

Relational-Cultural Theory: A Contemporary Theoretical Approach for Individual, Group, and Agency Practice

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Beyond Culture: Power, Economics and Social Justice

Introduction and Background

Learning Objectives

- Participants will develop a basic understanding of Relational-Cultural Theory.
- Participants will develop an understanding of Relational-Cultural Therapy and its applications to practice and supervision.
- Participants will demonstrate understanding of course content through discussion.

Overview

- Part One: Theoretical Background and Overview
- Part Two: Focus on Culture and Diversity
- Part Three: Relational-Cultural Social Work Practice
- Part Four: Relational-Cultural Social Work Supervision

Part One

Theoretical Background and Overview

What is Theory?

Discussion

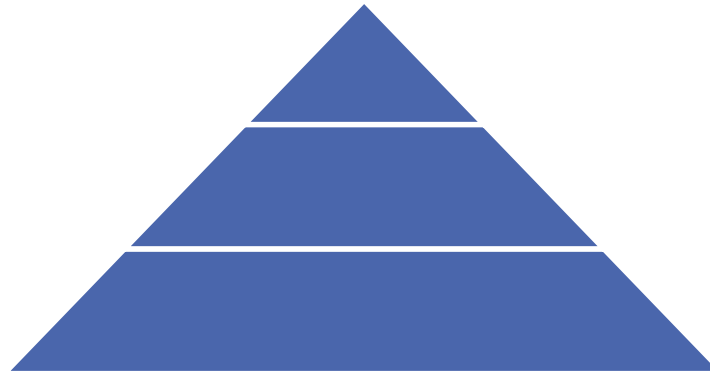
Do you have a theoretical approach, philosophy, mantra, proverb, or other type of dogma/belief/code which guides your practice?

Introduction to RCT

Relational-Cultural Theory

Background

- Developed by Judith Jordan, Jean Baker Miller, Irene Stiver and Janet Surrey.
- Initially called Self-in-Relation Theory.
- Roots in Attachment Theory.
- Traditional developmental theories prioritize independence and separation from others.



Relational-Cultural Theory

- Traditional models do not match women's/human experience.
- The goal of development is to become engaged in growth-fostering relationships.
- Relatedness and connectedness are critical components to healthy development.
- The value of relationships is often minimized in traditional theories, and women are made to feel ashamed of efforts/focus on emotional connections.

Relational-Cultural Theory

- Connection is the “primary organizer and source of motivation in people’s lives” (Jordan and Walker, 2004, p 1).
- Connection is the core of human growth and development.
- Isolation is the primary source of human suffering.
- Human beings grow through and toward connection.

Relational-Cultural Theory

- Developed by Judith Jordan, Jean Baker Miller, Irene Stiver and Janet Surrey.
- Initially called Self-in-Relation theory.
- Traditional developmental theories prioritize independence and separation from others.
- Connection as primary focus.

Quick Activity

Think of an important positive/connected relationship, and jot down at least five adjectives or thoughts about how you feel when you think of that relationship.

RCT Language and Definitions

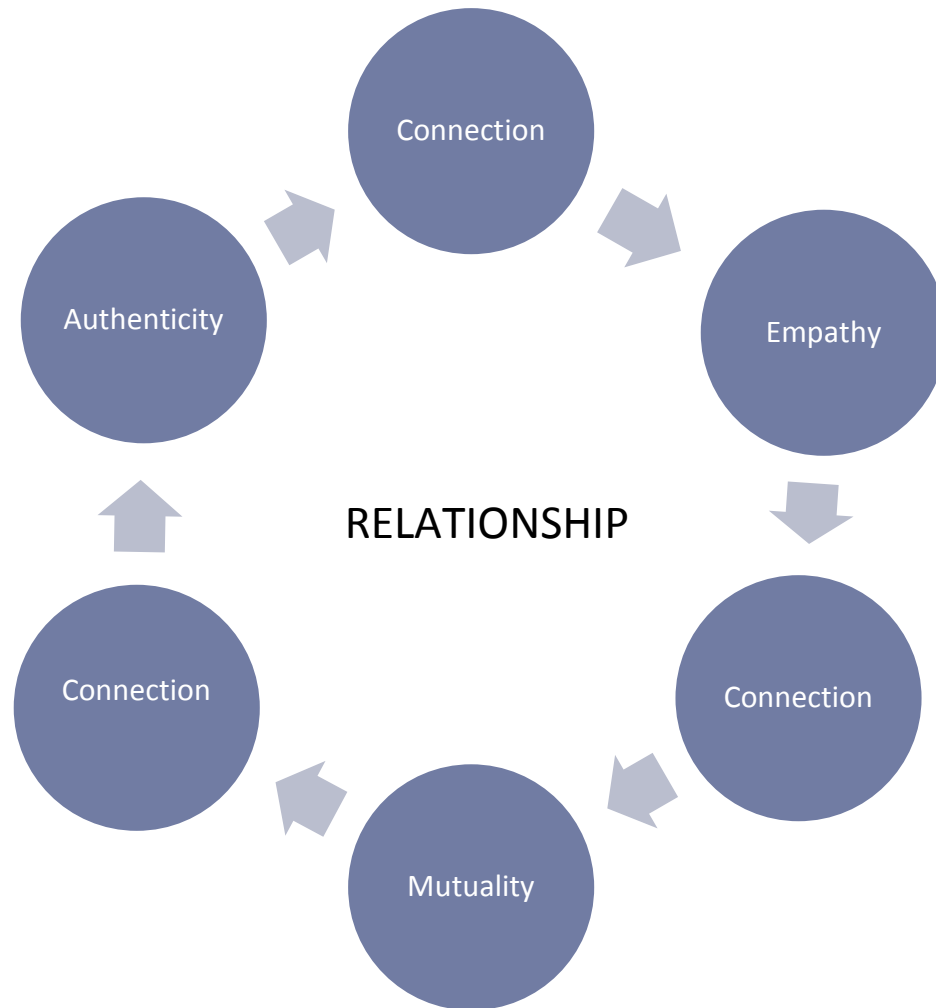
Connection

Connection

An interaction between two or more people that is mutually empathic and mutually empowering.

