



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.

Heather Warren

Living Childfree.



Summary:

Most of the contextual therapy theory is devoted to parent-child relationships as parenting is considered “the chief dynamic principle in the intergenerational order of being” (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986/2014, p. 99). However, family form and structure have experienced significant changes globally. One of those changes is a decrease in the birth rates (Ritchie, 2023) and an increase in the number of adults staying child-free by choice, at least in the Western countries (Barroso, 2021). While there have always been some individuals who for various reasons decided not to have children, clinicians may face more clients either asking for help to make a decision or to deal with the relational consequences of the decision.

There is not much research on this group. One study found no differences in life satisfaction and limited differences in personality traits between childfree individuals and parents, not-yet-parents, or childless individuals (Watling Neal & Neal, 2021). Another study found no significant differences in subjective well-being between childfree women and mothers in a sample of Israeli women (Shenaar-Golan & Lans, 2023). At the same time, childfree individuals may experience some negative attitudes from peers, family members as well as from larger sociocultural context. Examples from very different countries, such as the United States and Russia, will illustrate this point.

In this presentation we will discuss dynamics in families of individuals who are childfree either by choice or not, using the five-dimensional contextual therapy framework illustrated with both life and clinical examples. As the cornerstone dimension of the contextual approach, relational ethics will be discussed in-depth. In addition, special attention will be given to the dimension of facts including sociocultural context, gender, and medical condition. The contextual therapy theory offers a valuable lens through which to conceptualize possible individual and family dynamics and factors associated with living childfree. Some individuals may struggle with loyalty conflicts or how to pass on their generational legacy. In addition, in some cases a decision to have children can be rooted in loyalties to the nation, to the ethnic, cultural or gender group, and correspondingly, the opposite choice may bring up loyalty and legacy issues to the surface.

In this presentation we will discuss living childfree from the contextual therapy perspective including exploration of its main tenets as well as possible clinical recommendations illustrated with clinical examples.

Presenter:

Program Coordinator, 2024- Present, CRF Crossroads Family Center

Clinician, 2023-2024, CRF Crossroads Family Center

Practicum Student, 2021-2022, CRF Crossroads Family Center

Student Assistant, 2021-2022, Alliant International University, San Diego, Dean's Office

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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 predominantly from a Contextual Therapy perspective, utilising techniques from Gestalt Therapy, Transactional Analysis and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy.

- 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

- Lecturer
- Developed and lectured – Play therapy training for NMU first year Masters Students

References:

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- Nieuwenbroek, A. (2017). Contextual methodology: The 12 principles. English Translation: South Africa.
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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.

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

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).