

**ANXIETY, PHYSIOLOGY AND ADAPTIVE CAPACITY:  
A FAMILY SYSTEMS PERSPECTIVE**

**Presenter Bios**

**Laurie Lassiter, PhD, MSW (Keynote)**

Laurie Lassiter attended the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill as an undergraduate in the Religion Department. She has a PhD from New York University in cultural anthropology and an MA in social work from Smith College. Dr. Lassiter trained under Murray Bowen for four years at the Georgetown Family Center postgraduate program, and she has written several articles and book chapters on Bowen theory. Since 1991 she has been a frequent presenter at the Bowen Center Symposia and other conferences.

Dr. Lassiter serves as an Editorial Consultant for the Family Systems journal. She has organized two professional groups in Bowen theory that have been meeting for several years. Currently she is meeting with anthropologist Joanne Bowen and a small group to study societal process. She has a private practice open to individuals already familiar with Bowen theory. Dr. Lassiter leads a memoir writing group in her community in Leverett, Massachusetts, a rural town near Amherst. She is married with an adult son. Most days she can be found walking the trails with her Labrador Retriever, Cece.

**Sara Huron**

Sara Huron, PCC, CFBA, CFWA, is an executive coach and consultant in private practice who works primarily with business-owning families to help them strengthen family dynamics, develop leadership and management capability, and build emotional maturity and resilience. Sara is also active in the nonprofit sector, and is currently directing the expansion of a Cincinnati, Ohio-based nonprofit into Knoxville, Tennessee.

**Dr. Arthur Zipris**

Arthur Zipris is a licensed psychologist, practicing at the Pittsburgh Pastoral Institute, where he sees individuals, families, and couples. He has studied Bowen Family Systems Theory for over 30 years, and has done many presentations on different applications of the theory, both in Pittsburgh and elsewhere. He is also on the faculty of the Western Pa. Family Center, and has taught Family Systems theory for many years as an adjunct lecturer with the MFT program at Seton Hill. He is the primary author of the BFST workbook, and developed, along with other faculty members, the on-line program of the theory at the Family Center, as well as being a facilitator of the Basic Seminar at the Family Center.

## **Kelsey Swintek**

Kelsey Swintek is a writer in Pittsburgh. Her writing has appeared in Hobart Pulp and Nowhere Magazine, and is forthcoming from Press Pause. She publishes a weekly newsletter where she writes about everything, but often explores themes such as memory, perception, and relationships. Kelsey earned her Masters (Joint Honors) in Comparative Literature and Art History from the University of St Andrews. She is currently working on a collection of essays.

## **Rev. Margaret Marcuson**

Rev. Margaret Marcuson offers a way church leaders can bring their best to their ministry without giving it all away, so they can have a greater impact and find more satisfaction. Margaret speaks and writes on church leadership, and works with leaders around the U.S. and Canada as a teacher and coach. She has taught, coached and consulted with ministers from 17 different denominations. A long-time student of Bowen theory, she began her studies with Edwin Friedman in his training program for clergy. She has taught in the Leadership in Ministry workshop since 1999. Margaret is the author of *Leaders who Last: Sustaining Yourself and Your Ministry*, and *Money and Your Ministry: Balance the Books While Keeping Your Balance*. She is a graduate of the Pacific School of Religion. An American Baptist minister, Margaret was the pastor of the First Baptist Church of Gardner, Massachusetts, for 13 years. She lives in Portland, Oregon.

## **Dave Galloway**

Dave Galloway has been involved with Bowen Theory for over 16 years. He supports the Living Systems Counseling and Training program by seeing low-income clients and writing for their blog. The Family Systems Journal published his review of "How Emotions are Made" by Lisa Barrett. As a Family Enterprise Advisor, he has spent considerable time and effort thinking about Bowen Theory in the workplace. He has had leadership roles in several companies and believes everyone is a leader. His 41-year marriage has been a continual practical application of Bowen Theory.