- Connection is the “primary organizer and source of motivation in people’s lives” (Jordan and Walker, 2004, p. 1)
- Connection is the core of human growth and development.
- Isolation is the primary source of human suffering.
- Human beings grow through and toward connection.

Connection



Connection

“Being heard is so close to being loved that to the average person they are almost indistinguishable”.

David Augsburger

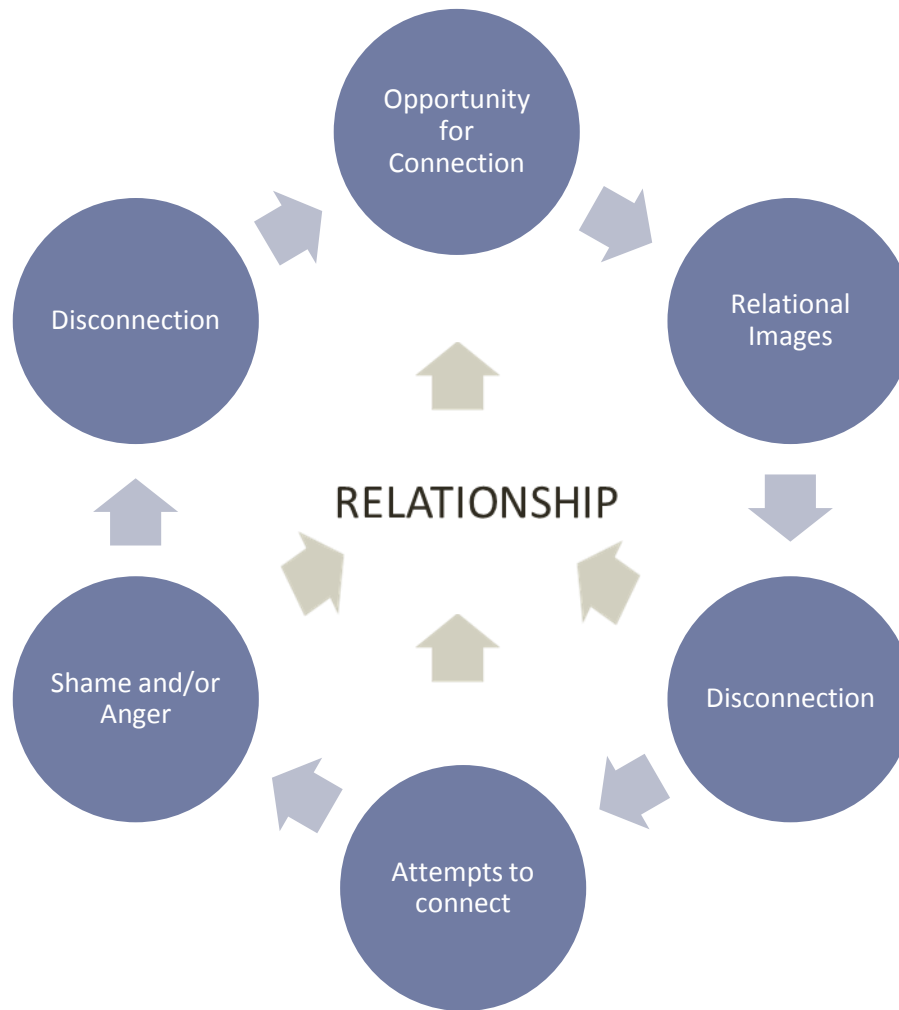
Disconnection(s)

Disconnections

Interactions in relationships where mutual empathy and mutual empowerment do not occur; usually involves disappointment, a sense of being misunderstood, and sometimes a sense of danger, violation, and/or impasse.

Disconnections may be acute, chronic, or traumatic.

