The Bowen Center Presents

The Spring Conference APRIL 21-22, 2023

Family Violence: A Systems Perspective

Guest Speaker: Dr. Karen Bales, PhD

The Bowen Center Presents: The Spring Conference

Family Violence: A Systems Perspective

April 21-22, 2023 Hybrid: In person and online

Sponsored by
The Bowen Center for the Study of the Family
Georgetown Family Center

4400 MacArthur Blvd. NW, Suite 103 Washington, DC 20007 +001-202-965-4400

Guest Lecturer Karen Bales, PhD Professor of Psychology University of California

Dr. Bales started studying primates as an undergraduate at the University of New Orleans, finishing her honors project as



an intern at the Audubon Zoo. Since then, she has worked with multiple primate species including common marmosets, golden lion tamarins, rhesus monkeys, and titi monkeys, finishing her Master's at the University of Tennessee, her Ph.D. at the University of Maryland, and a post-doc at the University of Illinois, Chicago. She has spent the last eighteen years at the University of California, Davis studying the neurobiology of social bonding in titi monkeys (a socially monogamous primate), prairie voles (a socially monogamous rodent), and now seahorses (a socially monogamous fish). In the course of this research, she has also investigated potential long-term effects of clinical applications of the hormone oxytocin, as well as long-term effects of other basic mammalian experiences like parenting. She is a past President of the American Society of Primatologists, a Kavli Fellow, recipient of the 2021 Exemplar Award from the Center for the Integrative Study of Animal Behavior, and a UC-Davis ADVANCE Scholar. She also serves as the Editor-in-Chief of the American Journal of Primatology and is very proud that her laboratory won the 2019 UC-Davis Laboratory Safety Award.

Dr. Bale's Presentations

Developmental Influences on Pair Bond Formation from Titi Monkeys, Prairie Voles, and Seahorses

Our ability to form successful attachments as adults may start developmentally, even prenatally. We utilize three different animal models (titi monkeys, prairie voles, and seahorses) to study the mechanisms by which social and environmental experiences during development affect adult pair bonding and parenting.

Pair Bond Maintenance in Titi Monkeys: Separation Distress and Jealousy

After we form pair bonds, these bonds are maintained by less positive emotions: our distress upon separation from our pair mate, and our jealous response to threats to the relationship. We have studied the neural and behavioral expression of these pair bond maintenance strategies in a pair-bonding primate, the coppery titi monkey.

Spring Conference Schedule

Friday, April 21, 2023

9:30	Welcome Randall Frost, MDiv
9:40	Do "Bystander" Relationships Exist in Family Violence?
	Monica Griffin, PhD
10:00	Developmental Influences on Pair Bond Formation from Titi Monkeys, Prairie Voles, and Seahorses Distinguished Guest Lecturer: Karen Bales, PhD
11:00	Break
11:20	Disturbance in the Family: The Role of the Clinician in the Effort to Restore Family Functioning Daniel Papero, PhD, LCSW
12:05	Discussion: Drs. Bales, Griffin, and Papero
12:30	Lunch A complimentary lunch will be served.
1:00	Lunch Event: <i>Thinking Systems</i> Book Signing Author Anne S. McKnight, EdD will sign copies of her new book.
1:45	Children Who Are Violent in the Home –
	Working with Parents Jenny Brown, PhD
2:05	Seeing the Family as a Natural System Carrie Collier, PhD
2:35	Discussion: Drs. Bales, Collier, and Brown
2:55	Break
3:15	Sexual Abuse in the Family: Adolescents who Sexually Abuse Other Children Alejandro Astorga, PhD
3:35	A Systems Perspective on Clergy Sexual Misconduct Rev. Carol Jeunnette, PhD
3:55	Discussion: Drs. Bales and Astorga and Rev. Jeunnette
4:30	Adjourn
4:30	Donor Reception (in person/online to 5:00 pm. In person only 5-6 pm)