### **Dr. Walter Howard Smith Jr.**

Walter Howard Smith, Jr.'s career focuses on the use of Bowen family systems theory to understand the functioning of families, organizations and social groups. (1978-present) Dr. Smith has focused on understanding how family functioning from this perspective leads to family violence, particularly child abuse. (1987-present) He attended the post-graduate training program in Bowen theory at the Georgetown University Family Center. (1980-1983) Dr. Smith is a trustee of the Casey Family Programs foundation based in Seattle Washington. This 2.9-billion-dollar operating foundation has a mission to provide, improve – an ultimately prevent the need for – foster care, and operates in all fifty states, District of Columbia, U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico. Member (2018-present.) Chair of board (2021-present) Dr. Smith is board member of the Pittsburgh Foundation, a community foundation that has a mission to improve the quality of life of the Pittsburgh region. (Member 2008-2020 and 2021-present) Dr. Smith is a licensed psychologist with a private practice that specializes in treating children, families, and couples. His practice includes executive coaching, business and organization consultation, conferences and lectures on child abuse and family violence from a family systems perspective. (1985-present)

### **Dr. Christopher Burnett**

Dr. Christopher Burnett is an Associate Professor of Human Relationship Systems in the Department of Couples and Family Therapy at Nova Southeastern University, Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. He has been with the University since 1993, shortly after completing his doctorate in Psychology from Indiana University of Pennsylvania. He is a licensed Psychologist in the state of Florida, and is also currently listed as a faculty member of the WPFC. As a faculty member of the department, he teaches in both the Masters and Doctoral programs. He teaches courses in Bowen Family Systems theory, research methods, and is a faculty supervisor in the University clinic that serves members of the community at large. He has Chaired dozens 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. He is also 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, MS**

Kristi Green is a fourth-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. Her most recent clinical experiences include having worked as a medical family therapy intern for the Kiran C. Patel College of Osteopathic Medicine at Nova Southeastern University and in an inpatient hospice unit in a south Florida hospital. Her interests include Bowen family systems theory and the application of natural systems ideas to the understanding of human functioning within emotional systems. In the future, Kristi plans to open a private practice that acknowledges and incorporates the multigenerational influences that affect a person's overall wellness.

## **Dr. Jetlexis Carlos**

Jetlexis Carlos is a licensed marriage and family therapist in Florida and New York. She holds the AAMFT-approved supervisor designation and is an AAMFT clinical fellow. Jetlexis recently completed her Ph.D. in Family Therapy at Nova Southeastern University. Her doctoral dissertation explored the lived experiences of marriage and family therapists who work with high-conflict couples. Jetlexis's clinical and research interests incorporate Bowen family systems theory concepts with couples counseling, marital conflict, and parenting. She is passionate about utilizing her knowledge of family systems theory and applying it in the therapy room, the community, and within organizations.

## **Giancarlo Simpson**

Giancarlo Simpson is pursuing his Ph.D. in Marriage and Family Therapy at Nova Southeastern University. He graduated from Lynn University with a Masters in the Applied Psychology – Counseling Program. Giancarlo serves as a faculty member at Lynn University, contributing to the school's academic literature. Giancarlo also has his own private practice, where he offers creative approaches to the therapeutic experience. He is also a photographer, rugby player, gamer, and pursuer of naps in random places.

### **Tameka Thomas LMFT, LMHC**

Tameka Thomas, LMFT, LMHC is a doctoral student at Nova Southeastern University in the Marriage and Family Therapy Program. Tameka has been working in the field of crisis management for over seven years in a community mental health agency and hospital setting. After starting her doctoral program at Nova, Tameka has been studying Bowen Family Systems Theory and how it relates to mental health crisis response. She believes that the Natural Systems approach is not just another systems theory to learn but more of a lifestyle change that benefits all stakeholders. Based on the latter, Tameka is interested in developing a mental health crisis response program that incorporates the use of Bowen Family Systems Theory.

### **Dr. Franchesca Fontus**

Dr. Franchesca Fontus is a graduate of Nova Southeastern University, having earned Master of Science (M.S.) and Doctor of Philosophy degrees (Ph.D) in Family Therapy. Dr. Fontus is currently an Assistant Professor of Couple and Family Therapy at Alliant International University and a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (LMFT) working with individuals, couples, and families in private practice. She has clinical work experience in community-based, school-based, substance use treatment settings, providing therapeutic services to diverse groups of children, teens, and adult populations within non-profit and private agencies. She is passionate about the personal growth of emerging therapists and clients. Dr. Fontus served on the board of the Broward Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (BAMFT), is an American Association for Marriage & Family Therapy (AAMFT) Clinical Fellow, and a AAMFT Approved Supervisor. She has been published and featured as a co-author in the Journal of Systemic Therapies on an article entitled "Therapists of Color: Surviving Long Enough to Keep Fighting". As she continues to sharpen her theoretical knowledge and skillset, especially through Bowen Family Systems Theory framework, Dr. Fontus aims to continue contributing to the field and community-at-large through speaking engagements, workshops, conference presentations, and publications.