Disconnection

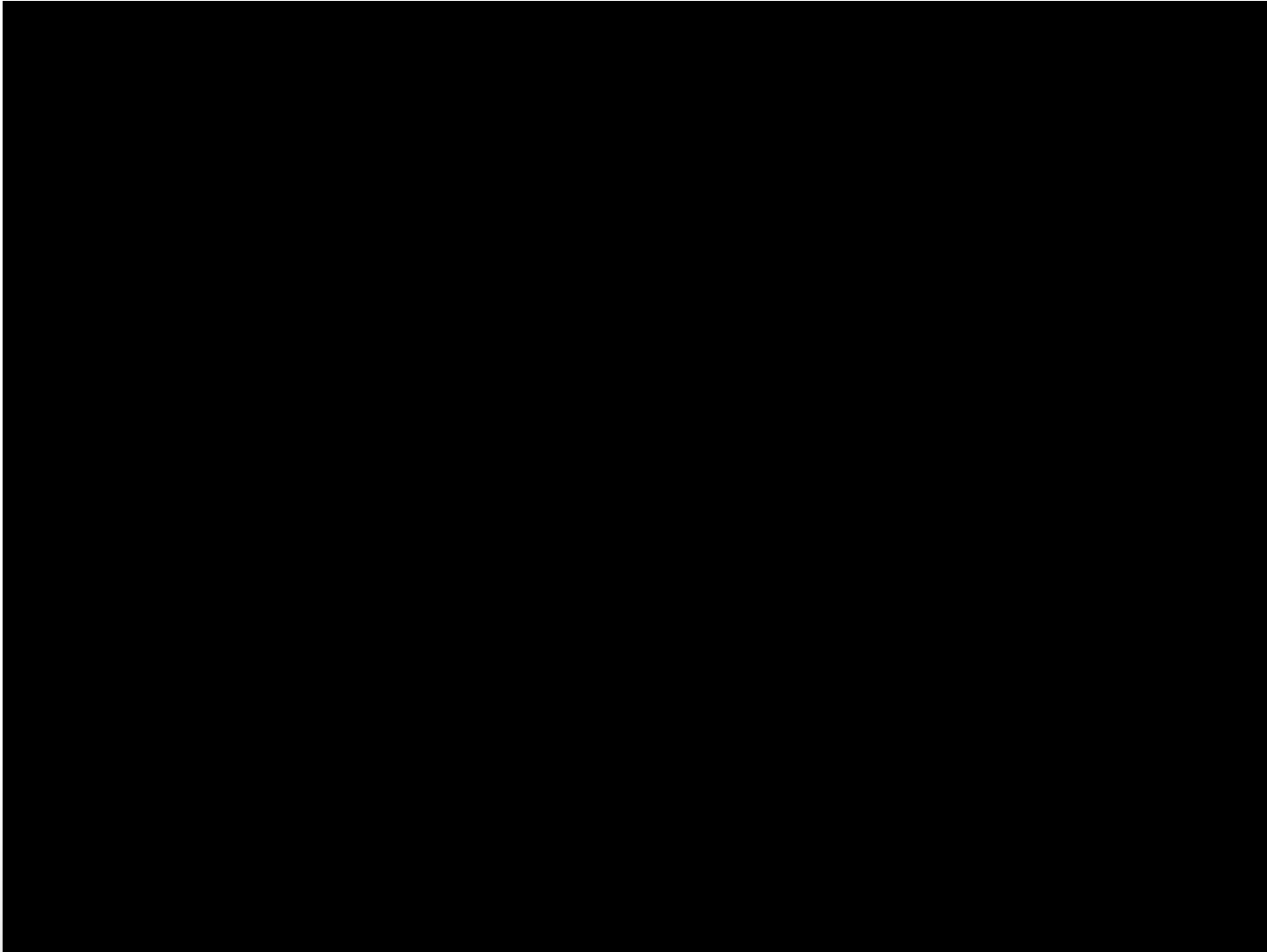


Mutual Empathy

Mutual Empathy

Openness to being affected by and affecting another person. (JBMTI, retrieved 2014)

What is Empathy?



Authenticity

Authenticity

The capacity to fully represent oneself in a relationship; to bring one's real experiences, thoughts, and feelings into the relationship.

(Molly Henchman, 2005-2006; JBMTI, 2011)

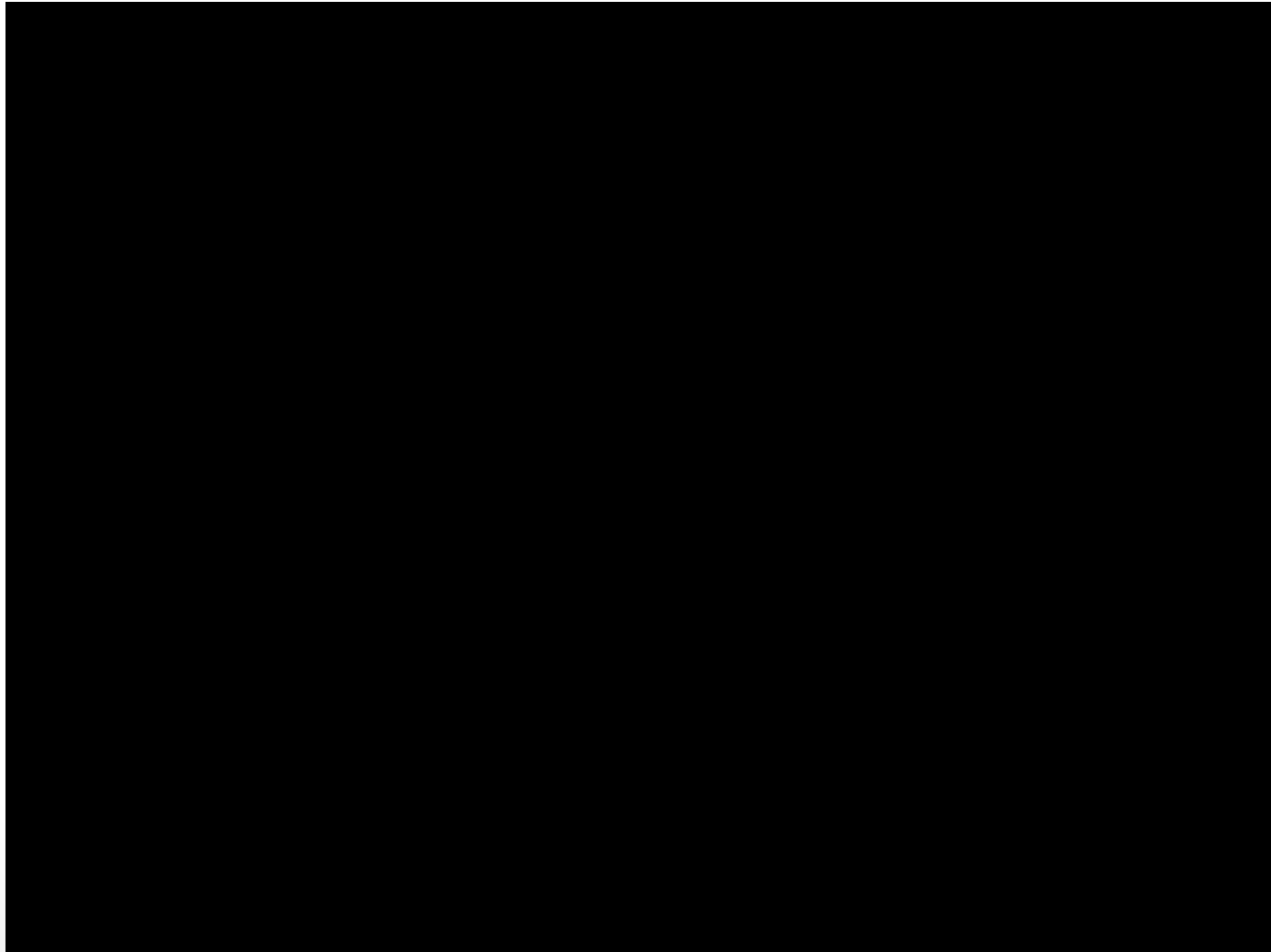
Shame

Shame

When one feels that he/she is no longer worthy of empathy or love.