Saturday, April 22, 2023

9:30	Welcome and Housekeeping Amie Post, MA, LCMFT
9:35	Presentation of the Polly Caskie Awards Randall T. Frost, MDiv and Eileen B. Gottlieb, MEd
9:55	Pair Bond Maintenance in Titi Monkeys: Separation Distress and Jealousy Karen Bales, PhD
10:55	Break
11:15	Use of Bowen Family Systems Theory to Reform Services and Funding to Prevent Child Abuse and Family Violence Walter Smith, Jr., PhD
11:45	Beyond the Explanation of Power and Control: What Does Bowen Theory Contribute to the Problem of Intimate Partner Violence? Amie Post, MA, LCMFT
12:05	Discussion: Drs. Bales and Smith and Ms. Post
12:30	Lunch A complimentary lunch will be served.
1:45	Differentiation of Family System Inventory: Development and Validation Mary Jane Wilt, PhD
2:05	Connect and Defend: An Evolutionary View of Inter-Group Violence Jake Morrill, MDiv, MA, LMFT
2:25	Discussion: Dr. Bales and Wilt and Mr. Morrill
2:45	Break
3:05	Family and Organizational Leadership in a Woke and Bespoke World Rev. Emlyn A. Ott, DMin
3:25	Utilizing Bowen Theory to Improve Community Collaboration Around Violence Prevention Policies Robert Davis, DMin
3:45	Discussion: Drs. Bales and Davis and Rev. Ott
4:15	Conference Adjourns

Abstracts

Monica D. Griffin, PhD mdgrif@wm.edu



Do "Bystander" Relationships Exist in Family Violence?

Social scientists have argued that groups make bystander intervention prohibitive in violent situations (see Darley & Latane 1968 on bystander effect). For decades, this argument has formed the theoretical basis for prevention programs and antiviolence educational initiatives. Bowen theory posits that human relationships are dynamic and patterned within emotional of the family system as part of larger social, ecological contexts with mutual, reciprocating influences (Bowen, 1974). Recent research on intervention behavior (Levine et al. 2020) aligns with Bowen theory in suggesting that more important than the presence of a sizable group of witnesses, the social identities (and, therefore, relationship or relatedness) between interveners, victims, or perpetrators might predict (and therefore, improve) the success of intervention. The presenter will interrogate relationship dynamics within intimate communities such as churches, workplaces, or friendship circles to consider how triangles and differentiation of self may emerge in intervention behavior when perpetrators, victims, and interveners are familiar with one another beyond the family system.

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Daniel V. Papero, PhD, LCSW dpapero@thebowencenter.org



Disturbance in the Family: The Role of the Clinician in the Effort to Restore Family Functioning

Human family systems form, at times, a rough-and-tumble world. Most of the behavioral processes observable in other primate groups appear in the family. Competition exists among siblings, between parent and child, between parents, and among the various procreative units that form the extended family clan. Competition takes many forms. Rivalries burst into open disagreement and conflict. Dominance interactions and deference challenges appear when the network tenses up. Coalitions form; some to reassert a semblance of order to the network, and others to provide succor and support to aggrieved individuals. At times, networks break into fragments, endangering the survival of the network as a functional unit and the functions it evolved to serve.

Family systems vary in their resiliency, their capacity to maintain functioning when conditions require adaptation. Less resilient families may require significant outside assistance to withstand and recover from challenge.

The effort to assist a faltering family system involves two general components: support and restorative development. The support component of the effort aims to assist the family to reduce the intensity of emotional tension in the system. The restorative component targets processes that reduce chaos, engage problemsolving activities, build emotional stamina, and slowly improve the effectiveness and efficiency of system functioning.

This presentation will review the process of regression in a family system, outline the theoretical base upon which the effort to assist rests, and describe the guiding principles and technical efforts of the helper in the effort to stabilize the regression in the family system and initiate restorative development.



