



ICCT2025 Antwerp 27-28-29 October 2025

International Conference Contextual Therapy

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

Workshop session 7a (E) – 15.45hr.-16.45hr.

Mayumi Y. Douglass & Tatjana Glebova

Contextual therapy's five-dimensional framework on trustworthiness in online-only relationships.



Summary:

Reaching a high level of trustworthiness is a desirable goal for many family therapists. Contextual therapists identify themselves as facilitators of a dialogue aimed at “the restoration of fairness, trustworthiness, and direct, non- self- sacrificing expressions of loyalty” (Ducommun-Nagy, 2024, p. 4). Trust plays a central role in face-to-face interactions and in online-only relationships. Online trust and face-to-face trust seem to be based on the same fundamental components (Coli et al., 2023).

The presenters are family therapy practitioners in the United States, where it has been found that 96% of individuals aged 18 -29 report having a smartphone, and 90% use at least one social media site. Moreover, 30% of individuals have used online dating applications, and at least two-thirds of those who make contact do not meet in person (Pew Research Center, 2019, 2020, 2023).

Meeting online has displaced friends as the main way heterosexual couples in the United States meet (Rosenfeld et al., 2019). Most teenagers and young adults engage in communication with friends and romantic partners using online instant messaging, and there has been an increase in the number of friendships and romantic relationships that are described as online-only (Nesi et al., 2018). Researchers have concluded that the rates and degrees of identity misrepresentation in virtual relationships tend to be more extreme (Campbell & Parker, 2022; see also Yang et al., 2021).

Examining relational ethics associated with trustworthiness and self-delineation in online-only relationships has become a new task for contextual therapists. This presentation's aim is to apply contextual therapy's five-dimensional framework to online relationships using a clinical case of a young male engaged in an online-only romantic relationship. Attendees will be invited to design clinical questions guided by the dimensions of relational ethics and mutual becoming.

This presentation will also delve into the ingredients that contribute to the attribution of trust in the context of youth' online interactions, such as the willingness to introduce new online friends or romantic partners to the inner circle of in-person friends and family members, to share

pictures with online friends and communicate via video calls, and to spend time together in person. An exploration of these ingredients in online relationships will include the phenomenon of catfishing, in which a person who uses a false identity online to involve themselves in one or more romantic relationships (Campbell & Parker, 2022).

Presenter:

Faculty Member, Lecturer University of San Diego.

Department of Counseling & Marital and Family Therapy.

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- Yang, C., Holden, S. M., Sean M., Ariati, J. (2021). Social Media and Psychological Well-Being Among Youth: The Multidimensional Model of Social Media Use. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*(24), 631–650. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10567-021-00359-z>



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Workshop session 7B (NL) – 15.45hr.-16.45hr.

Catherine Ducommun-Nagy

The dialectic theory of the personality in the area of virtual relationships.



Summary:

This workshop will focus on a reassessment the Dialectic Theory of the Personality proposed by Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy in the 1960, including his proposed six modes of relating, in the light of the new ways of relating that have been made possible by the internet, social media, and the AI.

This theory is based on a relational definition of the Self: no Self without an Other and no Other without a Self Furthermore, the need to relate to others as a source of definition/delineation of the Self is described as a fundamental/ontic need that takes precedence over any other needs and becomes a determinant of our behavior that is accounted for in the ontic/fifth dimension of the multidimensional model of relational dynamics proposed in contextual therapy.

In the area of the internet, one can wonder if contacts established on social media can remain a source of Self/Other definition. What happens to the Self/Other contraposition when people use avatars to interact online? What happens to the Self/Other dialogue if our questions are answered by AI, not by humans who could respond from their own vantage point and challenge ours? What happens to the Self when AI guided robots start to replace humans as personal assistants or companions?

After a brief summary of the main point of the theory, the presenter will try to answer these questions in dialogue with the audience, encouraging participants to bring in their own questions, observations, and reflections.

