

Social Work Supervision Through a Relational Cultural Lens: A “Working With” Model of Theory and Practice

Lisa Eible, DSW, MSW, LCSW

June 2016

Introduction and Background

- Bio
- Interest in RCT
- Supervision experiences

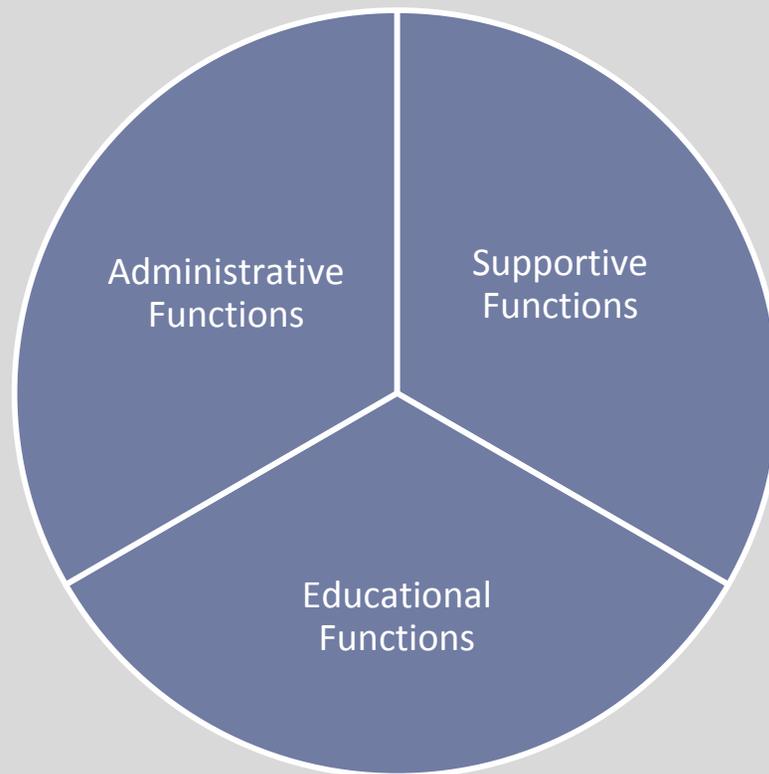
Presentation Overview

- How does Relational-Cultural Theory apply to and strengthen social work supervision and the supervisory relationship?
- Focus: An application of social work supervision in contemporary agencies.
- Background
 - Brief overview of social work supervision theory.
 - Cultural competence as a concept.
 - Brief overview of Relational-Cultural Theory.
 - Contemporary agency settings
- Proposal of a “working with” model.
- Case description.

Brief History of Social Work Supervision

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.

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)

Question

What are the desired characteristics in a supervisor?

Social Work Supervision Theory

Desirable skills and characteristics in supervision

- (a) availability,
- (b) knowledgeable about tasks and skills and can relate these techniques to theory,
- (c) hold practice perspectives and expectations about service delivery similar to the supervisee's,
- (d) provision of support and encouragement of professional growth,
- (e) delegate responsibility to supervisees who can do the task,
- (f) serve as a professional role model,
- (g) communicate in a mutual and interactive supervisory style (Bogo and McNight, 2006, p. 59).

Introduction to RCT

Relational Cultural Theory

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.
 - 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.

RCT Definitions

- **Connection**

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.

- **Mutual Empathy**

Openness to being affected by and affecting another person.

(JBMTI, retrieved 2014)

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.

(Molly Henchman, 2005-2006; JBMTI, 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. Increased relational competence and capacities over the life span.

