

42nd Pittsburgh Family Systems Conference & Symposium
Applying Family Systems Theory in a Conventional World

Speaker Biographies

Stuart Libman, MD is a Board-Certified Child, Adolescent and Family Psychiatrist, with further sub-specialization in Sports Psychiatry. After graduating from Ohio University and the School of Medicine at Case Western Reserve University, he completed training in Pediatrics, General Psychiatry, and Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at the University of Pittsburgh. He currently serves as the Medical Director of the PLEA School Based Partial Hospital Program for children and youth with diagnoses on the Autistic Spectrum. Although he was one of the founding members of the Western Pennsylvania Family Center, his clinical focus subsequently shifted to Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), and he has become an International ACT Trainer of the Association for Contextual Behavioral Science and a Prosocial Consultant.

Amie Post, MA, LCMFT has been a student of Bowen theory since 2001 when she was a master's student in Marriage and Family Therapy at Seton Hill University. Since 2015, Amie is the Executive Director of the Family Crisis Center of Baltimore County, Inc, a Baltimore based non-profit organization whose mission is to assist families as they experience the impacts of domestic violence. She deepened her study of Bowen theory in the Postgraduate Training Program 2012-2016 and served as a Clinical Intern 2015-16 at the Bowen Center for the Study of the Family. Amie is currently a member the Board of Directors at the Bowen Center and an active faculty member. Her research interests include the emerging concept of halobiont: the notion of a superorganism that reflects the totality of the human and its microbial partners; reciprocal functioning in relationship violence and evaluating and developing effective programs and systems of care.

Victoria Harrison MA, LMFT has served on Bowen Center for the Study of the Family faculty since 1992 and is founding director of Center for the Study of Bowen Theory and the Family in Houston, Texas. She also has a clinical practice in family systems psychotherapy with biofeedback and neurofeedback. Her articles on family systems, physiology and health are published in Family Systems, Family Systems Forum, and other journals.

Walter Howard Smith, Jr., Ph.D. is a licensed psychologist with a private practice that specializes in treating children, families, and couples. He is a founding member of the Western Pennsylvania Family Center, an education resource center for lay and professional persons interested in understanding families from a Bowen family system theory perspective. Dr. Smith is a trustee of the Casey Family Programs foundation based in Seattle Washington. This 2.3-billion-dollar operating foundation has a mission to provide, improve – and ultimately prevent the need for – foster care, and operates in all fifty states. As a psychologist, he consults with numerous organizations and presents at all-day conferences throughout the United States and several countries.

Patricia A. Comella, J.D., Esq. (ret) served on the Bowen Center faculty and was often co-organizer for spring conferences from 1993-2016. For nearly three decades she served in the Federal government: complex international negotiations were essential to the work she did and the theory was of inestimable value in conducting negotiations. Now fully retired, Pat uses her experience in pro bono work, with particular emphasis on environmental questions. Her latest work Extension of Bowen Theory to Include Natural Systems of Human Societies & Their Sustaining Environments, is found in the Keller-Noone edited Handbook of Bowen Family Systems Theory & Research Methods: A Systems Model for Family Research.

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Heather Brown, LMFT is a family therapist at the Center for Relational Change located in Pittsburgh, PA. She has been an adjunct professor in Seton Hill's marriage and family therapy program.

Christopher F. Burnett, Psy. D., is an Associate Professor of Human Relationship Systems in the Department of Couples and Family Therapy at Nova Southeastern University. He's been with the University since 1993, shortly after completing his doctorate in Psychology from Indiana University of Pennsylvania. He is currently listed as a faculty member of The Western PA Family Center. Chris has chaired a number of Bowen Family Systems themed dissertation research projects with his students, and has been the moderator of the "Bowen Club", an open seminar on Bowen theory and other related topics, for the past 12 years. Additionally, he's a member of the Board of Directors of the Florida Family Research Network, another organization dedicated to the dissemination of Bowen Family Systems theory ideas.