Jenny Brown, PhD jbrown@thefsi.com.au

Children Who Are Violent in the Home – Working with Parents

This presentation outlines the clinical presentation of children's aggressive behaviors in their families, including breaking property, exhibiting threatening behaviors, and inflicting physical harm to other family members. An outline of a Bowen theory perspective on children's aggressive behaviors is presented, drawing from the anxious child focus (FPP), intense reciprocity of aggressive episodes, and the parent-child triangle. Additionally, drawing from clinical cases, the following questions are asked: How does a child bind anxiety and borrow self in expressing violence as part of the family emotional process? What is evidence of progress in such families? How is progress understood? What about regressions? How does one attend to safety issues? and, How are the responses of other systems managed?



Carrie E. Collier, PhD ccollier@thebowencenter.org

Seeing the Family as a Natural System

Bowen theory holds that there are natural adaptive mechanisms that all families use to manage anxiety during difficult times. These mechanisms are programmed into the family emotional unit over generations. The parental projection of anxiety onto a child is one of the mechanisms the family uses to manage anxiety. This is an overly anxious stance toward a child in a positive or negative way with varying degrees of intensity. Child abuse and neglect is an extreme example of this mechanism at work in an anxious undifferentiated system.

Family conflicts and emotional cutoffs arise from a buildup of unprocessed anxiety over generations, coupled with less mature family functioning processes. Bowen posited that the most enduring parenting work happens between the grandparents and parents when addressing parental differentiation (Bowen 1977). Barriers to solving problems are exacerbated when families have tremendous amounts of life challenges mixed with unprocessed emotional anxiety.

Researchers and therapists can better understand the current emotional reactivity in the system by understanding the history of the nuclear and extended families' emotional patterns. The assessment of family mechanisms to manage anxiety over generations is critical to identify emotional reactivity and to make changes in the automatic emotional responses. The "Family Unit Functioning Questionnaire" (FUFQ) is one instrument that allows researchers to assess family unit functioning in the past and link it to the present (Collier & Villareal 2022).

Bowen, Murray. 1977. Archives at The Bowen Center. Washington, DC.

Collier, Carrie E and Villareal, P. 2022. "Family Unit Functioning Questionnaire: The Development and Initial Validation." Australian & New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy, 43(2): 223-242.





Sexual Abuse in the Family: Adolescents who Sexually Abuse Other Children

In this presentation, based on the contextualization of violence in the family as a process and linked to deeper processes inherent to our evolutionary functioning, we will address the processes of violence in the family that take the form of sexual abuse by young teenagers towards their brothers or sisters.

Frequently the abusive sexual behavior or abusive sexual practice that a young adolescent may develop towards his or her peers or another boy or girl tends to be understood from an individual approach and the clinical process is oriented towards characterizing his or her psychopathological functioning. In contrast, Murray Bowen's family systems theory view allows us to develop an understanding of such behavior more as a manifestation of a broader emotional process. It is therefore fundamental to approach intrafamilial sexual abuse developed by adolescents from the ideas of Bowen's family systems theory, a theory that considers the adolescent as part of an emotional system.

Some characteristics of the family systems where young adolescents have manifested these abusive behaviors will be presented, highlighting the observation of high levels of anxiety and reactivity operating in the family systems, as well as the observation of multigenerational emotional processes linked to emotional cutting processes. Finally, some hypotheses that could help to understand and contextualize this behavior will also be presented.

This presentation is the continuation of a research process that the author is developing in five care centers for young adolescents who present abusive behaviors which are implemented by the private nonprofit institution Corporación OPCION for the National Service for the Protection of Children and Adolescents in Chile. Preliminary conclusions will be presented that could be expanded in the future.





A Systems Perspective on Clergy Sexual Misconduct

Images of faith communities as families are abundant. The engagement of a faith community's leader in an extra-marital sexual relationship with a parishioner has parallels with family sexual violence.

Thirty-plus years ago, two years out of seminary, I accepted a call to be associate pastor of a congregation that had experienced a recently revealed twenty-five-year history of clergy sexual misconduct (CSM) and abuse. Uneasy with the predominant feminist understanding and response to CSM, my introduction to Bowen theory suggested a different approach, and ultimately led me to work on a PhD.