(Jordan, 2010)

Hard Wired to Connect

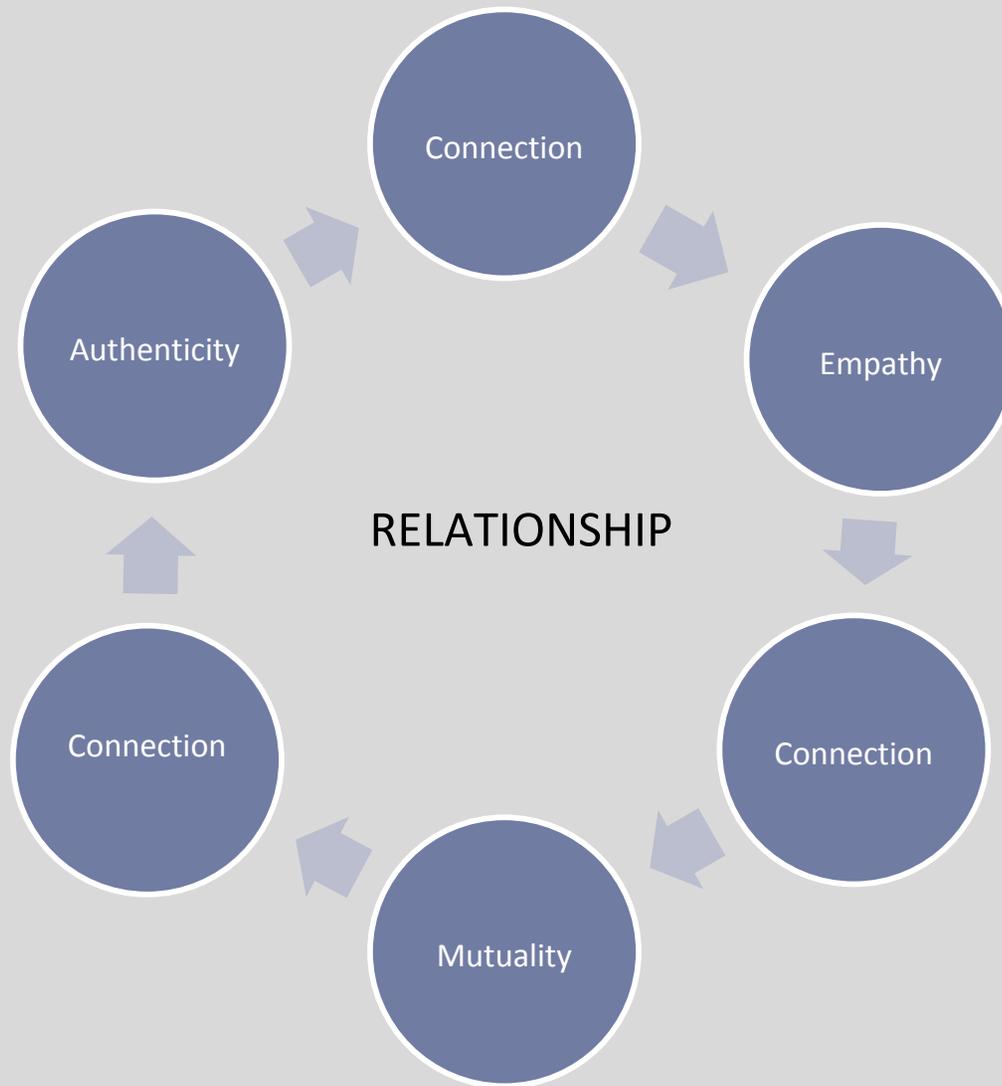
- <https://www.facebook.com/WeRHumanity/videos/960658507359128/>

The “Five Good Things”