(Molly Henchman, 2005-2006; JBM TI, 2011)

An Example



Relational Images

Relational Images

The collection of ideas and experiences we have about relationships, based on past relationships.

Central Relational Paradox

Central Relational Paradox

In the face of repeated disconnections, people yearn even more for relationship, but their fear of engaging with others leads to keeping aspects of their experience out of connection (these are protective strategies of disconnection, also known as *strategies of survival*). The individual alters herself or himself to fit in with the expectations and wishes of the other person, and in the process, the relationship itself loses authenticity and mutuality, becoming another source of disconnection.

(From <https://www.jbmti.org/Our-Work/glossary-relational-cultural-therapy#centralrelationalparadox>, retrieved 3/22/17)

Core Concepts of RCT

1. People grow through and toward relationship in the life span.
2. Movement toward mutuality rather than separation characterizes mature functioning.
3. Relationship differentiation and elaboration characterize growth.
4. Mutual empathy and mutual empowerment are at the core of growth-fostering relationships.

Core Concepts of RCT

- 5. Authenticity if necessary for real engagement and full participation in growth fostering relationships.
- 6. In growth fostering relationships, all people contribute and grow or benefit. Development is not a one way street.
- 7. Increased relational competence and capacities over the life span.

(Jordan, 2010)

Connection and Vulnerability

[www.ted.com/talks/brene brown on vulnerability](http://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_on_vulnerability)

The “Five Good Things”

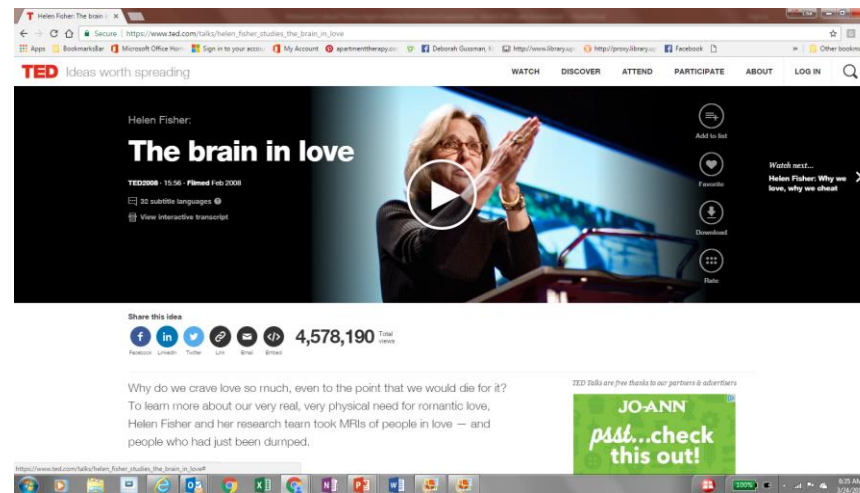
Miller noted five good things that come from connected, growth-producing relationships:

- a sense of zest that comes from connecting with another person;
- the ability and motivation to take action in the relationship, as well as in other situations;
- increased knowledge of oneself and the other person;
- an increased sense of worth; and
- a desire for more connections beyond the particular one (Miller, 1988).

Hard Wired to Connect

RCT as Evidence Based

- Functional MRIs
 - positive and negative relational features impact the brain.
 - Possibility of repair.




- Group outcomes equal or better than CBT.

RCT Emerging Tools

The C.A.R.E. Assessment

<http://www.amybanksmd.com/relational-assessment.html>

The C.A.R.E. Relational Assessment Chart

Answer the questions on a 1-5 scale: 1=None or never 2=Rarely or minimal 3=Some of the time 4=More often than not; medium high 5=Usually; very high	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	Total Statement Score	C.A.R.E. CODE
1. I trust this person with my feelings.							Calm
2. This person trusts me with his feelings.							Calm
3. I feel safe being in conflict with this person.							Calm
4. This person treats me with respect.							Calm
5. In this relationship, I feel calm.							Calm
6. I can count on this person to help me out in an emergency.							Accepted
7. In this relationship, it's safe to acknowledge our differences.							Calm
8. When I am with this person, I feel a sense of belonging.							Accepted
9. Despite our different roles, we treat each other as equals.							Accepted
10. I feel valued in this relationship.							Accepted
11. There is give and take in this relationship.							Accepted
12. This person is able to sense how I feel.							Resonant
13. I am able to sense how this person feels.							Resonant
14. With this person I have more clarity about who I am.							Resonant
15. I feel that we "get" each other.							Resonant
16. I am able to see that my feelings impact this person.							Resonant
17. This relationship helps me be more productive in my life.							Energetic
18. I enjoy the time I spend with this person.							Energetic
19. Laughter is a part of this relationship.							Energetic
20. In this relationship, I feel more energetic.							Energetic
Safety Group Score 							

