

Veronica - welcome



## Veronica

Each member introduces themselves, then I'll briefly recount how our CoP came together.



### Alana

Relational theory was an intervention in western psychotherapeutic models that cast women as "weak" because of their orientation toward relationships and interdependence

Initially articulated in the late 1970s by a working group of therapists at the Stone Center at Wellesley College, the model centered white women's experiences as universal

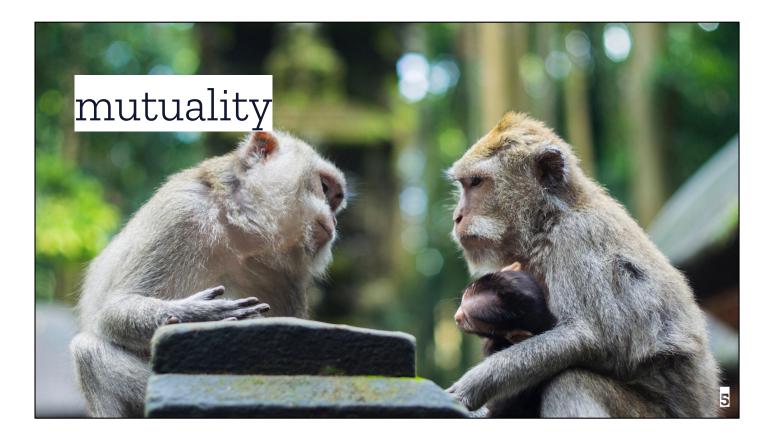
As women of color, lesbian and bisexual women, disabled women and others brought critiques of this distortion to the working group, the Stone Center group expanded to co-articulate the model with women holding different identities and experiences (Jordan 2017)

This expansion led to the development of Relational Cultural Theory, which incorporates analyses of how structures and systems of oppression impact our everyday lives and how we show up in relationships with each other



### Alana

- This model recognizes that we need connections to grow, develop and thrive
   -- and that isolation, at personal and cultural levels, is a source of suffering.
   While the model emerged out of therapy with women, it holds for all people.
   (Jordan 2017)
- In the relational cultural model, people move toward relationships in which they experience mutual empowerment, mutual empathy, authenticity, and a desire to continue growing interpersonal connections
- RCT practitioners attend to and intervene in disconnections that happen when people experience non-empathic responses or experience disconnection as that result from oppressive social practices & structures including racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism, transphobia, classism, and their intersections.
- Segue to Anastasia



### Anastasia

- Relationships are two ways! Sounds simple is it though?
- Parallel theory in Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed, which contrasts
  the traditional view of students as empty vessels that teachers pour into, with a
  model in which teacher & student learn from each other.
- How do we support the two-way-ness of relationships that we try to build? How do we ensure adequate room for real mutuality in relationships with unequal power dynamics?
- Ex: Are there places in library services where we make unilateral decisions
  with the assumption that they're for the good of our users? LOL yes, basically
  all descriptive metadata works that way.
- Ex: Are there places where we efface ourselves in our relationships with colleagues & patrons? Segue to Veronica.

#### Veronica

- Why can't my work reinvigorate me? Encountering RCT at peak burnout.
- Appreciation of the whole person; reciprocal acknowledgement and understanding of subjectivity.
- I am a person in this situation too. (self-affirmation and validation)
- If I cannot find intersubjective mutuality in my work, why not? What needs to change?
- EX. Changing my own relationship to work.
- Transition to Jo: Empathy is a key piece of mutuality and RCT



Jo

Empathy is key in order to move toward connection and relationships that foster growth. However, in order for real change to occur, empathy has to be mutual and multidirectional. When it is unidirectional and utilized as a technique to "feel someone's pain", it can be shallow and less likely to help form or maintain connection. If we demonstrate that we can respond to someone out of empathy and respect for them, then it becomes more significant. We have to show that not only do we understand someone's experience, but that it matters to us. This is part of going beyond neutrality, objectivity.

## Students

- -Ref desk
- -Teaching in the classroom
- -Student employees

## Colleagues

- -Faculty
- -Library



Jo

Experiencing vulnerability as a place of growth, rather than danger. What does it mean to be vulnerable, authentic without losing boundaries that protect us? This is not always possible, especially for those with marginalized identities.

Relational authenticity or vulnerability is not quite the same as total honesty, and/or removal of boundaries. How do we do this in our work with students, colleagues? Important to note that there are conditions that enable and inhibit these practices.

-Allowing vulnerability when working with patrons and/or students means allowing for openness, as well as movement away from the idea of objectivity or neutrality that doesn't allow us to respond or be ourselves. In the classroom, for me, it is part of decentering myself as an authority, and potentially letting student ideas guide the way.