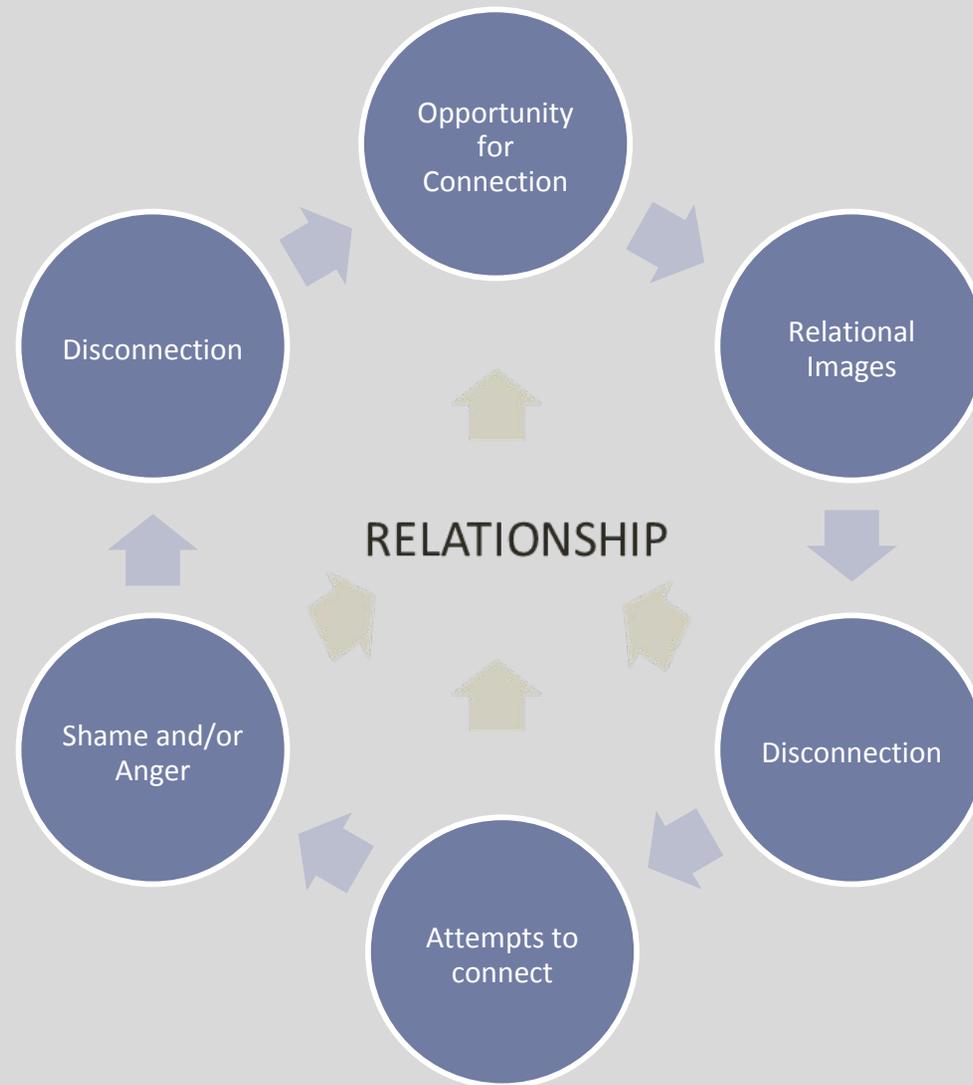
Miller noted five good things that come from connected, growth-producing relationships:

- 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).

Connection



Disconnection



Focus on Culture and Diversity

- Relational Images
- Cultural Privilege
- Concepts of Power
 - Power: the "capacity to produce a change" (Miller, 1968, p.198).
 - Power over.
- Privilege and 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.

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.

RCT and Supervision

- How does RCT apply to supervision, and specifically to social work supervision?

RCT Supervision



(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.

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, can be corrective for shame (Jordan, 2015).
- Application and use of RCT language to name observations, processes, and goals