Short Stretch Break

Part Two

Focus on Race, Culture and Diversity

Discussion

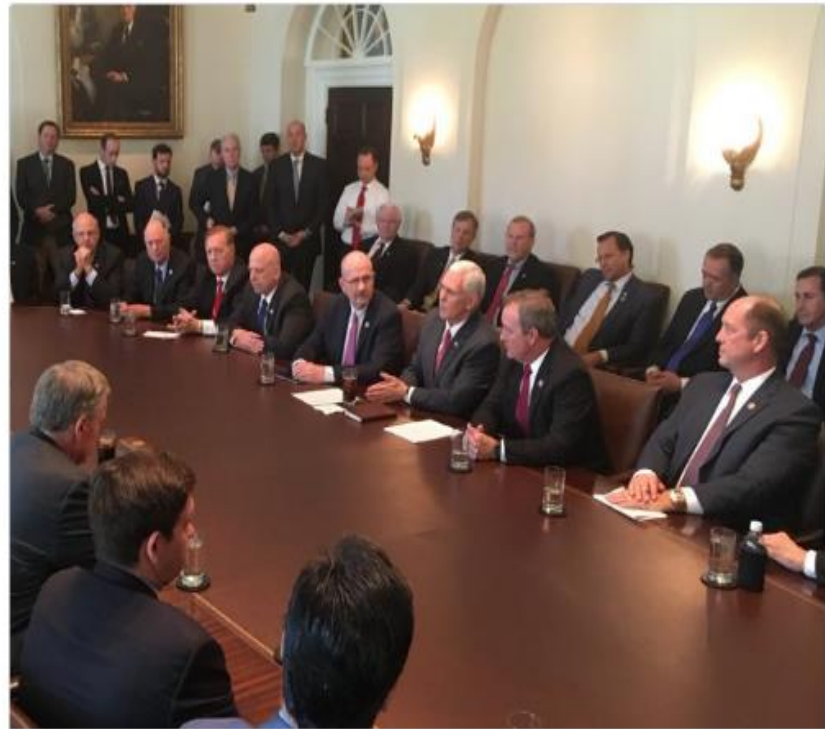
Growing up, what were the predominant messages you received about cultural differences? What did you observe from the adults in your life about how to "handle" difference?

Focus on Culture and Diversity

- Relational Images
- Cultural Privilege
- Concepts of Power
- Privilege and cultural privilege implications

Power Over vs. Power

Power Over



Vice President Pence ✓
@VP

 Follow

Appreciated joining @POTUS for meeting with the Freedom Caucus again today. This is it. #PassTheBill

2:21 PM - 23 Mar 2017

  1,151  4,452

<https://twitter.com/VP/status/844977432713146370/photo/1>

Power Over vs. Power With

Ferguson



Dallas



Power vs. Power Over

Example 1

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=you+tube+obama+vs.+trump+rally&view=detail&mid=EC3EC64D4440302042B1EC3EC64D4440302042B1&FORM=VIRE>

Cross Cultural Connection

- Authenticity: When we can't be authentic, when our real experience is not heard by others, we
 - Falsify, detach or suppress our response.
 - Develop strategies of disconnection.
 - Expect a relationship that is not mutual.
- Desire for cross-cultural connection is impacted by
 - Larger cultural context that does not support mutuality.
 - Conflict, including the growth that results from conflict
 - Need to “stretch” across differences.

Cross Cultural Connection

- Staying open in cross-cultural connection
 - Listen undefensively.
 - Be conscious.
 - Recognize the journey and process.

Relational Images

Relational Images are the collection of ideas and experiences we have about relationships, based on past relationships.



Source: Chris Buck/O, the Oprah Magazine



Source: Chris Buck/O, the Oprah Magazine



Source: Chris Buck/O, the Oprah Magazine

Discussion

What are the similarities and differences between racism and relational images?

Privilege

Privilege

A system of advantage gained through another's disadvantage (McIntosh, 1980, 1988). Unearned privilege is accrued through an accident of birth or luck, being part of a privileged group. The myth of meritocracy sometimes makes it seem as if the advantage or privilege has been earned.

Source: <http://www.jbmti.org/Our-Work/glossary-relational-cultural-therapy#power>

System of
extraordinary
assets
about

Understanding Privilege

Privilege quiz

Discussion

What "unearned privileges" do you hold? Describe a situation where your unearned privilege has benefitted you.

Implications of Cultural Privilege

- What is cultural privilege?
- How is cultural privilege distorted?
- Cultural privilege implications
 - Those with cultural privilege can appear more self sufficient, more healthy, more worthy of privilege
 - Those who have less cultural privilege can be viewed as deficient and needy.

Race and Connection

- Desire for cross-cultural connection is impacted by
 - Larger cultural context that does not support mutuality.
 - Conflict, including the growth that results from conflict.
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Relational Images and Possibilities

“We sometimes get ruttled in disconnections because the possibility of connection does bring with it vulnerability – the challenge to let go of the relational images that seem to provide a protective function.” (Walker in Jordan, Hartling & Walker, 2004, p. 141)

Discussion

- What examples are there are successful cross-racial relationships? In media, in the working environment, in your personal experience?
- How were you prepared, or not, to work cross-racially and/or cross culturally?
- What are the barriers for you (self awareness) in working cross-racially and/or cross culturally?

Cross-Racial Relationships

- <http://www.npr.org/2017/05/26/530192334/chappelles-show-co-creator-moves-into-the-limelight-with-3-mics>

The Pain of Racism

Soccer Fans' Racist 'Monkey Chants' Cause Brazilian Star To Leave Game In Tears

Everton Luiz endured 90 minutes of vicious verbal attacks from the crowd.



By Rebecca Shapiro



Living Authentic Lives

Fewer Teens Attempt Suicide in States That Allow Same-Sex Marriage



Susan Rinkunas
Feb 20 2017, 11:00am



That's the surprising finding of a new study.

ADV



Part Three

Relational-Cultural Practice

Discussion

How might RCT apply to your work with clients?

Application of RCT to Practice

- Focus on healing, growth producing relationships.
- Relational commitment.
- Focus on quality of life.
- Development of “5 good things” .
- Ability to reconnect, to continue relationship despite disconnection or conflict.

Application of RCT to Practice

- Multiple layers of healing opportunity.
- Opportunity to work cross-culturally.
- Focus on diversity issues.
- Consideration of issues of privilege in work together.
- Opportunity to work through vulnerabilities.
- Opportunity for authenticity.

RCT and SW Agencies

Discussion

What is your experience working
in contemporary agencies?

Traditional Paradigm



Agency Social Work



Contemporary Paradigm?



