



ICCT2025 Antwerp 27-28-29 October 2025

International Conference Contextual Therapy

The need for connection. Relationship challenges in today's world.

Workshop session 3a (E) – 15.15hr.-16.15hr

Cymone Damon Sams & Tatiana Glebova

**The intergenerational balance of give and take:
Destructive entitlement and relational dynamics in black
families – an auto-ethnographic study.**



Summary:

This autoethnographic study explores the intergenerational patterns of give and take and destructive entitlement within Black families. Using the lens of contextual therapy, particularly the concepts of invisible loyalties and fairness in relationships (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1984/2013), this study examines the relational dynamics between my grandmother and her four daughters, each of whom navigated family obligations and expectations differently. The research highlights how patterns of relational debts, entitlement, and perceived injustices are transmitted across generations and how they shape identity, loyalty, and emotional well-being within Black families.

Purpose:

This study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how destructive entitlement and invisible loyalties influence relational ethics and intergenerational family structures. By integrating autoethnography with contextual therapy, it contributes to the discourse on how Black families balance expectations of caregiving, emotional reciprocity, and loyalty conflicts. The research also considers how digital tools, such as ancestry databases and DNA testing, influence self-perception and family narratives.

Approach:

The study employs an autoethnographic methodology (Adams & Manning, 2015), drawing from personal narratives, reflective journaling, and family storytelling to explore intergenerational family dynamics. Thematic analysis is used to identify patterns of give and take, entitlement, and familial obligations within the case of my grandmother and her daughters. The study also incorporates genealogical research as a contemporary tool that shapes identity and loyalty in the digital age.

Research Implications:

Findings from this study have implications for contextual therapy, particularly in expanding its application to Black families. It offers insights into how historical and sociocultural factors shape relational debts and entitlements, contributing to a culturally nuanced understanding of loyalty conflicts.

Furthermore, the research underscores the role of digital ancestry tools in reshaping family identity and obligations, raising questions about how emerging technologies impact contextual therapy's core principles.

Practical Implications:

Therapists working with Black families can apply these findings to better navigate intergenerational conflicts, address destructive entitlement, and facilitate reconciliation. The study also encourages contextual herapists to integrate digital ancestry research into therapeutic conversations as a means of exploring family arratives, loyalties, and unspoken obligations.

Presenter:

Adjunct Professor | Pacific Oaks College

- Developed and adapted course materials based on provided syllabi to meet learning objectives.
- Taught seven courses across online and in-person formats, utilizing diverse teaching methodologies to engage students. Courses include:
 - o Practicum I, Practicum II, and Practicum III – Clinical Portfolio
 - o Child Adolescent Therapy
 - o Cross-Cultural Mores & Values
 - o Communication and Counseling Skills
 - o African American Psychology
- Delivered lectures, facilitated discussions, and assessed student performance to foster academic growth.

Clinical Supervisor | Open Door Counseling

- Supervise and mentor a multidisciplinary team of clinicians, ensuring adherence to best practices and ethical guidelines in sex offender treatment.
- Conduct case consultations, provide oversight for treatment plans, and facilitate staff development through ongoing training and support.
- Coordinate and implement evidence-based interventions tailored to individual and group treatment needs.
- Ensure compliance with CASOMB (California Sex Offender Management Board) standards and provide direct services as a CASOMB-certified independent provider.
- Collaborate with legal and community stakeholders to support client rehabilitation and public safety.
- Maintain documentation and reporting standards to meet regulatory and organizational requirements.

Co-Founder, Lead Clinician, & Clinical Supervisor Reconnect Marriage and Family Counseling

- Executive Leadership: Founded and oversee a thriving group private practice specializing in psychotherapy, managing business operations, strategy, and growth.
- Clinical Services: Provide individual, couples, and group therapy with a focus on attachment, trauma, and psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy.
- Supervision: Lead weekly group supervision for staff, incorporating case conceptualization and specialized training in areas such as attachment theory and contextual therapy.
- Program Development: Designed and launched innovative therapy programs, including group therapy services and training curricula for staff development.
- Marketing & Outreach: Develop and implement marketing strategies through blogging, social media outreach, partnerships with local businesses, and Google advertising.
- Education & Training: Conduct workshops and continuing education for staff and the broader community, with a focus on attachment, trauma, and cultural perspectives in therapy.
- Client-Centered Care: Transitioned the practice toward private pay while maintaining accessible services and ethical client care standards.

