



ICCT2025 Antwerp 27-28-29 October 2025

International Conference Contextual Therapy

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

Workshop session 2a (E) – 13.30hr-14.30hr.

Heather Warren & Tatiana Glebova

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

References:

- Barroso, A. (2021, November 19). Growing share of childless adults in U.S. don't expect to ever have children. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2021/11/19/growing-share-of-childless-adults-in-u-s-dont-expect-to-ever-have-children/>
- Boszormenyi-Nagy, I., & Krasner, B. (2014). Between give and take: A clinical guide to contextual therapy. Routledge. (Original work published 1986)
- Ritchie, H. (2023, September 27). Which countries have fertility rates above or below the replacement level? Our World in Data. <https://ourworldindata.org/data-insights/which-countries-have-fertility-rates-above-or-below-the-replacement-level>
- Shenaar-Golan, V., & Lans, O. (2023). Measuring differentiation of self to evaluate subjective well-being in women who are childfree by choice. The Family Journal, 31(2), 278-287.
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Workshop session 2B (E/NL) – 13.30hr.-14.30hr.

Greteke De Vries & Hanneke Meulink-Korf

Experiences from contextual pastoral care-and-counselling and interfaith encounters, inspired by contextual therapy.



Summary:

The influence of Contextual Therapy (CT) on pastoral care-and-counselling needs to be clarified and promoted. In the Netherlands, in 2001, the Foundation for Contextual Pastoral Care-and-Counselling (CPCC) was set up. Since then (and even before!) it organizes introductory courses and it issues a journal on contextual pastoral care. This Foundation provided a two year post-academic course in contextual pastoral care and counselling for church ministers and spiritual caregivers. In January 2025 this course was transferred to the CHE, a Dutch university for applied sciences. Dissemination of contextual pastoral care and counselling to protestant theological institutions in Central Europe and South Africa and international dialogues about contextual pastoral care broadened perspectives and practices of professionals from different cultural/religious backgrounds. This shows, f.i, when they take the position of multidirected partiality while conducting rituals such as baptisms, weddings, funerals, and also when they intervene in conflicts within communities of faith. They also draw from relational ethics to reflect on holy scriptures and religious doctrines.

This pastoral approach proves to be more than a one-way application. CPCC research contributes to foundational concepts of CT. Notions about human relationships from the philosopher E. Levinas were brought into conversation with the Buber-concept of dialogue that had inspired Boszormeny-Nagy so much. Especially the contextual concept of loyalty as 'a triadic configuration' can be related to 'the third one' (Levinas) for whom 'I' am responsible too (so the focus of professionals is not only on 'I' and 'you').

Presently, the boundaries between family systems and other social systems are weakening as a result of the still growing influence of globalisation, social media and the internet. Therefore, pastoral counsellors often meet people who are distressed, f. i. by the preference of their loved ones for another cultural or (non-) religious conviction. How to help to prevent (further) alienation between these family-members? Or they take care of blended families who come from different backgrounds and need to find a common ground. Moreover, contextual pastoral counsellors or ministers may be involved in interfaith encounters in the institutions they are working in, or in the neighbourhoods their communities are situated, and then 'intersectionality' should be considered as a tool for understanding destructive entitlement and 'religious literacy' is needed for fair bridging.

In this workshop we will elaborate on CT and CPCC by reading a religious (biblical) tale as a common ground for a multilogue. The story is about an intercultural refugee family with mother in law Naomi and her foreign daughters in law Ruth and Orpa. We offer a (re-) introduction of concepts such as 'relational and situational injustice', 'destructive entitlement and frozen trauma', 'loyalty conflict', 'connecting speech', 'the third one', 'exoneration', 'inequity aversion' and 'fair bridging'.

