

# Relational-Cultural Theory and Social Work Supervision

Lisa Eible, DSW MSW LCSW

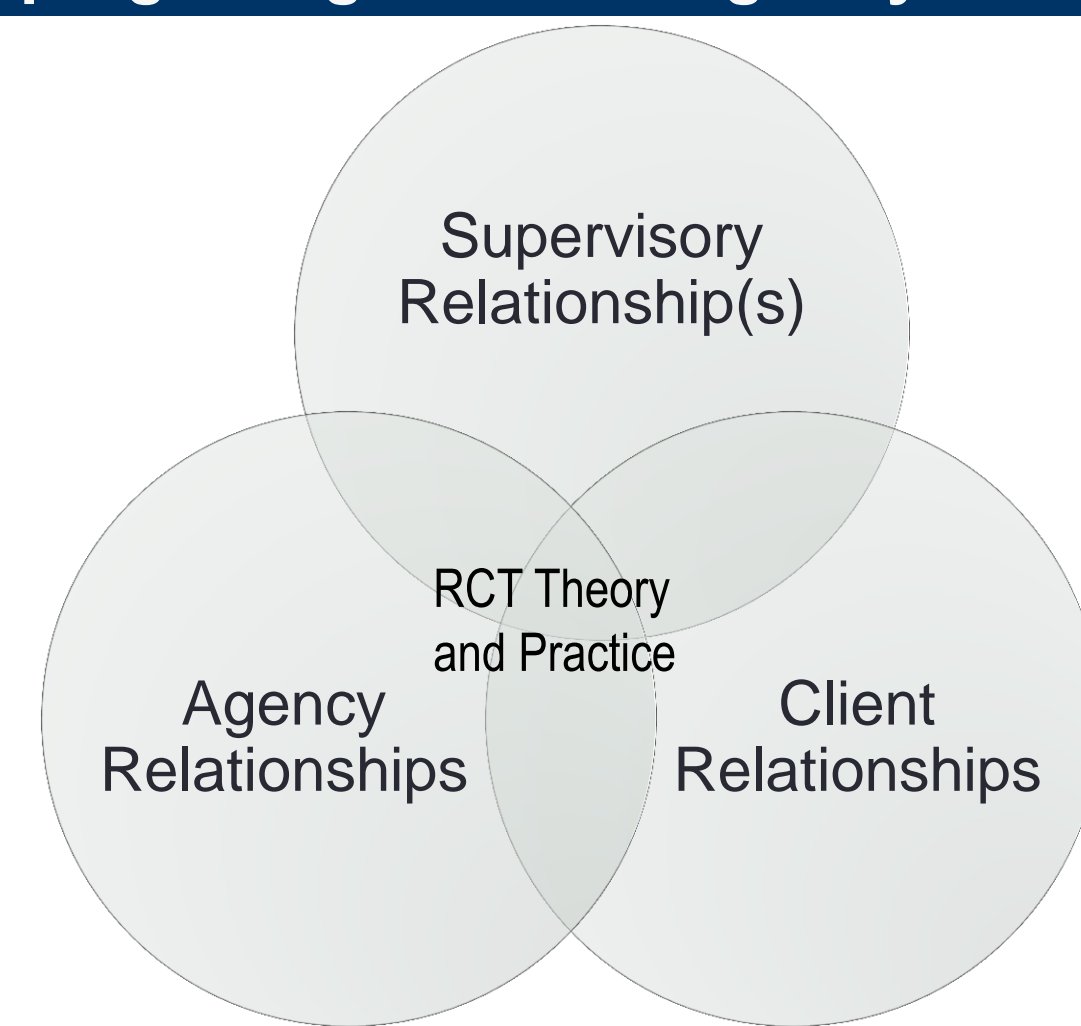
University of Pennsylvania

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## Research Question

How does Relational-Cultural Theory apply to and strengthen social work supervision in agencies?

