged participants. The study randomly assigned violent or peaceful video games trials, followed by simulations with variant punishment capacities. Overall, belligerent behaviors frequently occurred in severity with greater screen time correlations. Global findings concurred that viciousness in teens directly connects to violent video game intake, and future hostilities. To conclude, these discoveries prove the need for mindful media usage to minimize aggression worldwide.

**Cody Clark: *Cult Leaders: Delusional or Manipulative?***

The fascination of cults has seemed to grow since the rise of the “true crime” genre and the explosion of social media. Using mixed methods research, this presentation not only discusses cults, but also the influence of the cult leaders and the psychological impacts involved. The main research question, which is “Do cult leaders create the “delusion” or do they share it?” The data from research used in this study are collected from various different peer reviewed literature, such as articles, books, and theses. The hypothesis is that more cult leaders create a delusion as a form of power and control to better manipulate their followers instead of sharing in the delusion with them.

**Jay (Ava) Fasone: *Bodily Controversies: Reconciling the Ethical Discourse of Remains in Scientific Custody***

The issue of indigenous human remains in the custody of both publicly and privately-funded museums is one which has, in recent years, risen to increased prominence. Discourse has since erupted regarding the best practices for the handling, display, and potential repatriation of these remains, as well as how their presentation may relate to historical narratives of deculturalization, dehumanization, and generational grief. The proposals put forward to resolve this issue are myriad and vary greatly in quality, efficacy, and plausibility, and a multidisciplinary approach is determinately necessary. Within this presentation, I present a brief history of scientific remains, the discourse of ‘remains on display’, and dissect the proposals put forward to remedy the issue, paying particular attention to narratives of deculturalization and withholding of remains among American Indigenous (Pawnee, Potawatomi) groups.

**Jazmin A. Dominguez: *Scent Exposure Reprocessing: Correlation of Olfaction and Memory Could Help People Navigating Trauma***

This presentation explores an innovative praxis, Scent Exposure Reprocessing (SER), that integrates exposure therapy, aromatherapy, and an adaptation of EMDR to improve the quality of life for people experiencing trauma induced by sense of smell. Neuropsychology explains the biology connecting olfactory senses and memory storage, but there is little research implicating this connection with trauma processing in therapeutic settings. Phenomenologically exploring the lived experience of this connection may result in the emergence of a therapeutic approach similar to SER. This work in progress surveys college students’ experiences connecting scents with negative associations. This qualitative data will contribute to understanding the correlation between olfaction and memory as it pertains to trauma processing.

**Alora Ford: *Do You Recall That Event too?***

This presentation is on my current research on the idea of the Mandela Effect and how various individuals can falsely remember situations the same way as one another. I will expound on this phenomenon so that we can understand it better. There will be a brief description of what the Mandela effect is and its contribution to false memories as a whole, some theories that can be applied to it, and finally, there is an experiment to test this effect out with the audience. With this, we’ll understand more about how this effect can take place and how our shared experiences work to bring us closer together as we go through this journey of life.

**Khanh Hoang:** *The Power of Subconscious Mind*

In the realm of psychology, “consciousness and unconsciousness” remains a difficult problem to discuss. However, in the middle of these 2 aspects, there existed one other notion- “the subconsciousness” which controls over 90% of human behavior. Some people believe that changing people’s subconsciousness is changing their life. The Presentation will attempt to figure out the reason for that statement with a focus on human health. Subconsciousness is a part of consciousness that lies beneath our awareness which is responsible for human behaviors, storing memories, emotions, beliefs, and automatic responses.

**Eshkar Kaidar-Heafetz:** *Cuts, Bruises, and Pretty Words: Queer/Trans Non-Reproduction as Gender Affirming “Care.”*

In contemporary society, violence is a natural condition of being trans. Be it executive orders claiming there are only two genders, shootings in trans nightclubs, or rhetorical calls to eradicate the very concept of being transgender, de-legitimize trans individuals’ gender identity on multiple levels. This violence is not something simply “resolvable” but rather the result of compounding societal barriers weighing down on those whose gender expression is marked “deviant” or “sinful.” In responding and living through this violence, the idea of “gender-affirming care” arises. Like gender itself, the concept of “gender-affirming care” is up for interpretation. As often seen in modern biomedicine, gender-affirming care is thought of as a series of medical interventions that change the biological markers of an individual: bone structure, reproductive organs, and hormones. However, in this essay, I argue that to “affirm” a particular gender identity requires a particular responsiveness to the lived, embodied reality of transness and the violences trans individuals face daily. In doing so, the category of gender-affirming care is increasingly widened from particular medical changes to the body to a litany of relational, vulnerable, interpersonal acts particularized to the context of the individual, such as the practice of kink.