The goal of this workshop is to foster the reflection of therapists who wonder about the place of relational therapy, being any form of couple and family therapy or contextual therapy in a word in which virtual relationships may take the precedence over actual encounters.

Presenter:

Prof. Catherine Ducommun-Nagy MD is a Swiss board certified specialist in psychiatry and psychotherapy of children and adults and a contextual family therapist. She is a Clinical Associate Professor of couple and family therapy at Drexel University, Philadelphia and the president of the Institute for Contextual Growth, Inc. founded by her late husband Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy in Glenside PA. She is teaching worldwide as a presenter at national and international conference and as invited lecturer for private and academic programs. She publishes extensively on contextual therapy and its applications in French and English.

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

Workshop session 7C (NL) – 15.45hr.-16.45hr.

Yvette Desmet

**Connection and parentification in a digital era.
New challenges, everlasting needs.**



Summary:

With people in 2024 spending as much as 60.76% of their time online, it is crucial to examine the quality of the connections they form—both wireless and wired.

How has daily life changed in the short term, particularly post-COVID? In what ways have expressions of parentification evolved within the digital landscape?

I will explore these questions in depth during an insightful workshop at ICCT2025, structured in 3 parts.

PART 1. YOUR WORK/HOME IS WHERE YOUR LAPTOP IS

In the first part of the workshop, we start with a representation of Andolfi's house (see attachment), illustrating the placement of digital devices such as smartphones and laptops on different floors.

Afterwards, we will address several key questions together:

How do different generations handle this?

How do (home)working parents (one or both) influence family dynamics?

Using the ladder (see attachment), we explore all floors, reflecting on the impact of these changes and what they mean for relationships across the different levels (the 3 generations) of Andolfi's house.

Participants will be divided into 3 groups: one for the ground floor, one for the first floor, and one for the second floor. Each group will examine the effects on the family system from their respective floor's perspective.

PART 2. DIGITAL PARENTIFICATION

Next, we delve deeper into digital parentification and its consequences. We will address key questions such as:

Who are the 'digital natives'? How old are they now?

What role do they play in the lives of (grand)parents?

When does their role as a young 'digital assistant' extend beyond occasional technical support? At what point does it go beyond age-appropriate care, at the expense of their childhood and adolescence?

What is the impact of being 'chronically available'—always online—on young people transitioning into adulthood (as well as on their anxious parents)?

How does this affect closeness and distance, both positively and negatively?

PART 3. MIGRATION AND PARENTIFICATION

Finally, we will focus on parentification in the context of migration. Parents who watch their children (underage asylum seekers) grow up through the screen of a smartphone. When they are finally reunited with their 'child', the roles shift, and the child must guide them through life in their new country. This includes navigating the digital world, acting as a digital assistant and translator...

Presenter:

SOCIAL WORKER WITH YEARS OF EXPERIENCE IN POVERTY CONTEXTS

TRAINER – SYSTEMIC & CONTEXTUAL APPROACH

BOARD MEMBER, ACADEMY FOR CONTEXTUAL WORK

PRACTICE OWNER & CONTEXTUAL THERAPIST AT DROMEN OVER_HOOP

AUTHOR OF NEW BOOK 'BOKSEN BOVEN JE GEWICHT. KRACHTIGE EN KWETSBARE UITWEGEN NA PARENTIFICATIE' (ABOUT PARENTIFICATION)

COCREATOR OF PODCAST 'BOKSEN BOVEN JE GEWICHT' (ON SPOTIFY AND YOUTUBE, ABOUT PARENTIFICATION)

ORGANISER OF RETREATS IN FRANCE AND SPAIN

SOCIAL WORKER ARTEVELDE HOGESCHOOL GHENT

THREE-YEAR TRAINING IN SYSTEMIC THINKING (MARYSE ENGEL, GHENT)

MASTERCLASS LED BY PROF. IVAN BOSZORMENY-NAGY (AMSTERDAM)

References:

