

Understanding Relationships in PACE Work: Using Relational-Cultural Theory as a Framework for Practice

Lisa Eible, DSW MSW LCSW

October 2015

Learning Objectives

- Participants will develop a basic understanding of Relational Cultural Theory.
- Participants will understand the relationship between attachment theory and RCT.
- Participants will develop an understanding of Relational Cultural Therapy and its applications to practice.
- 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 Practice and PACE Participants

Part One

Theoretical Background and Overview

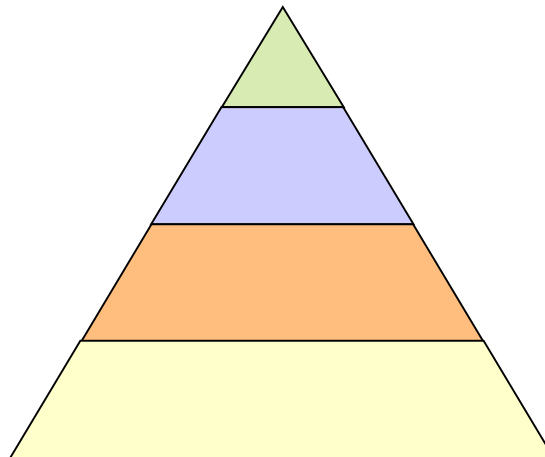
What is Theory?

Discussion

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

Background

- Developed by women at the Stone Center at Wellesley College
- Initially called Self-in-Relation theory
- Traditional developmental theories prioritize independence and separation from others



Relational-Cultural Theory

- Connection is the “primary organizer and source of motivation in people’s lives” (Complexity of Connection, 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.

Attachment Theory as a Foundation

Attachment Theory

Harlow and experiments with monkeys (6 minutes)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OrNBEhzjg8I>

Description of Attachment Impact (5 minutes)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6bul1meciGE>

Attachment Theory

Rene Spitz (1952) (7 minutes)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VvdOe10vrs>

4

Tenants of Relational Cultural Theory

- Traditional models do not match women's/human experience.
- The goal of development is to become in 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.

Definitions

- **Connection**

Although this term is used in common parlance to mean any kind of relationship, RCT defines connection as an interaction between two or more people that is mutually empathic and mutually empowering.

- **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

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

Definitions

- **Mutual Empathy**

Openness to being affected by and affecting another person. In mutual empathy, both people move with a sense of mutual respect, an intention for mutual growth, and an increasing capacity for connectedness. For mutual empathy to lead to growth, both people must see, know, and feel that they are being responded to, having an impact, and mattering to one another. The growth that occurs is both affective and cognitive and leads to an enlarged sense of community. Supported vulnerability, a feeling that one's vulnerability will not be taken advantage of or violated, is necessary for mutual empathy.

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

Connection and Vulnerability

- [http://www.ted.com/talks/brene brown on vulnerability](http://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_on_vulnerability)
(3 minutes – 10 minutes)

Definitions, continued

- **Authenticity:** The capacity to fully represent oneself in a relationship; to bring one's real experiences, thoughts, and feelings into the relationship.
- **Relational Images:** The collection of ideas and experiences we have about relationships, based on past relationships.
- **Shame:** When one feels that he/she is no longer worthy of empathy or love.

Source: (Molly Henchman, 2005-2006, Jean Baker Miller Institute, 2011)