Presenter:

Hanneke Meulink-Korf, PhD, (1948) is retired assistant/ associate professor in Theology (Pastoral care and counselling) at University of Amsterdam and Leiden University. She is a practicing contextual therapist and supervisor. She is registered by Vereniging van Contextueel werkers and by Vereniging Persoonsgerichte experientiele Psychotherapie (until 2025). She wrote several books and articles. Together with the late dr. Aat van Rhijn she published two books, both translated in English. She was one of the initiators of Contextual pastoral care in the Netherlands and (comparable to this) the master programme Dialogical Intergenerational Pastoral Process at Stellenbosch University (South Africa).

*Meulink-Korf, H. & A. van Rhijn 2016. The unexpected Third, Contextual pastoral care, counselling and ministry: an Introduction and Reflection. Wellington: CLF. Translated from the original of 2002 by Noeme Visser.

*Van Rhijn, A. & H. Meulink-Korf. 1997/2019. Appealing Spaces, the ethics of humane networking – the interplay between justice and relational healing in caregiving. Wellington: Biblemedia. Ed. Transl. and adapt. by prof Daniël Louw.

Together with Catherine Ducommun-Nagy and Greteke de Vries:

*Ducommun-Nagy, C. et al. 2023. Revitalizing Relationships. The resources of Contextual Therapy with inspiration from the pastoral process and interfaith studies. Stellenbosch: SUN Media.

Greteke de Vries, MA, (1959) is a Dutch theologian and minister of a protestant congregation in a multicultural neighbourhood in Amsterdam. She studied CPCC (with van Rhijn and Meulink-Korf and CT (with among others May Michielsen). She promotes and studies interfaith encounters. She is an experienced contextual pastoral minister and counsellor. She wrote a.o. a well-received biography on Aat van Rhijn, initiator of contextual pastoral care, and on dialogue in interfaith relationships. She is president of the Foundation for Contextual Pastoral Care-and-Counselling (CPCC) and member of Vereniging van Contextueel Werkers (VCW).

*Greteke de Vries, 2010. Meer dan voldoende te eten en een vrolijk hart- Aat van Rhijn, dominee en therapeut in het spoor van Nagy en Levinas, Vught: Skandalon

Together with Catherine Ducommun-Nagy and Hanneke Meulink-Korf:

*Ducommun-Nagy, C. et al. 2023. Revitalizing Relationships. The resources of Contextual Therapy with inspiration from the pastoral process and interfaith studies. Stellenbosch: SUN Media.



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Workshop session 2c (NL) – 13.30hr.-14.30hr.

Ard Nieuwenbroek

Elviskinderen, Living in the shadow of your passed sibling.



Summary:

The loss of a child has a profound impact upon the structure and dynamics of a family. This phenomenon is illustrated by the life of the late singer, Elvis Presley, who was born a twin, shortly after his brother was stillborn. The term "Elvischildren" refers to individuals who have lost a sibling either before or after their own birth. In American literature, these children are often called "replacement children" (Krell & Rabkin, 1979). However, many parents dislike this term, as they do not want to view their child as a replacement. However, this dynamic often occurs subconsciously. I therefore prefer to use the term Elvischildren to explain this concept. Since the 1960s, researchers in the United States, (e.g. Cain & Cain, 1964) have emphasized the profound effects of a child's death on family dynamics, narratives, career and relationship choices, as well as the existential motivations of the surviving siblings. Some Elvis children face challenges in their relationships with their parents, who, often unconsciously and unintentionally, may resist forming a close bond with them due to fear of another loss. Alternatively, parents may become overprotective, excessively indulgent, or even physically or emotionally abusive. Another challenge is that Elvischildren often (unconsciously) attempt to "make up" for their parents' loss, neglecting their own needs and struggling with self-validation. In recent years in my therapeutic practice, I have worked with many individuals, both young and old, who are Elvischildren. Their challenges are diverse, often encompassing burnout, repeated relationship failures, and depression. Using contextual family genograms, we frequently identify the root causes of their difficulties. Recognizing and understanding their identity as an Elvis child provides a sense of relief and paves the way for a contextual journey, one that sometimes involve their family of origin directly, and at others through fantasy and imagination. In this workshop, I will share my clinical and contextual experiences in recognizing and supporting Elvischildren.