- Specialized Expertise: Advocate for and integrate African American experiences and perspectives into therapeutic practices, with a focus on loyalty, family dynamics, and healing trauma.

References:

- Adams, T.E., & Manning, J. (2015) . Autoethnography and family research, *Journal of Family Theory Review*, 7(4), 350–366. doi:10.1111/jftr.12116.
- Boszormenyi-Nagy, I., & Spark, G. (2013). *Invisible loyalties*. Routledge. (Original work published 1984)



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Workshop session 3b (E) – 15.15hr.-16.15hr.

Tanya Defferary

Understanding dissociation through a contextual therapy perspective.



Summary:

Dissociation is a protective mechanism enabling individuals to mentally detach from traumatic or overwhelming experiences (van der Hart, Nijenhuis, & Steele, 2006). While initially adaptive, the brain's propensity to establish patterns can result in the habitual use of dissociation in response to triggering events (Porges, 2011). Dissociation exists on a continuum, ranging from transient detachment to complex conditions like Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID) (Putnam, 1997). This paper focuses on the less severe manifestations of dissociation, utilising a Contextual Therapeutic Framework (Nagy & Krasner, 1986; Nieuwenbroek, 2017) to reframe it as a relational phenomenon. Central concepts such as delegations, hidden loyalties, destructive entitlement, and unblaming (exoneration) are explored to understand dissociation's origins within relational and intergenerational dynamics.

Additionally, the Structural Dissociation Model (SDM) is integrated, highlighting the division between Apparently Normal Parts (ANPs) and Emotional Parts (EPs) of the personality. ANPs manage daily functioning by suppressing traumatic memories, while EPs hold unresolved emotional pain and trauma (van der Hart et al., 2006). This structural division is contextualised as a response to relational obligations and unaddressed injustices (Schwartz, 1995).

The paper emphasizes the importance of addressing dissociation's relational and structural roots, cautioning that interventions like mindfulness and grounding exercises, if applied without this understanding, can inadvertently exacerbate anxiety and potentially reinforce dissociative patterns (Treleaven, 2018). Practical therapeutic approaches, including the "via the other side" technique (Nieuwenbroek, 2017) and adapted empty-chair methods, are presented to support clients in reconnecting with relational contexts and fostering integration. By merging relational and structural perspectives, this paper offers a comprehensive lens for understanding and managing dissociation therapeutically.

Presenter:

I work primarily from a Contextual Therapy perspective, while also drawing on techniques from Gestalt Therapy, Transactional Analysis, and Parts Therapy.

In addition, I offer play therapy, integrating these approaches through expressive arts modalities such as sandtray work.

Counselling Psychologist - Independent Practice

- Provide psychotherapeutic services to adult and child clients, as well as couples and families
- Provide clinical and research supervision to psychology students (Masters and BPsych, respectively)
- Provide research editing services and assistance to psychology students (Doctoral, Masters and BPsych)

Nelson Mandela University, P.E

- Guest Lecturer
- Develop and lecture – Play therapy training for NMU first year Masters Students

Counselling Psychology South Africa

- Executive Committee Member Workshop Developer & Facilitator
- Designing and leading local and international workshops and retreats through my company, Global Therapy Connect.

References:

- Boszormenyi-Nagy, I., & Krasner, B. R. (1986). Between give and take: A clinical guide to contextual therapy. Brunner/Mazel.
- Nieuwenbroek, A. (2017). Contextual methodology: The 12 principles. English Translation: South Africa.
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- Putnam, F. W. (1997). Dissociation in children and adolescents: A developmental perspective. The Guilford Press.
- Schwartz, R. C. (1995). Internal family systems therapy. Guilford Press.
- Treleaven, D. A. (2018). Trauma-sensitive mindfulness: Practices for safe and transformative healing. W. W. Norton & Company.
- van der Hart, O., Nijenhuis, E. R. S., & Steele, K. (2006). The haunted self: Structural dissociation and the treatment of chronic traumatization. W.W. Norton & Company.