This presentation is not a deconstruction of the feminist response to CSM. Rather, I use Bowen theory to consider strategies to help prevent CSM and responses and interventions that have the capacity to promote healing and growth for all involved. I use Bowen theory because it offers ways of understanding and responding to difficult human challenges in families as well as other close relationship systems, such as congregations.

I begin with contexts of this challenge: congregations, leaders, cultural shifts around women, conceptualizations of clergy extramarital relationships, and a closer look the current dominant understanding and response to CSM.

Next is a consideration of CSM using aspects of Bowen theory. From this perspective, CSM can be understood more as a symptom of one or more of the intersecting systems of which the minister is a part, rather than simply an individual's abuse of power.

Closing this presentation is a discussion of implications of a Bowen systems perspective for prevention and response/intervention to situations of CSM and a review of ways in which this perspective, while in ways at odds with the dominant feminist response, can promote healing and more mature functioning.





Use of Bowen Family Systems Theory to Reform Services and Funding to Prevent Child Abuse and Family Violence

This presentation uses Bowen family systems theory and its applications in the child abuse field to examine alternative funding and service strategies that prevent and treat child abuse. Bowen theory offers a different way of thinking about how society addresses families with symptoms of child abuse and family violence. Bowen theory expands the lens of observing and understanding child abuse by focusing on the family for prevention and intervention efforts. Central to this effort is the application of the concepts of differentiation of self and emotional triangles to shape how government agencies and foundations approach challenges of initiating and funding services that address the family as a single emotional unit. As social and human services represent society's response to family violence, the presentation addresses how this shift in thinking alters the ordinary way society contributes to the very problem that it intends to manage. Examples of alternative service and funding strategies will be illustrated in the presentation. The presenter will also discuss the challenges of managing a natural systems approach to funding and providing services within organizations that are embedded in conventional thinking.





Beyond the Explanation of Power and Control: What does Bowen Theory Contribute to the Problem of Intimate Partner Violence?

What difference does a theory make? Dr. Bowen writes, "Systems thinking provides no magical answers, but it does provide a different way of conceptualizing human problems. It offers a more realistic evaluation of the difficulty in changing the basic patterns in any human dilemma, and it suggests ways to avoid some of the pitfalls of conventional thinking, and to institute progress toward long term goals." ([1973] 1978, 416). This presentation will consider how Bowen theory provides a way of thinking about the problem of domestic violence and how this thinking can inform new ways of aiding individuals and families facing this challenge. Findings from a multiyear program evaluation effort will be presented as a way of illustrating the impact of Bowen theory in clinical application.

Bowen, Murray. Family Therapy in Clinical Practice. New York: Jason Aronson.





Differentiation of Family System Inventory: Development and Validation

This presentation describes my doctoral dissertation research project,¹ a descriptive phenomenological qualitative study that gathered data from thirteen Bowen clinicians to determine the feasibility, acceptability, usability, and relevance of the "Differentiation of Family System Inventory" (DoFSI) founded on Bowen theory and on Dr. Papero's "Systems Model for Family Functioning."

According to the preponderance of the data, the DoFSI measured up to its user-friendly, practical, relevant, and useful aims in providing a tool for ongoing reflection and growth and is appropriate for both personal and professional use. The data affirmed the content validity and format of the inventory as well, while implicating and prompting a return to Dr. Bowen's seminal work, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, to ensure the content validity of the final version of the instrument. In keeping with the theme of the Spring Conference, the presentation asserts that, while the inventory could be used with families and family members impacted by violence to identify systemic patterns and support efforts to increase differentiation, it is not limited to this population.

¹ https://www.proquest.com/docview/2729492541 Bowen, Murray. *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*. New York: Jason Aronson.





Connect and Defend: An Evolutionary View of Inter-Group Violence

Historian John Bohstedt demonstrates the relevance of relationships—within and across groups—to the effectiveness of peasant food riots as a strategy for group survival. Similarly, sociologist Zeynep Tufekci correlates relationship quality to effective protest in the internet age. Military scholars likewise observe relationship as a variable in battlefield effectiveness. How do these observations of humans relate to phenomenon of "mobbing" and other collective antipredator behavior in nonhuman animals? Through the lens of Bowen theory this presentation will look at the research on relationships in coordinated group violence, by both human and nonhuman animals, toward an evolutionary view of intergroup violence.