Presenter:

Social Pedagogue and Contextual Therapist (VCW Certified)

References:

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 - Nieuwenbroek, A., & Kimenai, J. (2023). Elviskinderen, uit de schaduw van je overleden broer of zus, ACCO.
 - Nieuwenbroek, A., & Kimenai, J. (2024). Burn-out bij kinderen en jongeren. ACCO.
-

Ard Nieuwenbroek

Elviskinderen, leven in de schaduw van je overleden broer of zus.

Beschrijving:

Het verlies van een kind heeft een diepgaande invloed op de structuur en dynamiek van een gezin. Dit fenomeen wordt geïllustreerd door het leven van de overleden zanger Elvis Presley, die als tweeling werd geboren, kort nadat zijn broer doodgeboren was. De term "Elviskinderen" verwijst naar individuen die een broer of zus verloren voor of na hun eigen geboorte. In de Amerikaanse literatuur worden deze kinderen vaak "replacement children" genoemd (Krell & Rabkin, 1979). Veel ouders hebben echter een hekel aan deze term, omdat ze hun kind niet als een vervanger willen zien. Daarom gebruik ik liever de term Elviskinderen. Sinds de jaren 1960 hebben onderzoekers in de Verenigde Staten (bv. Cain & Cain, 1964) de nadruk gelegd op de ingrijpende effecten van de dood van een kind op de familiedynamiek, carrière- en relatiekeuzes, evenals de existentiële motivaties van de overlevende broers en zussen. Sommige Elviskinderen worden geconfronteerd met uitdagingen in hun relaties met hun ouders, die, vaak onbewust en onbedoeld, zich kunnen verzetten tegen het vormen van een hechte band met hen uit angst voor een nieuw verlies. Ouders kunnen ook overbeschermend worden, overdreven toegeeflijk, of zelfs fysiek of emotioneel mishandelend. Een andere uitdaging is dat Elviskinderen vaak (onbewust) proberen het verlies van hun ouders "goed te maken", waarbij ze hun eigen behoeften verwaarlozen en worstelen met zelfvalidatie. In de afgelopen jaren heb ik in mijn therapeutische praktijk met veel mensen gewerkt, zowel jong als oud, die Elviskinderen zijn. Hun uitdagingen zijn divers en omvatten vaak burn-out, herhaalde mislukte relaties en depressie. Het erkennen en begrijpen van hun identiteit als Elviskind geeft een gevoel van opluchting en maakt de weg vrij voor een contextuele reis. Een reis die veelal direct betrekking heeft op hun gezin van herkomst. Soms door gebruik te maken van ethische verbeelding. In deze workshop deel ik mijn klinische en contextuele ervaringen in het herkennen en ondersteunen van Elviskinderen.

Workshopgever:

drs. Ard Q. Nieuwenbroek,
Sociaal pedagoog en contextueel therapeut (VCW reg.)

Referenties :

- Cain, A. C., & Cain, B. S. (1964). On replacing a child. *Journal of the American Academy of Child Psychiatry*, 3(3), 443–456
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Workshop session 2d (F) – 13.30hr.-14.30hr.

Rudy Gavage & Christophe Gabriel

La partialité multidirectionnelle à l'épreuve de la co-intervention : réflexions sur l'équilibre relationnel et la justice dans le sous-système thérapeutique.