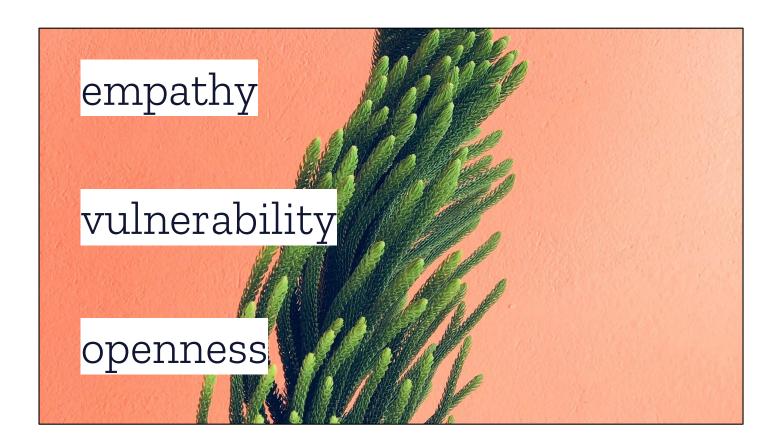
#### Lali

Allowing oneself to feel vulnerable in a collegial context can be complicated by fears of being "devalued, disempowered, or disgraced, perhaps triggering or reinforcing further feelings of shame" (Hartling, et al., 2004, pg. 103). Those of us with marginalized identities do not always feel safe enough to deploy our most authentic representations, particularly when such representations do not align with institutional norms and practices.

As Jo mentioned, authenticity extends beyond honesty and constant sharing; it is a person's ongoing ability to represent themselves in a relationship more fully (Stiver, 2004, pg. 72). Mutual engagement in growth-fostering relationships facilitates the creation of safe spaces where one can risk revealing their true self.

At CSUSM, I and two other colleagues--both self-identified as Chicana--work with first-year students in *Pathways to Academic Success and Opportunities* (PASO), a federally funded Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) Title V program designed to increase Latinx retention and graduation rates. We collaborate with PASO instructors on specialized information literacy curriculum emphasizing Latinx identities. In discussing evaluation of scholarly resources, including the discernment of bias, with Latinx students, we draw from our own personal and professional experiences. Being "real" allows us to build connection with our students, particularly as we disclose our own vulnerabilities and marginalization.

The ability to be "real" with our students entails fostering comfort and safety within our own collegial trio relationship--if we didn't have kinship with one another (anchored by mutual empathy), we simply could not do this work.



## Lali

The open expression of vulnerability has been coded as weak, particularly because "we live in a cultural milieu that does not respect helpseeking" (Jordan, 2004, pg. 35). We can acknowledge & be open about vulnerability IF we feel comfortable & confident enough to create growth-enhancing relationships (bringing folx with us in the process). Such connection is hard to achieve when one is trapped in a "power over" dynamic, where one person dictates the rules for discourse and direction of the relationship.

Segue to Veronica (Power With connections)



## Veronica (power with)

- RCT emphasizes the idea of power with, rather than power over (empowering), which is needed in a profession like ours which is
- Feminized but not a feminist profession (same hierarchical / patriarchal /racist structures)
- This practice actively subverts that hierarchy there is no active/passive dichotomy
- RCT aims to foster empowerment through a relational context healthy relationships
- EX: actively trying to cultivate this kind of relationship with the people I supervise. (ballad of the lonely manager)
- Transition to Alana



Alana (conflict) - We can treat conflict as an opportunity to learn, and to recognize and value different perspectives. We can be open to hearing how people are experiencing a situation in their position (in workplace hierarchy, for example), and developing a response together. In my work, I've tried to invite conflict (when I feel it emerging), in one-to-one and group contexts. I try to move into conflict by listening and asking questions to understand rather than to respond, and to reflect about what systems/policies/relationship dynamics contribute to a particular event (what's beneath the tip of the iceberg).



Veronica



Jo

# reflection

What inspired you today?

What have you heard that makes you want to move forward with an intentional practice of RCT?

How will you keep this practice going?



Anastasia

Jordan, Judith V, Linda M Hartling, and Maureen Walker. 2004. The Complexity of Connection:

Writings from the Stone Center's Jean Baker Miller Training Institute. New York: Guilford

Press.

Jordan, Judith V., Alexandra G. Kaplan, Jean Baker Miller, Irene P. Stiver, and Janet L. Surrey.

1991. Women's Growth in Connection: Writings from the Stone Center. New York, NY, US:
Guilford Press.

Miller, Jean Baker. 1987. Toward a New Psychology of Women. 2nd ed. edition. Boston: Beacon Press.

Walker, Maureen, and Wendy B. Rosen, eds. 2004. How Connections Heal: Stories from Relational-Cultural Therapy. New York: The Guilford Press.

what we've been reading