## Overlapping Obligations of Agency Social Work

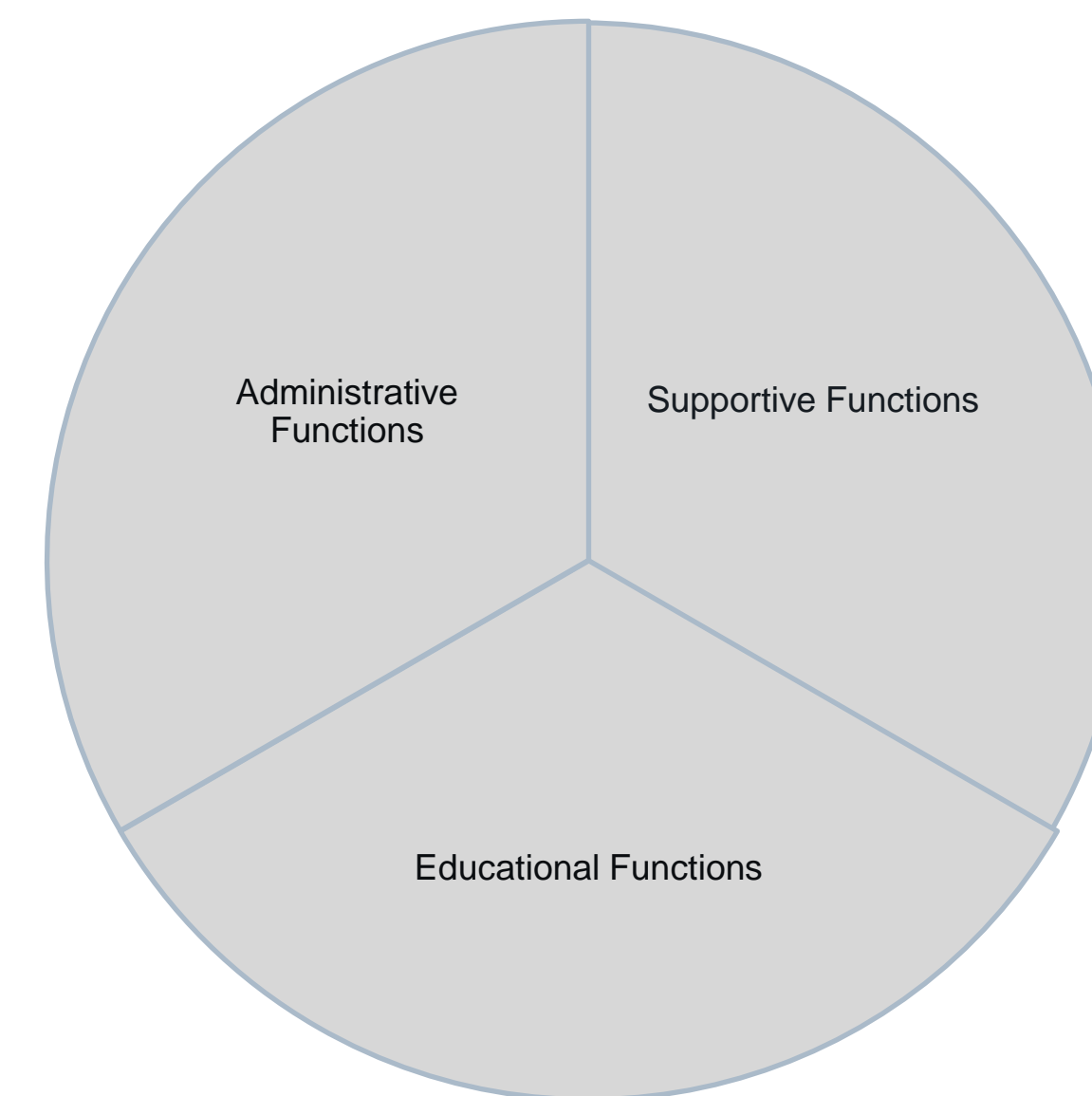


## Challenges in Contemporary Agencies

- 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).



## Features of Social Work Supervision



## Contemporary 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.

## Characteristics Desired by Supervisees

- Availability,
- Knowledgeable about tasks and skills and can relate these techniques to theory,
- Hold practice perspectives and expectations about service delivery similar to the supervisee's,
- Provision of support and encouragement of professional growth,
- Delegate responsibility to supervisees who can do the task,
- Serve as a professional role model,
- Communicate in a mutual and interactive supervisory style (Bogo and McNight, 2006, p. 59).

## Core Concepts of Relational-Cultural Theory

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.
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)

## RCT Supervision

vulnerability	avoidance of shame	demonstrating responsiveness and authenticity
evaluating outcomes	acknowledging the power of social context	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
mutual empowerment	mutual empathy	sensitivity to power differential
sensitivity to vulnerabilities	mutual learning	reflection
connecting with affect	mutual influence	empathic teaching

(Jordan 2004; Jordan 2010; Abernethy & Cook, 2011; Walker, 2008; Fletcher, Jordan & Miller, 2000; Jordan & Romney, 2005).

## RCT Social Work 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.
- 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

- Supervisor has 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.
- 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 in approach and attitude.
- 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 and mutuality are salient features.
- Collaboration with vulnerability
- Open and flexible
- Accepting of uncertainty
- Demonstrate an ability to learn alongside the supervisee (Abernathy and Cook, 2011).

## Considerations for RCT SW Supervision in Agencies

1. High level of self awareness required
2. RCT expertise helpful
3. Ability to manage through disconnection, with supervisees and with others in agency.
4. Ability to work with a wide variety of work styles, approaches to practice, and personality types.
5. Energy, endurance, agency/system management, issues/politic management are part of routine work.
6. Sensitivity to cultural differences and styles.
7. Self-disclosure and use of self may be different.
8. Advisement and relational mentoring includes features beyond work with clients.
9. Supervisors are often middle managers.
10. Supervisors are not immune to agency stressors.

## Contact information

Lisa Eible, DSW MSW LCSW  
 University of Pennsylvania  
 4508 Chestnut Street  
 Philadelphia, PA 19139  
[leible@yahoo.com](mailto:leible@yahoo.com)  
 267-253-0841