Rev. Emlyn A. Ott, DMin eott@healthycongregations.com



Family and Organizational Leadership in a Woke and Bespoke World

In times of massive change, critique and adaptive upheaval, research shows that societal physical, emotional, and faith experiences are impacted. (Jenkins 2022, *Plagues and Their Aftermath*). The tendency to reject thoughts and perspectives that are not our own or within our direct experience are amplified. Violence (physical and relational) is heightened in families, organizations, and societal processes.

Differentiation of self provides a way of thinking about the variations that are observed and clarity about the impact of the forces of anxiety (both acute and chronic) and individuality and togetherness shifts. Societal emotional process incorporates the experience of global, multiracial, and interfaith communities. Societal process demonstrates the power of interlocking triangles and the reciprocity between families, organizations, and communities. As Murray Bowen states in *Family Therapy and Clinical Practice*,

Society's emotional reactiveness in dealing with societal problems is similar to the years of slow build-up of an emotional breakdown in a family. When the first symptom appears, the family either ignores it or does enough to relieve the immediate symptom, considering the problem solved. (273)

Making use of research with leaders in communities of faith and higher education settings for those preparing for leadership, this presentation will focus on the impact of differentiation of self in managing front-line leadership of organizations confronted with family and societal violence. The presentation will include perspectives on managing responses to global, multiracial, and interfaith differences and their impact on societal process.

Bowen, Murray. *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*. New York: Jason Aronson. Jenkins, Brian Michael. 2022. *Plaques and their Aftermaths*. Melville House.

Robert Davis, DMin robert@swg-unboxed.org



Utilizing Bowen Theory to Improve Community Collaboration Around Violence Prevention Policies

After the murder of George Floyd in 2020, national protests brought attention to police violence and systemic injustices within the criminal prosecution system. Community leaders in Denver, under the facilitation of Dr. Robert Davis, convened the Denver Task Force to Reimagine Policing and Public Safety. These efforts explored police, community, and family violence in an effort to develop policy recommendations that minimize violence and improve overall public safety.

In this presentation Dr. Davis discusses how Bowen theory informed his efforts to bring together community organizations, activists, community leaders, and city officials to develop over one hundred and twelve public safety policy recommendations, many of which centered around violence prevention. The presenter examines his efforts to encourage best thinking among individuals with differing philosophies and objectives, by utilizing, in his role as facilitator, the following three of the eight Bowen concepts: (1) how understanding interlocking triangles helped him remain in meaningful contact with the key members of this unique relationship/emotional system, (2) how understanding societal emotional process (regression in society) allowed him to show up in community meetings as a calmer, less anxious presence, and (3) how working on differentiation of self and understanding his approximate level of differentiation helped him to develop and live by a clear set of guiding principles.

Conference Events



Book Signing: Friday 1:00 pm

Author Anne S. McKnight will sign copies and answer questions about her new book *Thinking Systems: Applying Bowen Theory in Clinical Practice.*

The book draws on Faculty Case Conferences previously published in *Family*

Systems Journal. Dr. McKnight introduces each chapter with a brief presentation of a concept of Bowen theory. The discussion among faculty following each case presentation captures the value of systems thinking in clinical work with families.



Use the qr code to purchase at any time during the conference. Or go to bowencenter.org/publications. Checkout with Store Pickup to pickup your copy at the conference. Sale price ends April 28th.

Donor Reception: Friday 4:30 pm

What are the current priorities of, and challenges before, the Bowen Center? What questions do people in the Bowen network have about and for the Bowen Center?

Bowen Center donors and any conference attendee who would like to learn more about the work of the Center are invited to a reception to engage these questions and to connect with current Bowen Center leadership.