**Nikki Johnson:** *Grounding Transcendent States in Neurophysics: The Neural Correlates of Peak & Plateau Experiences*

For centuries, many vastly different spiritual, psychological, and philosophical traditions based throughout the world have documented the role of both temporary and longer-lasting shifts of consciousness in enabling human beings to open themselves up to greater senses of interconnectedness with the cosmos and progress toward the objectives associated with self-actualization and self-transcendence. How might we ground these transformative states — defined by Abraham Maslow as “peak and plateau experiences,” respectively — in the practical terms of neuroscience and physics? This presentation illuminates the cutting-edge science that may underlie these non-ordinary states of consciousness and their profound subjective effects.

**Malkam Kraft:** *The Crucial Study of Child Abuse and Preventions*

This presentation is a focused overview of; Causes, Effects, Preventions, Stigmas, and Therapy in an ongoing study examining child abuse. Causes explores various factors that may contribute to child abuse, such as mental health, economic hardship, and emotional suffering. Effects discusses long and short-term physical and psychological consequences of abuse such as the manifestation of life-threatening ailments like PTSD and physical injuries. Prevention focuses on ways children and adults can seek help as victims or witnesses of abuse. Stigmas examines how attitudes toward abuse vary across cultures. Finally, Therapy discusses various therapeutic approaches available for victims of abuse.

**Artemiy Leonov:** *Qualitative Psychology, Aesthetics of Bakhtin, and Projective Tests*

There is a general agreement that qualitative psychology is legitimate to borrow research methods of art studies; however, it remains unclear whether qualitative psychology also inherits similar methodological issues. In this presentation, I aim to translate into psychological context the three questions of aesthetics raised by early Mikhail Bakhtin — 1) the author-character problem, 2) the form-content relation, and 3) the completeness of hermeneutic activity. After that, I will analyze the design and results of projective tests, which may represent a “middle-ground” between art and psychology.

**Sarah Joanna O’Donnell Fredrickson:** *Reclaiming Pleasure: Mindfulness Masturbation under MDMA as a Healing Modality for Female Sexual Assault Survivors*

Sexual assault can profoundly disrupt a woman’s relationship with her body and sexuality, leading to challenges with intimacy, trust, and diminished sexual well-being often leading to post – traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Jardim 2021). This paper seeks to explore the potential of combining mindfulness practices with masturbation, under the influence of 3,4 – methylenedioxyamphetamine (MDMA), may facilitate healing by fostering comfort with intimate touch, pleasure, and orgasm in a safe self – directed environment as well as the theoretical underpinnings and empirical evidence supporting the integration of mindfulness-masturbation and MDMA-assisted therapy as a novel intervention for women recovering from sexual assault-related trauma and reclaim their sexuality (Jardim 2021).

**Serena Lewis:** *Navigating Imposter Syndrome: The Unique Struggles of Black Women in Sports*

Imposter syndrome is a psychological phenomenon defined as “intellectual phoniness.” (Clance & Imes, 1978) For Black women in sports, this experience is heightened by barriers and pressures, such as stereotypes, microaggressions, underrepresentation, biases, cultural expectations, and a lack of cultural understanding from coaches and staff. Historically, Black women have faced disadvantages in accessing resources, training, and opportunities. The complex identity of being a Black woman in sports makes their experiences unique and frequently misunderstood. The issues Black women face in sports often lead to internal conflicts that contribute to their feelings of imposter syndrome, taking a toll on their mental health.

**Erica Omokemi Olaniyan:** *Where Land Meets Water: Exploring Transpersonal Experiences and Their Impact on Self and Others with Human Design*

This research proposal integrates Human Design into transpersonal psychology, exploring how transpersonal experiences shape personal meaning and relationships. Founded by Ra Uru Hu, Human Design is a social, archetypal model combining Eastern and Western tools to create inner guidance systems. It categorizes individuals using birth data and suggests personalized strategies for self-thriving. Transpersonal psychology, emerging in the 1960s, transcends the ego, integrating mind, body, and soul. This study will examine mystical, peak, and flow-state experiences through Human Design, fostering personal and relational growth. This integration of structure and flow is where land meets water—creating transformative change individually and collectively.