Features of Agency Social Work

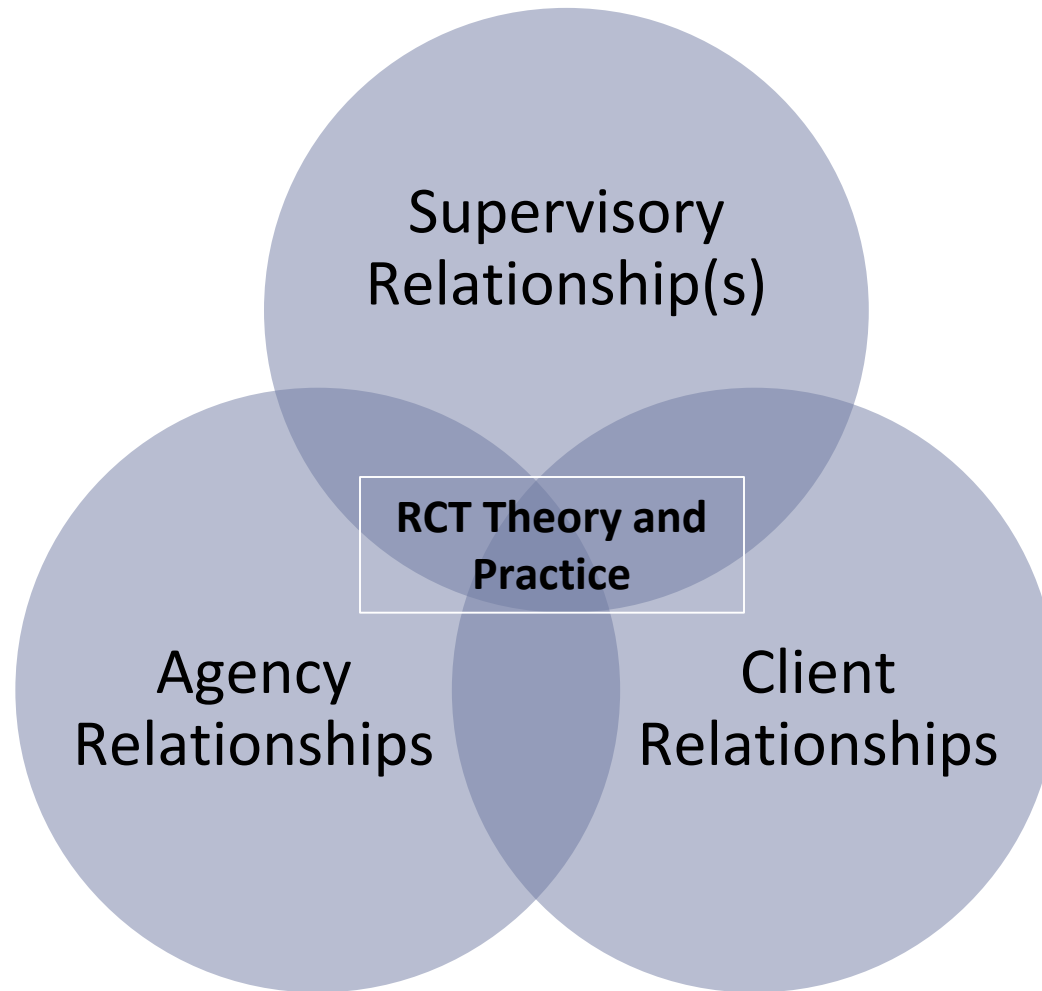
- Doing more with less. Again.
- Operating in crisis (Hartling and Sparks, 2008).
- Focus on measurable outcomes, evidence based practice.
- Teams, and challenges within.
- Variety of motivations related to work.
- Leadership may be out of touch with realities of front line work.
- Complicated issues of race and power are often unnamed and unacknowledged.
- Clinical supervision may not be available on site.
- Issues of burnout and staff stability (Hartling and Sparks, 2008).

Working in a Non-Relational World

The opposite of the five good things can occur:

1. Diminished energy for the work we are doing,
2. Feeling disempowered or stifled in our ability to take action on behalf of our clients, ourselves, or others,
3. Less clarity and more confusion about others and ourselves,
4. Diminished sense of worth, and
5. A desire to withdraw from or defend against relationships in these settings (Hartling and Sparks, 2008, p. 169-170).

RCT Social Work Practice



RCT in Agencies - Possibilities

- Rather than devaluing, place relational work at center of agency 's ability to achieve mission.
- Understanding what RCT brings in relationship to power, race and culture, and the damage that traditional patriarchal thinking does to the workers in organizations, and to the organization as a whole.
- Recognize “good conflict” and it’s relationship to growth.
- Modeling positive, growth producing relationships.
- Awareness of power and hierarchy.
- Openness to influence.

Additional Considerations

- High level of self awareness
- RCT expertise.
- Ability to manage through disconnection, with supervisees and with others in agency.
- Ability to work with a wide variety of work styles, approaches to practice, and personality types.
- Energy, endurance, agency/system management, issues/politic management.
- Sensitivity to cultural differences and styles.
- Self-disclosure and use of self may be different.
- Advisement and relational mentoring includes features beyond work with clients.

Part Four

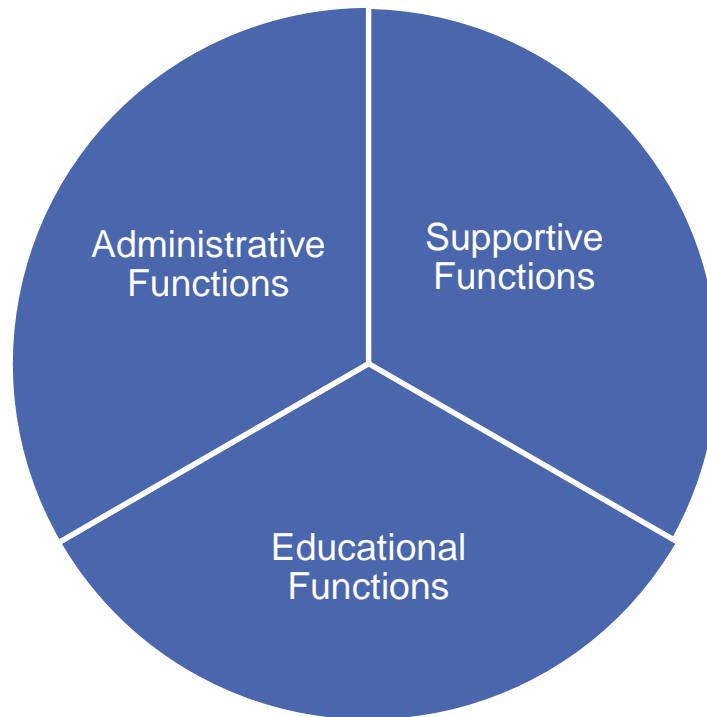
Relational-Cultural Theory and Supervision

RCT and Supervision

How does Relational-Cultural Theory apply to and strengthen social work supervision and the supervisory relationship?