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Oscar Westra van Holthe

**Het mentaliseren, belichamen en visualiseren van meerzijdige partijdigheid:
hoe kan je werken met dader-slachtofferdynamieken in de
kamer van een contextueel therapeut?**



Summary:

Het behouden van een meerzijdig partijdige houding kan uitdagend zijn voor therapeuten. We kunnen zelfs in ons eigen vertrouwen in de mensheid beschadigd raken. Toch blijft de vraag als therapeut binnen het contextuele werkveld: hoe kunnen we een relatie blijven aanbieden aan zowel de dader als aan het slachtoffer? Hoe kunnen we alle kanten een stem geven, recht doen aan alle belangen –maar dit alles zonder in intense patroonherhalingen van overdracht en tegenoverdracht te vervallen?

Nagy heeft al vroeg de term “meerzijdige partijdigheid” (in het Engels: “multidirectional partiality”) geïntroduceerd in een poging om ons therapeuten te beschermen voor het meegezogen raken in de relationele dynamieken van een gezinssysteem (Boszormenyi-Nagy, 1966, p. 421; 1987, p. 55-74; Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 2020, p. 480). Van der Meiden en collega's vonden dat boven de 43% van de interventies gecodeerd kunnen worden als een uiting van meerzijdige partijdigheid (2017, p. 503; 2019). De vraag blijft alleen wel: hoe kunnen we dit als begeleider belichamen wanneer we met een cliënt praten die teveel leunt op diens destructief recht? Dat is makkelijker gezegd dan gedaan.

Om meerzijdige partijdigheid binnen Nagy's contextuele raamwerk begrijpelijker te maken, hebben Heyndrickx en collega's (2022, p. 120-130) de metafoor van “de stoel” geïntroduceerd. Langs de lagen van Nagy's theorie, beschrijven ze vier ingangen om meerzijdige partijdigheid te bevorderen. Eerst beschrijft de therapeut de cliënt feitelijk vanaf een afstandje. Daarna, ten tweede, kan de therapeut symbolisch op de stoel van de cliënt gaan zitten om diens innerlijke psychologische wereld te doorgronden. Ten derde kan de therapeut naast de stoel van de cliënt staan, waarmee zicht op de interacties en positionering binnen het familiesysteem wordt verkregen. Ten vierde kan de therapeut achter de stoel van de cliënt staan om diens – maar al te vaak ongelukkige en destructieve – pogingen tot herstel van rechtvaardigheid te begrijpen. Door vanuit deze verschillende perspectieven te kijken naar een cliënt, wordt de ontologische verbinding van de mens, aldus de auteurs, recht gedaan.

In deze workshop, geïnspireerd op bovenstaande metafoor, onderzoeken we een cliëntcasus van één van de deelnemers. Kunnen we de casus in de kamer ervaarbaar maken en in beeld brengen? Er zal in de duiding van onderliggende dynamieken uit concepten van Westra van Holthe's onderzoek naar hoe contextueel therapeuten van de Vereniging Contextueel Werkers werken met dader en slachtoffer-dynamiek werken (2023) worden geput. Ook worden concepten uit Westra van Holthe's trainingen over zijn systemisch-lichaamsgerichte gedachtengoed aangehaald (zie o.a. Westra van Holthe, 2020).

Presenter:

Oscar Westra van Holthe is de oprichter van de European Peace Conference on Perpetrator-Victim Dynamics. Hij zit ook in het bestuur van de Nederlandse Vereniging voor Perso-psychotherapie. Zijn master thesis voor de opleiding Contextuele Benadering ging over hoe leden van de Vereniging van Contextueel Werkers met dader en slachtofferdynamieken bij misbruik werken (Westra van Holthe, 2023). Op dit moment is Oscar in opleiding om contextueel therapeut, in aanvulling op zijn jarenlange ervaring in het werken met familieopstellingen (zie o.a. deze documentaires over zijn werk). Oscar is ook de oprichter van Teamcoach Zuidas, waarmee hij contextueel denken in het bedrijfsleven brengt.

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