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

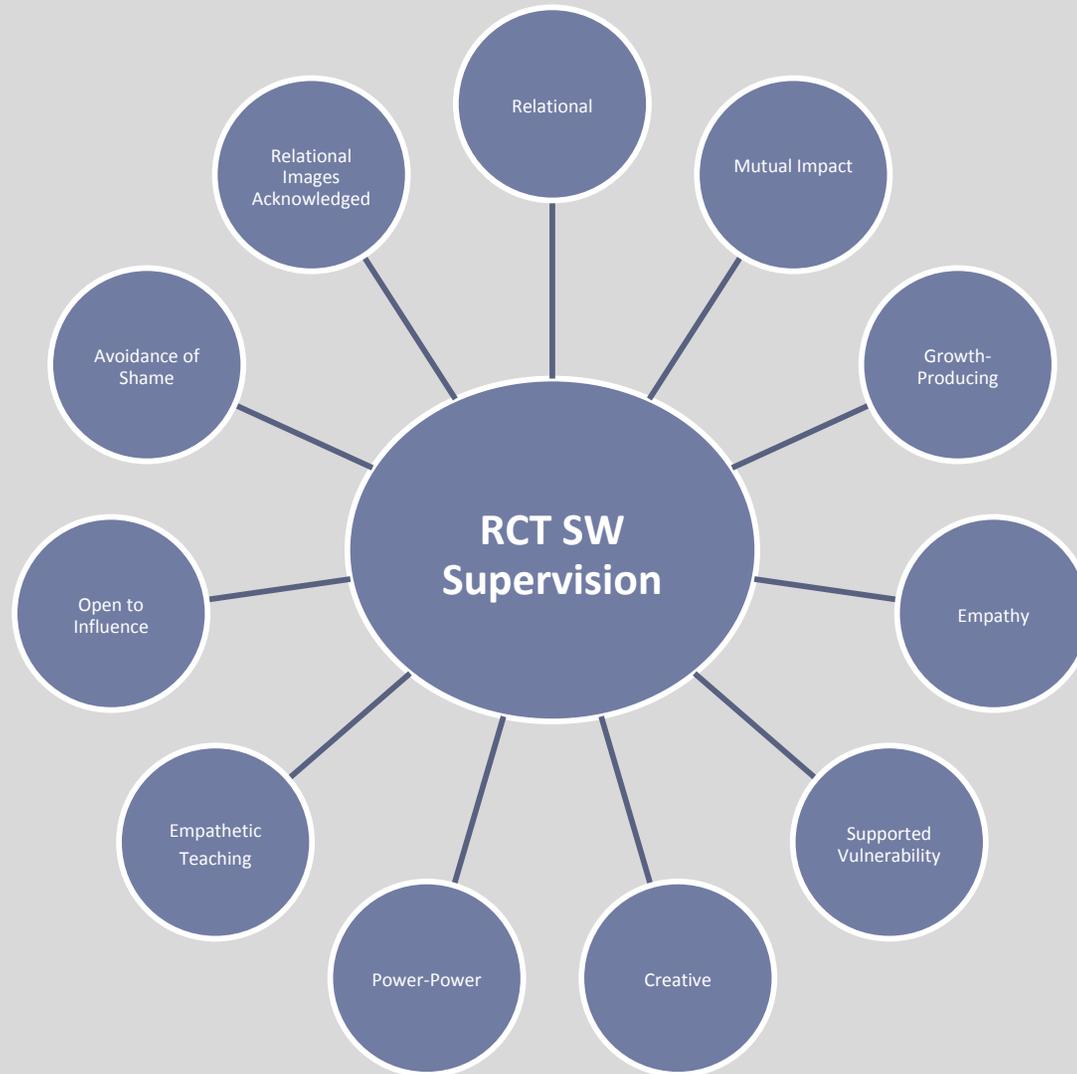
Intellectual Mattering

(Harriet Schwartz)

“Working With”

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

RCT Social Work Supervision



Discussion

What is your experience
of social work
and social work supervision
in contemporary agencies?