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Workshop session 3c (NL) – 15.15hr.-16.15hr.

An Van Herck

Vastgeschroefd: tussen taal, theorie en ontmoeting.



Summary:

A great merit of Iván Böszörményi-Nagy is observing, expanding and conceptualising what he saw happening between people. We have gratefully received the rich contextual thinking from him as a legacy. In supervision, we often hear: 'Now I grasp the framework, the concepts and how everything is connected. I look from the five dimensions and can form a lot of hypotheses... but now? How am I going to work with it with these people in front of me?' It is now up to us to translate Nagy's theory- indeed philosophy- into ordinary workable human language in our work with clients. Our figurative language, metaphors, sayings, ... are a great wealth of human translations of what plays on relational ethics. 'I lost myself', 'In the end, you have to do it all by yourself', 'I can't find my bearings', 'Who is behind me', 'It's a matter of give and take', 'Watering the wine', ... Humans have language for all the concepts Nagy has given us. After all, these are taken from life. So: relax, just listen and dare to be creative. In our training centre, this human language is the starting point for the search for helpful metaphors, which students - after thorough literature of the basic works - are given. In this workshop, we zoom in on the conviction that often resounds in conversations: 'Between us, it's completely stuck!' Recognisable? It brought us to the metaphor of 'the screw'. People have thoughts about themselves, about the other person, about the relationship. 'That's the kind of daughter I am, that's the way my father is, that's the way it always goes between us now.' These images sometimes get screwed, 'that will never change'. In the workshop, we glean such language from our clients. And we look together at the factors that make this screw get stuck? What can loosen this screw? What is the gain and what is the risk? How can you, as a contextual worker, be meaningful in this?

Presenter:

An Van Herck (°1978) is Master in Orthopedagogy (KUL, BE). She has been working as a contextual therapist in her own practice for over 15 years. She is a recognised supervisor (BVRGS) and is a staff member at IPRR, where she passes on the contextual philosophy to future relationship and family therapists and system counsellors. She is co-author of 'Handbook of Contextual Counselling' (Pelckmans, 2022). Since 2022, she has been president of the Belgian Association for Relationship and Family Therapy and Systemic Counselling, (BVRGS). She is married and mother of four.

References:

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An Van Herck

Vastgeschroefd: tussen taal, theorie en ontmoeting.

Inhoud:

Een grote verdienste van Iván Böszörményi-Nagy is dat hij observeerde, uitbreidde en conceptualiseerde wat hij zag gebeuren tussen mensen. We hebben zijn rijke contextuele denkwijze dankbaar als erfenis ontvangen. In opleiding en supervisie klinkt echter vaak: 'Nu begrijp ik het kader, de concepten en hoe alles met elkaar verbonden is. Ik bekijk het vanuit de vijf dimensies en kan veel hypothesen formuleren... maar nu? Hoe ga ik hiermee aan de slag met deze mensen voor mij?' Het is nu aan ons om de theorie – en zelfs de filosofie – van Nagy te vertalen naar gewone, bruikbare mensentaal in het werk met cliënten. Onze beeldende taal, metaforen, gezegden... vormen een schat aan menselijke vertalingen van wat er speelt op het gebied van de relationele ethiek. 'Ik ben mezelf kwijtgeraakt', 'Uiteindelijk moet je het allemaal zelf doen', 'Ik kan mijn weg niet vinden', 'Wie staat er achter me?', 'Het is een kwestie van geven en nemen', 'Water bij de wijn doen', ... Mensen hebben taal voor alle concepten die Nagy ons heeft gegeven. Deze zijn immers ontleend aan het leven. Dus: ontspan, luister gewoon en durf creatief te zijn. Op het IPRR, het opleidingscentrum waar ik doceer, is deze menselijke taal het uitgangspunt voor het zoeken naar nuttige metaforen, die studenten – na grondige literatuurstudie van de basiswerken – krijgen aangereikt. In deze workshop zoomen we in op de overtuiging die vaak in gesprekken terugkomt: 'Tussen ons zit het helemaal vast!' Herkenbaar? Het bracht ons bij de metafoor van 'de schroef'. Mensen hebben gedachten over zichzelf, over de ander, over de relatie. 'Zo ben ik nu eenmaal als dochter, zo is mijn vader nu eenmaal, zo gaat het nu eenmaal tussen ons.' Deze beelden raken soms vastgeschroefd, 'dat zal nooit veranderen'. In de workshop sporen we dergelijke taal op bij onze cliënten. En we kijken samen naar de factoren die ervoor zorgen dat deze schroef vast komt te zitten? Wat kan deze schroef losmaken? Wat is de winst en wat is het risico? Hoe kun je daar als contextueel werker betekenisvol in zijn?