Summary:

La partialité multidirectionnelle, définie par Boszormenyi-Nagy et Spark (1973), constitue une pierre angulaire de la thérapie contextuelle. Elle invite le thérapeute à manifester une prise de position singulière envers chacun des membres composant le système relationnel, y compris ceux qui sont absents, réduits au silence, ainsi que les membres des générations à venir (Haxhe, 2024, p.165). Plus qu'une simple technique, cette posture clinique et éthique représente un outil puissant de reconnaissance et de justice relationnelle, comme l'ont souligné plusieurs auteurs contemporains (Heyndrickx, 2024 ; Ducommun-Nagy, 2025). Dans le même temps, la co-intervention est reconnue, dans diverses approches thérapeutiques, comme un levier pour enrichir le regard clinique, offrir un soutien mutuel aux thérapeutes et créer un espace partagé qui améliore le dialogue thérapeutique, transforme leur posture, élargit leur compréhension commune et renforce la confiance réciproque (Lagogianni, C., Georgaca, E., & Christoforidou, D. 2023 ; Valdiviezo-Oña, J., Moreno-Oliva, M., Trujillo, J., Unda-López, A., Ortiz-Mancheno, N. and Paz, C., 2025).

Or, la littérature contextuelle s'est principalement centrée sur la partialité multidirectionnelle dans la relation entre le thérapeute et la famille, sans explorer en profondeur la façon dont cette partialité s'observe dans le sous-système thérapeutique lui-même, lorsque deux cliniciens interviennent ensemble. C'est précisément cette réflexion que notre atelier souhaite ouvrir : comment la co-intervention, loin d'être un simple partage de tâches, peut devenir un espace privilégié où se rejouent et se négocient les principes de justice relationnelle qui fondent l'approche contextuelle.

À partir de vignettes cliniques issues de pratiques en co-thérapie, nous illustrerons comment deux intervenants peuvent, chacun à leur manière, porter une partialité envers différents membres d'un système, et comment leurs divergences, mises en dialogue, peuvent soutenir la restauration d'un équilibre relationnel plus large. Nous inviterons les participants à réfléchir à la façon dont certaines loyautés, asymétries et responsabilités peuvent apparaître entre co-thérapeutes, et à la manière dont leur relation peut, dans certains cas, devenir une ressource clinique.

Nous souhaitons que notre workshop soit résolument interactif en invitant les participants à travailler sous-groupes sur de brèves vignettes cliniques, en adoptant chacun une posture de partialité distincte, avant de réfléchir à la manière dont ces propositions peuvent s'articuler pour soutenir l'intervention contextuelle. Plus largement, notre démarche vise à nourrir une réflexion collective sur les potentialités et les limites de la co-intervention en thérapie contextuelle, et à enrichir la compréhension de la partialité multidirectionnelle dans ses dimensions les plus concrètes et partagées.

Presenter:

Rudy GAVAGE, psychologue clinicien (Clinique Psychologique et Logopédique Universitaire de Liège), assistant-doctorant (Université de Liège, département de Psychologie, Service de Clinique Systémique et Psychopathologie Relationnelle) et étudiant en dernière année à l'Institut de Formation et de Clinique Contextuelles L'Ardoise Pivotante.

Christophe GABRIEL, psychologue clinicien (Clinique Psychologique et Logopédique Universitaire de Liège) et assistant (Université de Liège, département de Psychologie, Service de Clinique Systémique et Psychopathologie Relationnelle).

References:

Boszormenyi-Nagy, I., & Spark, G. M. (1973). Invisible loyalties: Reciprocity in intergenerational family therapy. Harper & Row.

Ducommun-Nagy, C. (2025). The essence of contextual therapy, its place in the field of family therapy, and its role in the future. *Family Process*, 64(1), e13070. <https://doi.org/10.1111/famp.13070>

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Heyndrickx, P. (2024, mars 25-26). La responsabilité et la partialité multidirectionnelle [Communication]. Colloque Contextuel n°8 « La responsabilité : un engagement pour la postérité », L'Ardoise Pivotante, Liège, Belgique.

Lagogianni, C., Georgaca, E., & Christoforidou, D. (2023). Co-therapy in Open Dialogue: Transforming therapists' self in a shared space. *Frontiers in psychology*, 14, 1083502. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1083502>

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