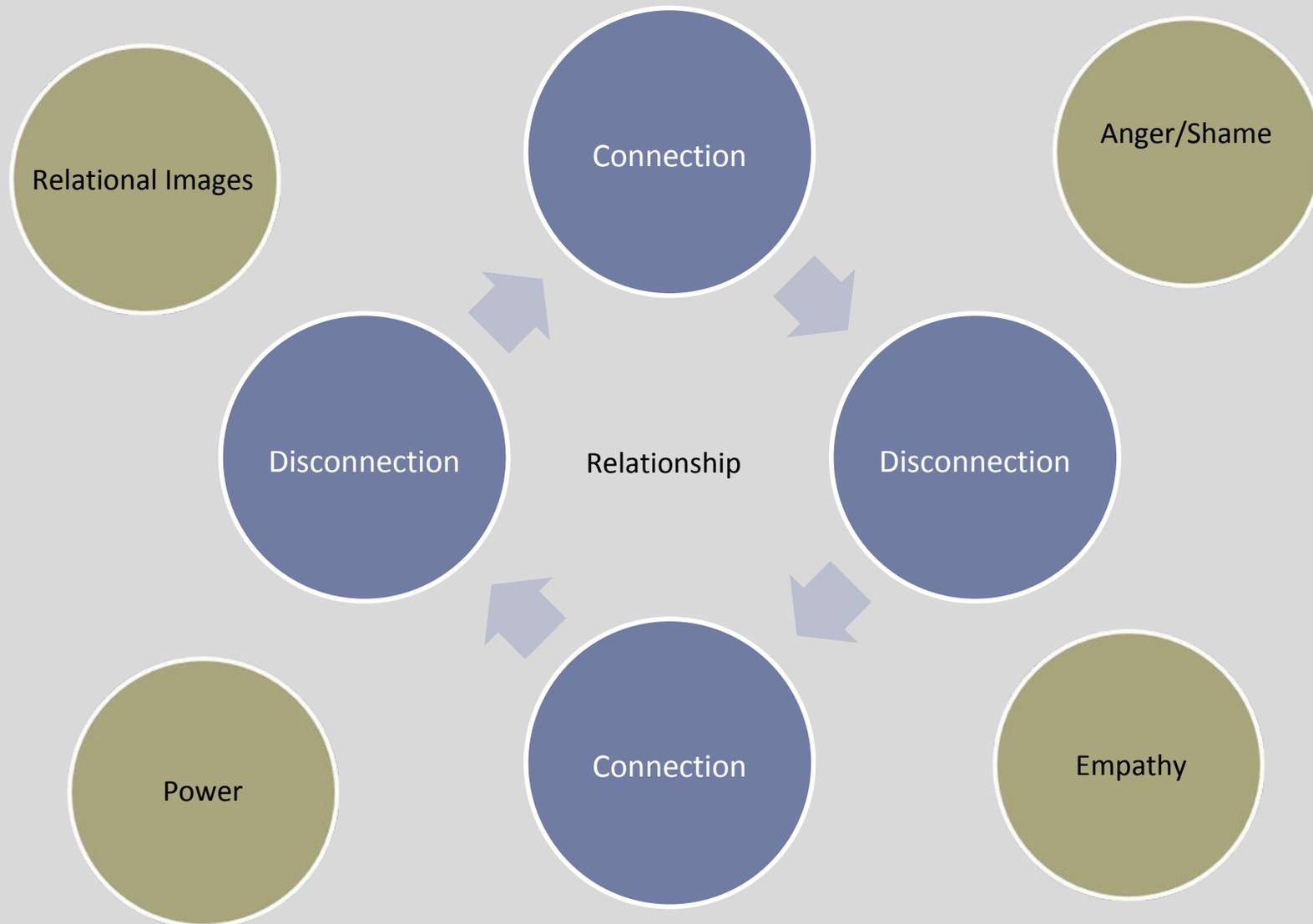
Agency Social Work



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).

Complications of Connection



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).