Core Concepts of RCT

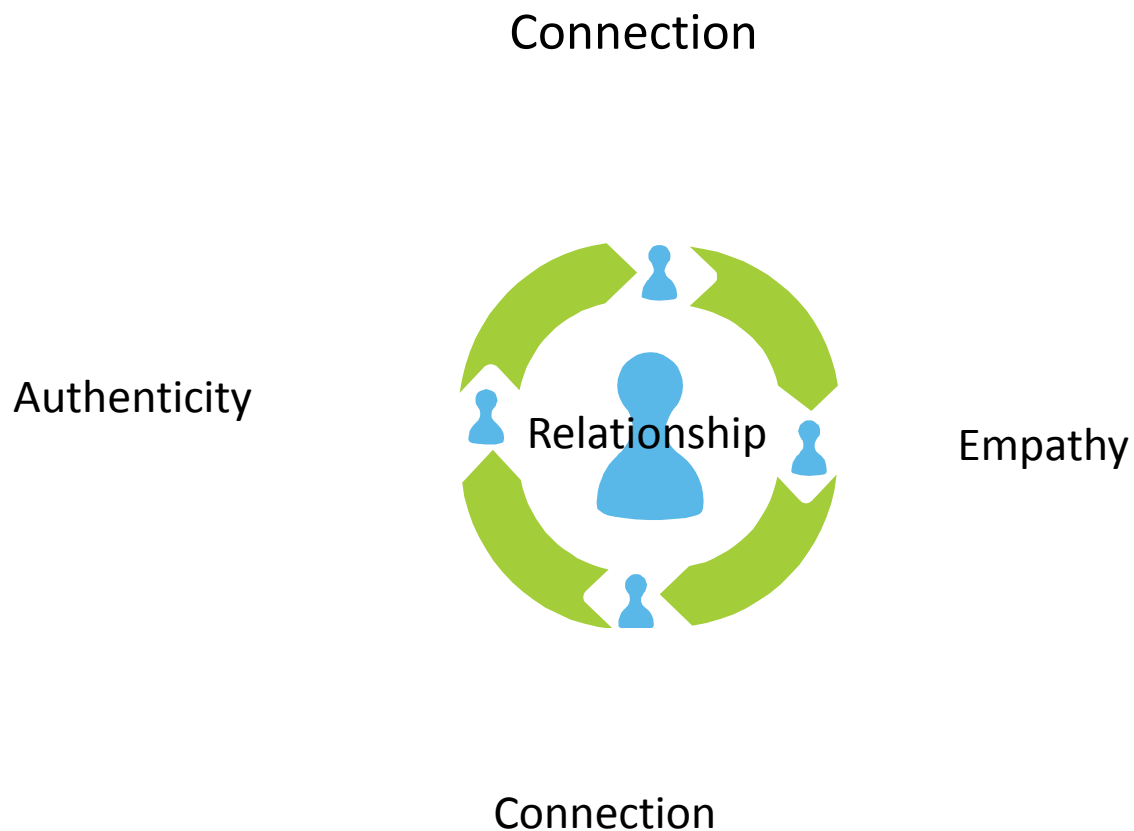
1. People grow through and toward relationship in the life span.
2. Movement toward mutuality rather than separation characterizes mature functioning
3. Relationship differentiation and elaboration characterize growth.
4. Mutual empathy and mutual empowerment are at the core of growth-fostering relationships.

Core Concepts of RCT

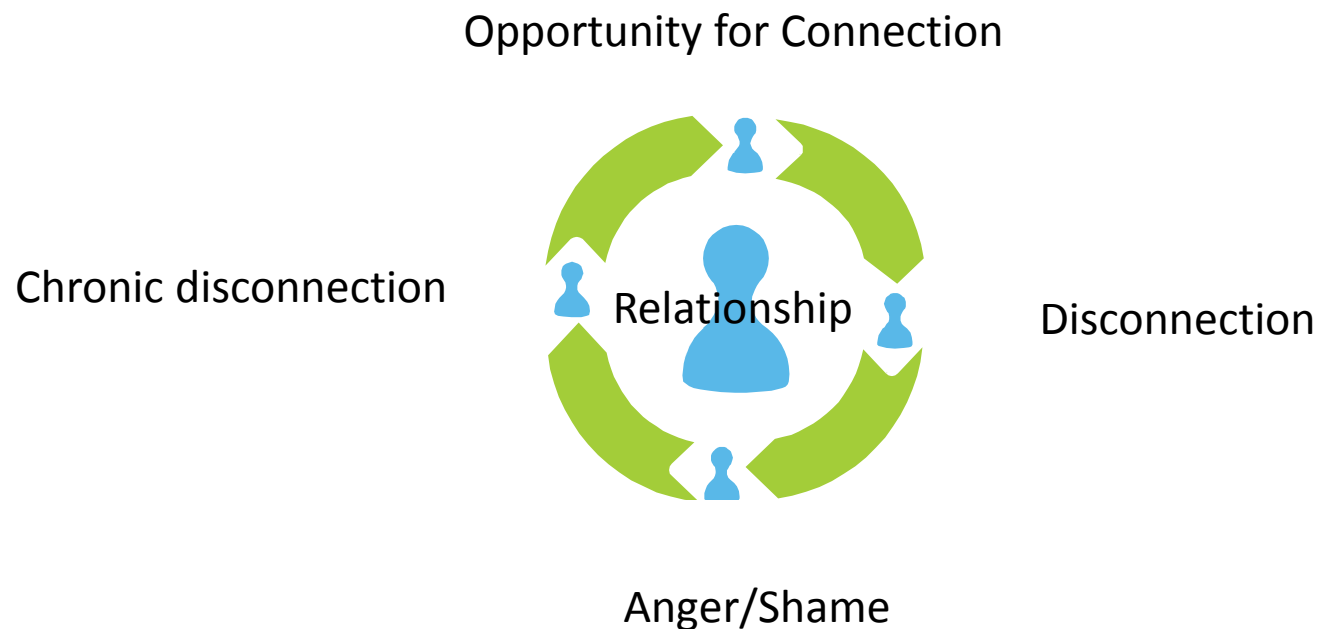
5. Authenticity if necessary for real engagement and full participation in growth fostering relationships.
6. In growth fostering relationships, all people contribute and grow or benefit. Development is not a one way street.
7. One of the goals of development from a relational perspective is the development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