Kristi Green is a third-year student in the Doctor of Marriage and Family Therapy program at Nova Southeastern University in Fort Lauderdale, FL. She currently serves as a graduate assistant for the Department of Family Therapy. Kristi earned a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's degree in mental health counseling. Her research experiences include having worked as a research assistant on projects involving social/evolutionary neuroscience and early childhood autism.

Georgie-Ann Neil is a second-year doctoral student in Marriage and Family Therapy at Nova Southeastern University. She holds a master's in social work and is a Registered Social Work Intern. She is currently the President of Delta Kappa Omicron Chapter, the International Marriage and Family Marriage Honor Society, Department of Family Therapy Graduate Assistant, and Student Leadership Council Representative. Her clinical background has been in social services aiding the vulnerable population by providing therapeutic treatment, assertive community treatment, and substance abuse management care. Her research interest is centered around culture and its generational limitations, education in the minority population, blended family, and migration of the Caribbean people. Her compassion to serve family and youths has her volunteering in her local community.

Jessica Elliott is a third-year PhD student in the Department of Couple and Family Therapy at Nova Southeastern University located in Fort Lauderdale, FL. She previously earned a bachelor's degree in Psychology from Florida State University in 2016 and a master's degree in Marriage and Family Therapy from Nova Southeastern University in 2019.

Brittany A. Gray, M.S. is a first-year doctoral student in the Doctor of Marriage and Family Therapy program at Nova Southeastern University and is anticipating specializing in the Medical Family Programs upon completion of her doctorate degree. Brittany holds a master's degree in Marriage and Family Therapy, a bachelor's degree in Psychology, and an associate degree in Chemical Dependency.

Allison Whitney has been engaged in learning Bowen's Family Systems theory for over thirteen years and has had the privilege of building out her foundational work and thinking right here in Pittsburgh and through the Center. Over the years, her BFST learning experience has been compounded by other various educational resources and events hosted around the country and the globe. She currently holds the position of Board President for the Western PA Family Center.

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Ashley North, LMFT has been a student of Bowen Theory for over a decade, first encountering theory in the graduate program of Marriage and Family Therapy at Seton Hill University. She is a board member of the Western Pennsylvania Family Center.

Ps. Alejandro Astorga A. Professor of Psychology at the undergraduate and graduate levels of Family Systems Theory and family psychotherapy. Faculty of the postgraduate program “Multigenerational Family Therapy” in Universidad Mayor in Santiago, Chile.

Technical director and supervisor of Opcion www.opcion.cl (organization offering services to the youth in Chile. In collaboration with the government this nonprofit organization serves annually more than 17,000 children and their families. They cover 10 regions in the country with 1,200 professionals).

Rev. David Swanson, M.Div. is a pastor of Pittsburgh Mennonite Church and serves on the board of the Western Pennsylvania Family Center. He has been studying Bowen Family Systems Theory for three years and uses theory to experiment and observe in his family, workplace, and the organizations of which he is a part while developing his ability to see more clearly and function more steadily. Dave holds particular interest in developing broader pedagogy and opportunities for engagement with Bowen Theory in diverse contexts and conversations in our region and beyond. He is especially interested in bringing theory into constructive conversation with the fields of spirituality and pastoral care, social justice movements, and race theory.

Rev. Dr. Carol Jeunette works with troubled congregations, first call pastors, and the Voyagers - clergy working with Bowen Theory and Rabbi Edwin Friedman’s application of the theory to leadership and congregations. She holds masters’ degrees in Divinity, Counseling and Family Studies, as well as a Ph.D. in Religion and Psychological Studies. Her doctoral work and dissertation: A Pastoral Theology of Congregational Care and Leadership: Nurturing Emergence. Carol lives in southeastern Wisconsin with her husband, John, and is looking forward to finishing up an intense interim pastor position in December.