Social Work Supervision Theory

Functions of Social Work Supervision



Social Work Supervision Theory

- Limited theoretical development in recent years.
- Limited literature re impact of feminism.
- Limited theoretical attention to diversity issues.
- Limited contemporary research in the area of supervision, particularly around supervisor/supervisee differences.
- Limited language development and application.

Quick Activity

Think about the best supervisor you have had.
Jot down 5 (positive) characteristics they possessed.

Social Work Supervision Theory

Desirable skills and characteristics in supervision

1. availability,
2. knowledgeable about tasks and skills and can relate these techniques to theory,
3. hold practice perspectives and expectations about service delivery similar to the supervisee's,
4. provision of support and encouragement of professional growth,
5. delegate responsibility to supervisees who can do the task,
6. serve as a professional role model,
7. communicate in a mutual and interactive supervisory style (Bogo and McNight, 2006, p. 59).

Social Work Supervision Theory

Shulman's theory of "interactional supervision"

- an interactional process in which the worker plays an active part in influencing the behavior of the supervisor and the outcome of the process.
- common or constant elements across settings, disciplines, populations, and problems.
- universal dynamics and skills that apply to different modes of interactions, including individual and group supervision.
- parallels between supervision and other helping relationships.
- supervisor-supervisee working relationship as the medium through which a supervisor can partially influence the outcomes of practice. (Shulman, 2010, p. 12)

The “Five Good Things”

Miller noted five good things that come from connected, growth-producing relationships:

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Focus on Culture and Diversity

- Relational Images
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Power

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RCT Supervision

vulnerability

avoidance of shame

demonstrating
responsiveness and
authenticity

evaluating outcomes

acknowledging the
power of social
context and working
through related
barriers

identifying and
working with
relational images

mutual empathy

identifying and
working with
disconnections

creation of safe
context

formal and informal
relational
assessment

fluidity

relational curiosity

(Jordan 2004, Jordan 2010)

RCT Supervision

mutual empowerment

mutual empathy

sensitivity to power
differential

sensitivity to
vulnerabilities

mutual learning

reflection

connecting with affect

mutual influence

empathic teaching

(Abernethy and Cook, 2011; Walker, 2008; Fletcher, Jordan and Miller, 2000; Jordan and Romney, 2005).

RCT Supervision

- Supervisor is seen as having a specific role that includes the assumption of some level of authority of both knowledge and position, while still being open to learning and being impacted by the ideas and experiences of others, most notably, supervisees.
- Model of mutual learning and growth, as opposed to one where the supervisor is the expert and immune to the influence of the supervisee's ideas and experiences.

Mentoring

RCT Supervision

- Creative, relational, growth-producing, and modeling of the client-therapist relationship. (Downs, 2006)
- Power-power relationship, where we feel present and alive in our ability “to influence and participate in shaping the world” (Brock as cited in Walker, 2008, p. 133).
- Recognition of RCT themes
 - Relational images
 - Connections and disconnections
 - Awareness of self, inclusive of racial identity development
- Relational courage
- Empathetic attunement in supervision, as in therapy.

RCT Supervision

Supervisors

- Collaboration with vulnerability
- Open and flexible
- Accepting of uncertainty
- Demonstrate an ability to learn alongside the supervisee (Abernathy and Cook, 2011).
- Remaining open and non defensive during reflexive dialogue (Porter, et al., 1998).
- Self-disclosing in ways that benefit the supervisees (Porter, et al., 1998).