Source: "Relational-Cultural Therapy, Jordan, 2010

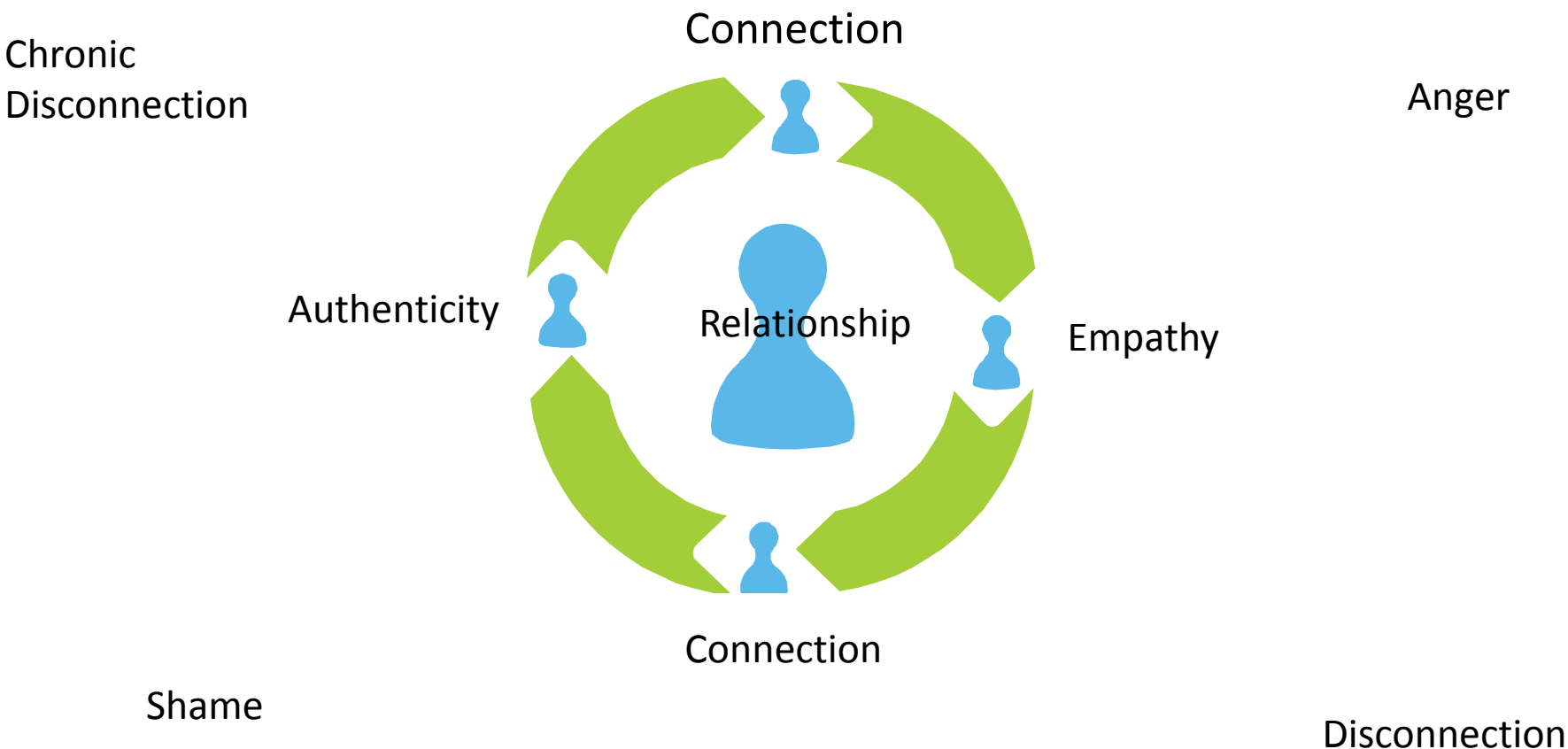
Cycle of Connection



Cycle of Disconnection



Cycles of Relational Experiences



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).