### **Dr. Devon Dunn**

Devon Dunn is a recent graduate of Nova Southeastern. They're a licensed therapist and just joined a private practice in West Palm Beach. They are currently focusing on helping couples and individuals understand themselves systemically. Their other areas of interest are sex therapy, medical family therapy, and drug rehab. In their spare time, they enjoy kayaking, blogging, and camping with their fiancée and friends.

## **Cassandra Cacace**

Cassandra Cacace (she/her) is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist in Florida working toward completing her Ph.D. in Couples and Family therapy from Nova Southeastern University. She is the daughter of two healthcare professionals, which sparked her initial interest in researching and working with healthcare professionals in her career. She finds the concepts from Bowen's theory most applicable when exploring the larger organizational system, along with its potential impacts on relationships and individuals. She plans to continue her work in private practice and plans to teach at the university level in the future. In her free time, Cassandra is an obsessed dog mom to Gemma, the world's laziest (and her opinion sweetest) Australian Shepherd.

## **Dr. Mary Mukasa**

Dr. Mary Mukasa was born under exceptional circumstances, and her chances of being happy and living a prosperous lovely life were marginal. Her parents divorced when she was only 10 years old; her father abandoned her. She went to live with her grandparents who arranged to marry her off at 12. She figured out adult life when following a loving and nurturing professor, family therapist, and psychologist in Dr. Burnett. Thanks to Dr. Burnett Thinking System, she is married to a handsome, loving, and supportive husband. Her nuclear family system is blossoming with loving, caring, and differentiated persons of a spouse and two daughters who are well-nurtured! Their second daughter lives the highest quality of stable life with non-sickle cell disease or Sickle Cell Anemia (SCA) crisis!

## **Ashley North**

Ashley North has been a student of Bowen Theory for over a decade, having first encountered the theory in 2010 in the graduate program of Marriage and Family Therapy at Seton Hill University. Ashley attempts to think theory within her own relationships, in her practice with clients, while on the board and as an observer of the Basic Seminar of the Western Pennsylvania Family Center, and anywhere else that nitrogen and oxygen can be found. Ashley has a particular interest in more clearly understanding the biological foundations of theory and how a focus on emotional process may be an emotional process in itself.

## Allison Whitney

Allison has been engaged in learning Bowen's Family Systems theory for over fourteen 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. One thing Allison is very clear about is that Bowen's Systems Theory makes a great deal of sense to her and predicts that there is a high probability she will gleefully pursue paths in life that allow for additional spacetime in exploring and applying the theory further. She currently holds the position of Board President for the Western PA Family Center.

## Ashley Taylor, M. Ed, MMT, MT-BC

Ashley Taylor, M.ED, MMT, MT-BC is an educator, a music therapist, a relational therapist, and a secular community leader attempting to figure out how to serve in any of those roles as a Self. She has been studying Bowen Family Systems theory for three years via the Western Pennsylvania Family Center and the Bowen Family Center's symposiums and introductory courses, as well as studying with a Bowen-oriented clinical supervisor and personal coach during that time. So far, learning Bowen's theory has expanded Ashley's thinking about polyamory & love, queerness and other sociocultural identities, religion, politics, plants, animals, food, bodies, sex, and (of course) her own Family of Origin. She has published work on queering pedagogy, self-of-the-therapist, and fat identity in music therapy and hopes to continue thinking, learning, and writing about these and other topics from an increasingly clear systems perspective.

## Alejandro Astorga

Psychologist, School of Psychology, University of Chile, Santiago (Chile). Master in Family Therapy, Accademia di Psicoterapia della Famiglia, Roma (Italy). Master in Law, mention in children, adolescence and family, Universidad Diego Portales, Santiago (Chile). Faculty of the Postgraduate program "Multigenerational Family Therapy" in Universidad Mayor in Santiago (Chile). Member of the Ibero-American Institute of the Bowen Center for the Study of the Family. Technical Chief and supervisor of Opcion [www.opcion.cl](http://www.opcion.cl) (a non profit organization offering services to children, youth and families in Chile. In collaboration with the Chilean government, OPCION serves annually more than 15,000 children and their families).