The reception will begin with 30 minutes both in-person and on Zoom. The last hour, complemented by hors d'oeuvres, will be in-person only, allowing for less formal connections.

Bowen Center Training Programs

Applications Open May 1, 2023

INTRODUCTION TO BOWEN'S THEORY

An introduction for people who have little to no formal training or education in Bowen theory. There are no prerequisites.

POSTGRADUATE TRAINING PROGRAM

Designed for those with prior training/coaching experience utilizing Bowen theory who want to establish a foundation in theory and learn to apply it in their personal and professional lives.

CONTINUING STUDIES PROGRAM

The Continuing Studies in Bowen Family Systems Theory Program is for professionals in various fields with at least one year of training in Bowen family systems theory.

FAITH LEADERSHIP SEMINAR

An online seminar for those leading faith communities. Includes guest speakers, small group, and individual coaching sessions. For those who have had experience with Bowen theory.

DIFFERENTIATION AT WORK

A think tank for those interested in the application of Bowen theory to work organizations: leadership, coaching, organizational development, family business and transfer of wealth in families.

CLINICAL STUDY GROUP

A monthly discussion format for applying Bowen theory to clinical cases.

SPANISH SPEAKING STUDY GROUP

The Spanish Speaking Study Group centers around the reading and discussion of Dr. Bowen's seminal book, Family Therapy in Clinical Practice.

Learn more at thebowencenter.org/training

Bowen Center Conferences and Resources

Clinical Conference Series

The Clinical Conferences combine presentations by Bowen Center faculty with recorded clinical interviews with families.



Upcoming: May 12, 2023

Clients Engagement with Bowen Family Systems Theory Presenter: Douglas C. Murphy, MA, LCMFT

Learn more: thebowencenter.org/clinical-conferences

Professional Lecture Series

Free and open to the public

Upcoming Lecture:

May 11, 2023 7:30 - 9:00 pm ET

Carrie Collier, PhD, LPC, CRC



Top 5 Questions About Bowen Family Systems Theory Now and Then: Murray Bowen's Archival Letters from the Bowen Center Collection.

Learn more: the bowencenter.org/professional-lectures

Spring Conference Resources

"Violence in the Family: An Overview." Dr. Roberta Holt interviews Bowen Center faculty member Douglas Murphy, MA, LMFT.

Family Systems Forum, Volume 20, No. 3, Fall 2018. "On Violence." Daniel V. Papero, PhD. Published by the Center for the Study of Natural Systems and the Family.

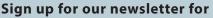
Family Systems Journal. Volume 5(2). "Child Abuse in Family Emotional Process." Walter Smith, PhD.

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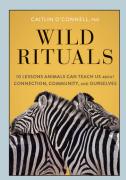
November 3-4, 2023

Guest Lecturer:

Caitlin O'Connell, PhD, author of Wild Rituals: 10 Lessons Animals Can Teach Us About Connection, Community, and Ourselves



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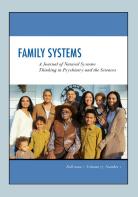
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Family Systems Journal

SPRING ISSUE: VOLUME 17, NUMBER 2



The journal's purpose is to advance the understanding of human emotional functioning and behavior based on Bowen theory.

The journal is published twice per year and is now available in print + digital and digital-only subscription options.

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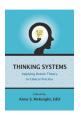
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About the Bowen Center

The Family Center was originally established by Murray Bowen, MD in 1975 under the auspices of Georgetown University. The Center became independent in 1990 as the Georgetown Family Center. In 2000 it was renamed for Dr. Bowen.



Dr. Bowen was a pioneer in family research who developed a new theory of human behavior and a different approach to the treatment of human problems. Through the varied activities of the Center, Bowen theory continues to be refined by the latest knowledge from the various scientific disciplines. The Bowen Center is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization.

Purchase Conference Recordings



Visit **thebowencenter.org/spring-conference.**Conference attendees, please check your event email for the attendee discount code (up to 50% off). Or contact *info@thebowencenter.org* after the conference.

Recordings are set to release on May 5, 2023

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