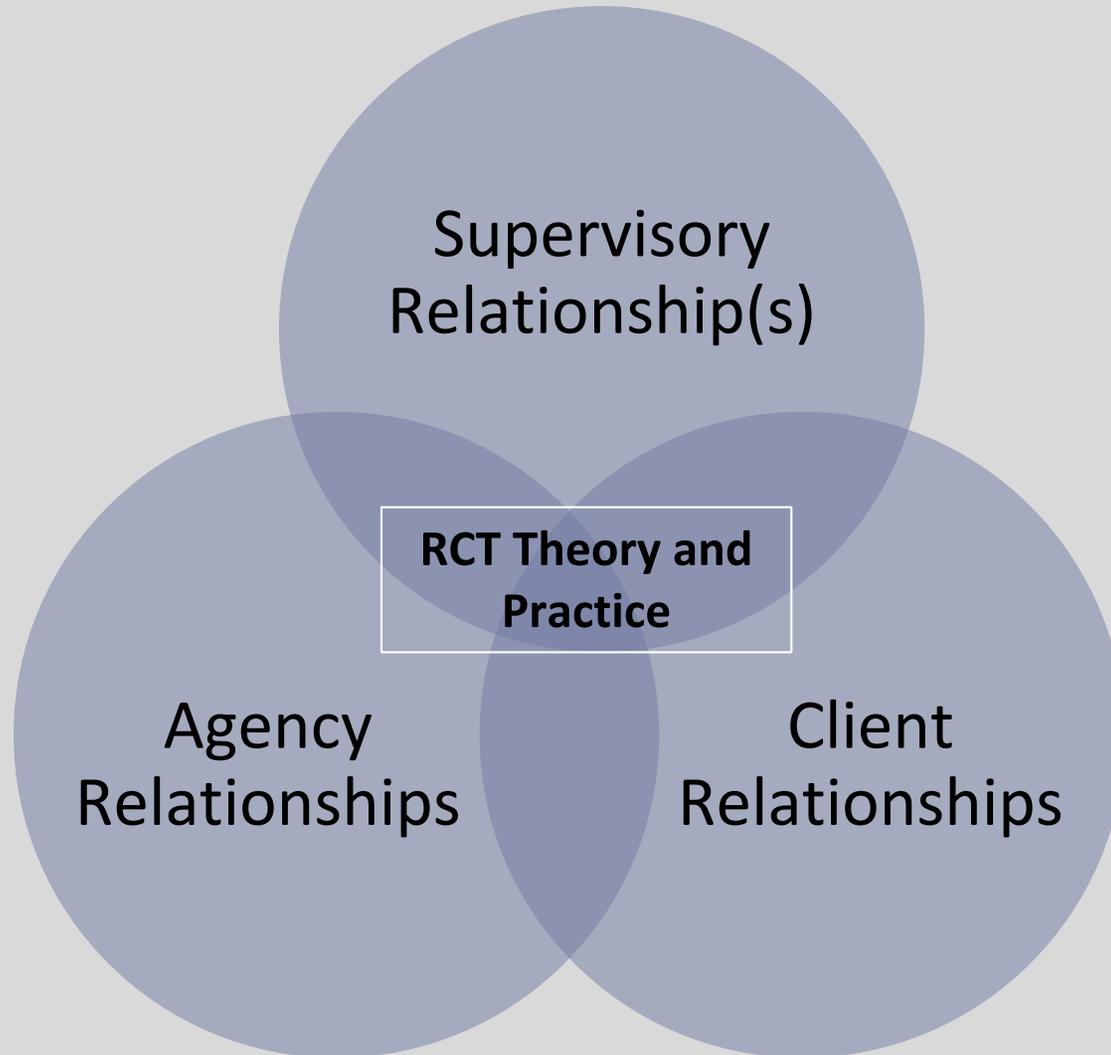
RCT in Agencies - Possibilities

- Rather than devaluing of relational work, 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.
- Supervisor as middle managers.
- Supervisors are not immune to agency stressors.

RCT Social Work Supervision



Unique RCT

- What is new/different/special about an RCT approach to supervision?
 - 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 n the agency.

What Do We See

- 5 good things, related to practice
- “you think like me”, “you get me” moments

“Working With”

- How does this operationalize to practice?

Case Example

Conclusion

Questions/Discussion

Contact Information

Lisa Eible, DSW MSW LCSW

limeible@yahoo.com

www.lisaeible.com

RCT Resource

- <http://jbmti.org/>