**Rafael Oquendo:** *Dangerous, Deviant, and Dysfunctional: Approaches to Trauma-Induced Behavior*

This research focuses on the relationship between trauma and abnormal behavior. In the process of my research, I ask: How does trauma induce abnormal behavior, and can the behavior change? Using different models, the cause of unhealthy and irregular behavior can be comprehended, categorized, and treated. I'll argue that motives and intentions determine how abnormal behavior is classified; the abnormal psyche is elusive by nature and needs a critical approach to be understood. This research will explain each category's traits and how dangerous, deviant, and dysfunctional behavior can be assessed and treated.

**Charity Paschall:** *The Linguistic and Criteria Evolution of the DSM Editions*

This research presentation details the diagnostic and criteria evolution of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). Diagnostic criteria, language, and categories have evolved throughout the text's history. This presentation will show, etymologically, how words have historically influenced the DSM's linguistic changes specific to defining and categorizing behaviors over time. For example, changes in diagnostic criteria for specific disorders, as well as the removal of disorders like "homosexuality" and the use of terms such as "mental retardation" and "hysteria." It is crucial to consider how terms, societal behaviors, and societal norms can affect those suffering psychologically (Miller, 2015). Furthermore, it is valuable to understand the impact of countertransference throughout the history of the diagnostic manual editions and how it is influenced by religion, societal norms, or internal morals.

**Sandy Paillant –** *Social Identity in an Unhealthy Organizational Culture*

This presentation will examine the concepts of social identity and healthy organizations and will consider how the two might be related.

**Kathleen Pine:** *Anxiety in Female College Students*

This research presentation is an exploration of causes and effects of anxiety described by female college students. The study was inspired by the need to understand the various sources of anxiety, and how these factors impact the well-being of female students. The findings revealed that academic-related stress, like high-stakes assessments, is the primary source of anxiety. The research also highlights the ways in which anxiety manifests in female students, including panic attacks and sleep disturbances. These insights underscore the importance of addressing anxiety in this demographic to improve their overall mental health and academic performance.

**Noah Robertson:** *Unsurpassable Richness: Ambiguity as Relation in Psychotherapy*

Ambiguity— within us, between, ineluctably part of our shared worlds— is a source of rich interpersonal and transpersonal value. This richness has historically been negated in psychotherapy in favor of a positivist construal of ambiguity that conflates it with obscurity. The consequence of this conflation is that it forbids a relational encounter by avoiding the ontological primacy of ambiguity. As an existential-hermeneutic directive, ambiguity can instead be affirmed and leveraged in service of a stronger therapeutic relationship. The theoretical style of Intersubjective psychoanalysis embodies this attitude and expresses ambiguity through authenticity, attunement, and aliveness.

**LaShun Taylor:** *Cultural Influences on Emotional Expression and its Impact on Mental Health for Men*

Gender norms and expectations are embedded in our societies in almost every area of our daily lives. One area worth exploring is how culture influences emotional expression and how men are expected to suppress certain emotions. Researching the impact cultural influences have on emotional expression in men and how they are negatively impacted, psychologically and mentally.

**Chris Scoggins-Wilson :** *Community Based Approach to the Double Empathy Problem*

Autistic 'self-improvement' typically focuses on how autistic individuals can improve their lives by accommodating neurotypical individuals. However, as seen with the double empathy problem, the socio-communitive breakdown lies with a difference between how neurotypical and autistic individuals communicate with each other. Most psychoeducation for both communities is focused *on* the groups instead of *with* the groups; neurotypical individuals might read a paper written about an autistic individual, while an autistic individual might attend social skills classes. Even support groups are segregated by neurotypes. While it is important to seek support inside the community, this is stopping a sort of real change in how autistics and neurotypicals communicate. This presentation proposes a theoretical model for cross-neurotype support groups. The theoretical framework will first be that two neuro-segregated support groups are set up, then after meeting and discussing areas that the two communities have difficulty understanding the other, a second group will take place in which the communities come together to understand the issues that are common and to gain a better perspective from the other side. By doing so, communication across the communities will grow, which is one piece of solving the double empathy problem.

**Gabrielle Williams:** *Emotions Carried Onwards*

This presentation will explore the long-term effects of child abuse on self-esteem and worth during adulthood through the lenses of psychodynamic and humanistic psychological theories. If selected, I will be explaining the different forms of abuse and its effects via PowerPoint presentation. Applying what we know from psychological theories, it can be said that the developmental stages of a child are pivotal in creating a foundation of autonomy and individual worth, allowing a space for personal growth and resilience as they mature. Using references from various reputable sources and interviews from people who have experienced various forms of abuse, I intend to provide a clear understanding of these effects and offer a pathway to change. Thank you for your time and consideration.