Persoonlijke gegevens:

An Van Herck (°1978) is Master in de Klinische Orthopedagogiek (KUL, BE). Ze werkt al meer dan 16 jaar als contextueel therapeut in haar eigen praktijk. Ze is erkend supervisor (BVRGS) en werkt bij IPRR, waar ze de contextuele filosofie doorgeeft aan toekomstige relatie- en gezinstherapeuten, seksuologen en systeemcounselors. Ze is coauteur van 'Handboek Contextuele Hulpverlening' (Pelckmans, 2022). Sinds 2022 is ze voorzitter van de Belgische Vereniging voor Relatie- en Gezinstherapie en Systemische Begeleiding (BVRGS). Ze is getrouwd en moeder van vier.



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Workshop session 3d (NL) – 15.15hr.-16.15hr.

Cathy Van Gorp & Kelly Vercaigne

Wat als de enige weg naar veilige connectie disconnectie is?



Summary:

Wat maakt het moeilijk om kritisch na te denken over het bewegen wég van bloedbanden? Waarin zit de uitdaging om dit te zien als een op verandering gerichte en welzijnsbevorderende interventie? Zijn de meest toxische systemen het moeilijkst om te verlaten omdat dit een definitieve afstand betekent van het recht om je veilig verbonden te voelen?

Als volwassene kan het destructief zijn om te blijven investeren in of gefocust te blijven op zorgfiguren wanneer de balans fundamenteel onfair is. Op deze manier ontstaan intergenerationele patronen van verlies en pijn.

Op zo'n definitieve manier voor jezelf kiezen is diep pijnlijk en voelt als een aanval op je eigen bestaansrecht. Dit leidt tot een heel specifiek loyaliteitsconflict, waarin men op hechtingsvlak wordt uitgedaagd en opnieuw geconfronteerd met de pijn van het oorspronkelijke verlies.

Wanneer de balans fundamenteel onfair is, wordt het destructief om je te blijven richten op zorgfiguren of te blijven zoeken naar erkenning van hen. Bewustzijn van deze pijn is noodzakelijk om een einde te maken aan de voortdurende strijd om erkenning.

Het herstellen van de relatie met jezelf wordt de opdracht wanneer het herstellen van de relatie met de belangrijke ander onmogelijk blijkt. Soms is het nodig om afstand te nemen van de familie, meer of minder afstand te creëren, of zelfs volledig te breken, om zo een fundamentele verandering tot stand te brengen— voor jezelf én voor de generaties die volgen.

Presenter:

Kelly Vercaigne is getrouwd, mama van een 2 vrolijke jongedames van 11 en 2 stoere, zorgzame broers van 18 en 19. Kelly was oprichter van inloophuis T'hus in Waregem, gaf les in de opleiding tot ervaringswerker in UCLL Heverlee. Ze werkt momenteel als contextueel counselor in groepspraktijk Lichtbaken in Oostnieuwkerke, als contextbegeleider in Arcade in Oostende, en freelance spreker en supervisor samen met Cathy in Ck-nieuwe verhouding. Samen schreven zij het boek 'Trauma Verteert/d' (Beefcake, 2023).

Cathy Van Gorp is getrouwd en mama van 2 jongvolwassenen. Ze is klinisch psycholoog en systeemtherapeut. Ze startte haar carrière in Inghelburch in Brugge. Daarna was ze 12j coördinator en groepstherapeut in het dagziekenhuis de Bres AZ Groeninge in Kortrijk. Op heden werkt ze als traumatherapeut met vluchtelingen en migranten in CGG Kortrijk. Ze heeft haar eigen privépraktijk in Zedelgem, schreef en redigeerde meerdere systeemtherapeutische artikelen en het boek 'Ik was gestoord' (Roularta, 2008).