Relational-Cultural Theory

- “When we are hurt, misunderstood, or violated in some way, when we attempt to represent our experience to the injuring person and we are not responded to, we learn to suppress our experience and disconnect from both our feelings and the other person.” (p2)
- “If on the other hand, we are able to express our feelings and the other person responds with care, showing that we have had an effect, then we feel we are effective in relationship with others, that we matter, that we can participate in growth-producing and healthy relationships” (p2)

RCT as Evidence Based

- “hardwired to connect”
- Functional MRIs are showing
 - how positive and negative relational features impact the brain
 - Possibility of repair

Part Two

Focus on Culture and Diversity

Relational Images

- Relational Images: The collection of ideas and experiences we have about relationships, based on past relationships.

Discussion

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

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
- Cross-Cultural Connection

Definitions

- **Power**
Most fundamentally, the "capacity to produce a change" (Miller, 1968, p.198).
- **Power Over**
A concept in many societies that people can only feel safe and productive if they exercise power over others, keeping the others in a less advantaged position. The dominant group exercises power over other groups and individuals and does not encourage mutually empowering relationships. This model leads to disconnections and violations of relationships.

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

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>

Activity

- Walk of Privilege

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.

Understanding Privilege

Privilege quiz

http://www.buzzfeed.com/regajha/how-privileged-are-you?utm_term=.roJ0wdBv7#.wqzDnNQ0A

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.

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
 - Need to “stretch” across differences

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 Miller & Walker, 141)

Definitions

- **Racial Identity Development**
Defined by Tatum (1993) as "a process of moving from internalized racism to a position of empowerment based on a positively affirmed sense of racial identity" (p. 3).
- **Racism**
Defined by Tatum (1993) as "a pervasive system of advantage based on race which has personal, cultural and institutional implications for our daily lives" (p. 2).

Racial Identity Development

- Social identities
- Awareness of multiple social identities
 - Need to form alliances where people are targeted and disadvantaged
 - Taking responsibility for group privilege
 - Concepts of being “in the center” and “in the margin”
 - Choices related to moving in one direction or another

Race and Connection

- Social segregation
 - Work is a location where cross-racial contact occurs
 - Conflict is inevitable
 - Importance of “home communities”

Race and Connection

- Staying Open in Cross-Cultural Connection
 - Listen undefensively
 - Be conscious
 - Recognize the journey and process

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?

Relational Images and Possibilities

- “Typically what we get in much so-called diversity training is that the people that inhabit the more powerful categories need to behave better. That’s certainly true. However, relational-cultural healing is also about how everybody needs to be open to movement. “

(Walker in Miller & Walker, 141)

Part Three

Relational-Cultural Practice and PACE Participants

Discussion

How might RCT apply to your work with PACE participants?

Application of RCT to PACE

- 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 PACE

- 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.

Citations

- Jordan, J. V., Hartling, L. M., & Walker, M. (Eds.). (2004). *The complexity of connection: Writings from the Stone Center's Jean Baker Miller Training Institute*. Guilford Press.
- <http://www.jbmti.org>
- Jordon, J. V. (1997). *Women's Growth in Diversity*.
- Jordon, J., Kaplan, A. G., Miller, J. B., Stiver, I. P., & Surrey, J. L. (1991). *Women's growth in connection*.
- Jordan, J. V. (2009). *Relational-cultural therapy*. American Psychological Association.
- McGoldrick, M., Giordano, J., & Garcia-Preto, N. (Eds.). (2005). *Ethnicity and family therapy*. Guilford Press.

Citations

- Miller, J. B. (2012). *Toward a new psychology of women*. Beacon Press.
- Miller, J. B. (2015). *The healing connection: How women form relationships in therapy and in life*. Beacon Press.
- Miller, J. B., & Stiver, I. P. (1997). *The healing connection*.