### **Mckinzie Wright:** *Propaganda and Transgender Experience*

From book burnings and banning to fear mongering to the demonization of professions— what does this sound like to you: Nazi Germany or modern day America? One might overlook these similarities, but for transgender peoples, the reality they face may be similar in both time periods. In this presentation, I aim to either break down these fears or study this propaganda for what it is.

# HISTORY OF SPARC

In order to create a forum for student research, Student Psychology Annual Research Conference (SPARC) was inaugurated in the spring of 1999. The spark for SPARC came from graduate students enrolled in a research class during that semester. They wondered if there could be a good place to share and dialogue further about their research. Students then designed, organized and delivered the conference and have continued to do so ever since. Significantly, this conference was set up not as a competition but instead as a clearing for undergraduate and graduate Psychology students, faculty, and friends to join in a community of learners.

SPARC provides a focal point for end-of-year presentations, a testing ground for new ideas, an opportunity to refine and practice presentation skills, and a celebration of scholarship and creativity. We are very proud of our students; we invite you to jump in and take this time to continue our learning together.

# SCHOLARSHIP & AWARD

## 1. Cleo Margaret Hackney Scholarship

- Sophomore, Junior, or Senior who intends to complete a B.S. in psychology at UWG and is a resident of Carroll, Polk, or Troup Counties or a resident of the state of GA. Financial need is to be considered. The awardee(s) will receive a scholarship along with recognition at SPARC and Scholars' Day.

## 2. The Thomas Herndon Award in Psychology

- These awards are presented annually to outstanding students from academic disciplines in the social sciences. Recipients must have a declared major in the field of the award, superior academic achievement, demonstrated leadership ability, potential for development in the respective academic discipline, and active involvement in extracurricular activities. The award was established in 1953 by friends and classmates in memory of the late Thomas A. Herndon, Jr. a graduate of the class of 1939. Award recipients are required to have a minimum overall 3.2 GPA, and transfer students must have completed a full semester at UWG and maintained a minimum 3.2 GPA from each institution. Only undergraduates are eligible to be nominated. The awardee will receive recognition at SPARC and Scholars' Day.

## 3. Academic Recognition Day Scholar

- The Academic Recognition Day program honors undergraduate students from the University System of Georgia who are residents of Georgia and maintain a 4.0 grade point average. Academic Recognition Day began more than 30 years ago as a celebration of Georgia students' academic achievement. The honorees receive a resolution from the Georgia House of Representatives, along with a letter of commendation from the University System chancellor. The awardee will receive recognition at SPARC and Scholars' Day.

# SCHOLARSHIP & AWARD

## 4. Mike Arons Scholarship

- Dr. Mike Arons, professor of psychology emeritus, was honored by former students, faculty, and friends by the establishment of the Mike Arons Humanistic Psychology Scholarship at the University of West Georgia. The scholarship fund was established by former students Dr. Larry Schor, UWG associate professor of psychology, and Dr. John Buchanan, president of the Helios Foundation, to benefit a UWG graduate student majoring in psychology.

## 5. Jim Thomas Scholarship

- Dr. James “Jim” Thomas was one of the legacy founders of the UWG Psychology Department. Working closely with Dr. Mike Arons they created an astonishing 45 new courses for the program which attracted students from all over the world to visit and study UWG’s unique approach of Humanistic Psychology. In honor of his contribution to the department, the Jim Thomas Humanistic Psychology Award was founded.

## SPECIAL THANK YOU

- ❖ Those members of the SPARC 2025 Planning Committee that expressed leadership and effort toward the event; Rafael Oquendo, Sha'Miracle Thomas, Madison Enderle, Natalie Pena, & Sarah (Jo) O'Donnell.
- ❖ Thank you to our faculty support from Dr. Richard La Fleur and Dr. Lisa Osbeck for acting as faculty advisors and planning support for SPARC 2025.
- ❖ Thank you to our sponsors for donating us food to celebrate!
- ❖ The biggest thanks go out to all our student presenters and their faculty mentors who helped make SPARC a success this year! And, to the community (past, present, and future) for its steady support.

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STUDENT PSYCHOLOGY ANNUAL RESEARCH CONFERENCE



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