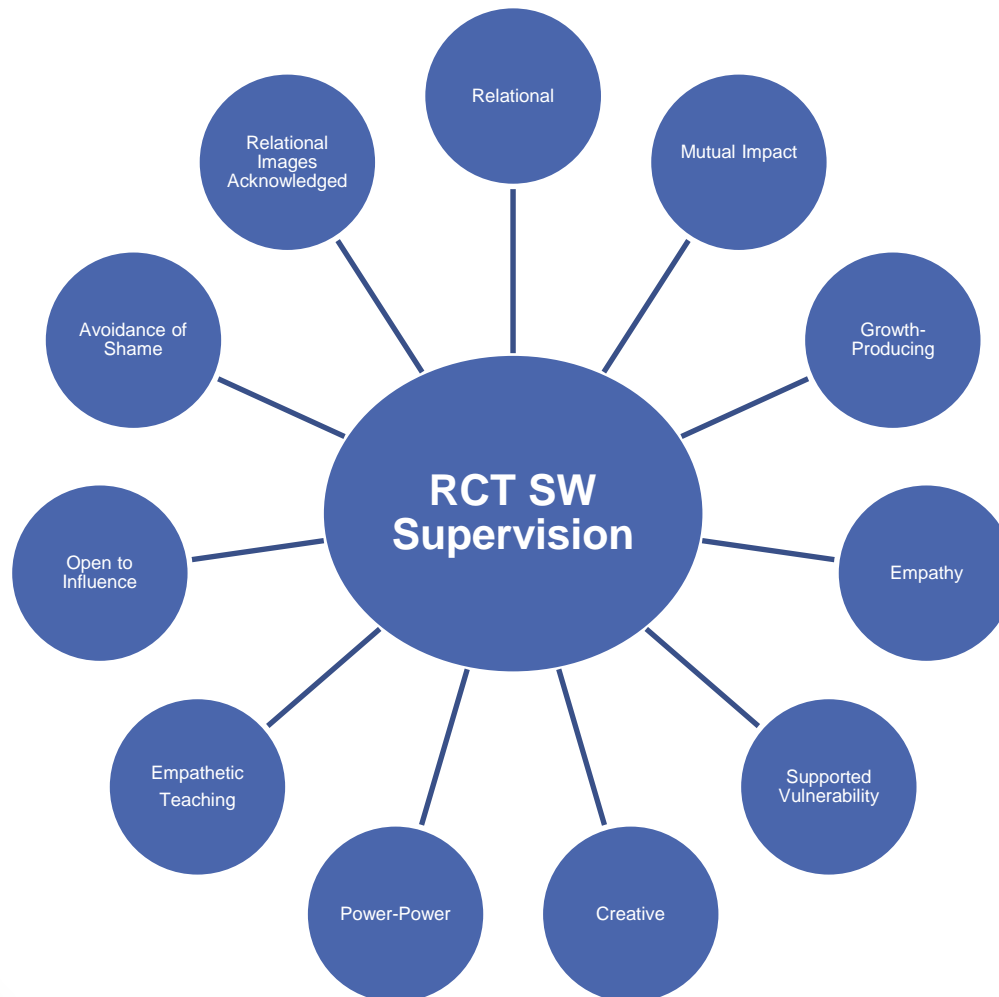
RCT Social Work Supervision

- Does not dismiss the need for hierarchical relationships in organizations.
- Considers carefully impact of race and other privileged difference.
- Awareness of power differentials, and such issues are raised when appropriate.
- Feminist.
- Style is flexible, responsive to individual needs.
- Focused on relational growth, in supervisory relationship, but also in relationships of social worker with client (parallel process).
 - Authenticity
 - Mutual growth

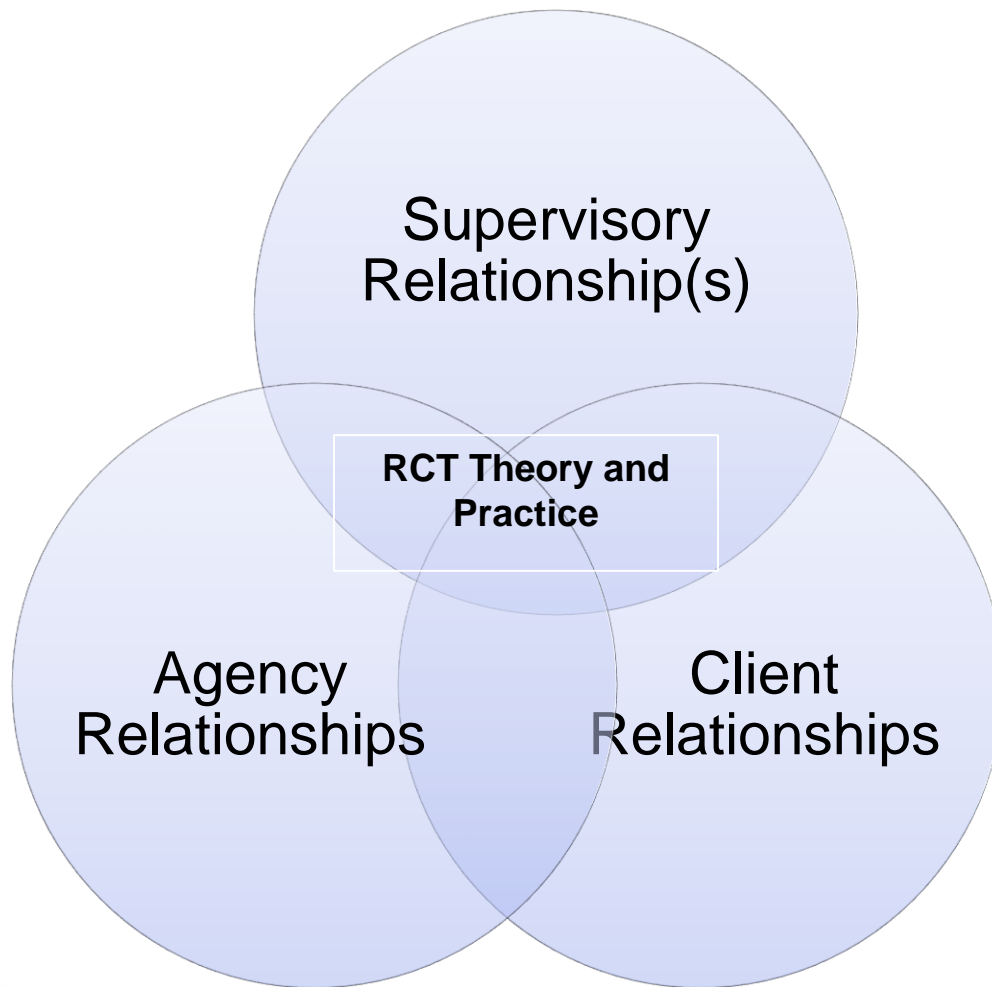
“Working With”

“Working with or beside” relationship, as opposed to a supervisory or expert type role (Lazzari, Colarossi, & Collins, 2009).

RCT Social Work Supervision



RCT Social Work Supervision



“Working With”

How does this operationalize to practice?

Case Example

Unique RCT

What is new/different/special about an RCT approach?

- Grounded in feminist values and experience.
- Diversity issues and cross racial experiences are at the center of relational experiences.
- Intellectual and experiential mattering.
- Less controlled/specific use of self, with more authenticity.
- Supervision becomes a combination of traditional supervision, with mentoring features.
- In agencies, application of RCT not only to the supervisory dyad, but also to work in the agency.
- 5 good things, related to practice.

Conclusion

Questions/Discussion

RCT Resource

<http://jbmti.org/>

Conclusion

Contact Information

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Questions/Discussion

Citations

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