Introduction

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The primacy of connection in women's lives is not a new idea. The initial Stone Center model, which was called "self-in-relation," began with that idea but has been evolving ever since. That evolution has been a movement from a psychology of separation to one of connection, and it represents a profound change in our approach to understanding people. Putting connection at the center challenges core beliefs of Western social, psychological, and economic systems. Connection is not a simple, cozy, or easy concept; viewed as the primary organizer and source of motivation in people's lives, it is powerful, complex, and revolutionary, challenging some of the basic tenets and values of 21st-century Western culture.

In 1991 five women (J. V. Jordan, A. G. Kaplan, J. B. Miller, I. P. Stiver, & J. L. Surrey) published *Women's Growth in Connection*. Four of us had been meeting since 1978, trying to learn together, to break free of some of what we felt were the damaging effects for women of traditional therapy. We began cautiously, some of us not quite taking our own ideas seriously. But by 1981 we were writing papers to be presented at conferences, and we had found an institutional home at the Stone Center at Wellesley College where Jean Baker Miller served as the first director; we were literally coming into voice. *Women's Growth*

in Connection contained the essential early papers that were an effort to better understand and represent women's lives. We questioned the usefulness of a psychology that elevates and celebrates the separate self. Self is a metaphor, a highly valued concept in Western culture, particularly in the culture of the 21st-century United States. The dominant (white, male, middle-class, heterosexual) culture valorizes separation. To the extent that relationships are emphasized, they are viewed as primarily utilitarian, as aids to the achievement of a separate self. Our Western psychologies focus on individual personality traits, movement toward autonomy, independence, success accomplished through competitive achievement. They underemphasize the importance of connection, growth-fostering relationship, and the need to participate in the growth of relationship and community. The clinical practices that derive from these traditional developmental and clinical models typically overemphasize internal traits, intrapsychic conflict, and striving for independence. Therapeutic practices reflect the dominant culture of separation and power over others.

By the time our second volume of papers, *Women's Growth in Diversity*, was published (Jordan, 1997), we were referring to the Stone Center relational model. Connection, not self or even self-in-relation, was now (and still is) at the center of the model. The Stone Center model posits that connection is at the core of human growth and development. Isolation is seen as the primary source of human suffering. We believe that human beings grow through and toward connection. The path of human development is through movement to increasingly differentiated and growth-fostering connection; chronic disconnections result from the unresponsiveness of important people in our lives. 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 own feelings and the other person. 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 that we are effective in relationship with others, that we matter, that we can participate in creating growth-fostering and healthy relationships. Ultimately we feel anchored in community and we experience relational competence.

Women's Growth in Diversity emphasized the importance of connection as it also sought to move the model away from the biases of white, middle-class, heterosexual experience, from woman's voice to women's voices. Since publication of that book we have continued to explore connection, especially connection across difference. We are concerned about the suffering incurred at an individual level when people experi-

ence a sense of personal isolation, immobilization, and not "mattering" in the world. But we also care deeply about the effects of disconnection at a societal level, the ways that power differentials, forces of stratification, privilege, and marginalization can disconnect and disempower individuals and groups of people. The exercise of power over others (dominance), unilateral influence, and/or coercive control is a prime deterrent to mutuality.

Mutuality involves profound mutual respect and mutual openness to change and responsiveness. It does not mean equality. When it comes to the therapeutic relationship, it does not mean blurring of the roles of therapist and client. As Jean Baker Miller once said, "In order for one person to grow in a relationship, both people must grow." This involves intersubjective, cognitive–emotional change; there is a certain, although different, vulnerability for both participants. Although we ultimately believe safety lies in building good, growth-fostering relationships and not in establishing separation from and power over others, building authentic connection is predicated on tolerating uncertainty, complexity, and the inevitable vulnerability involved in real change. It is far from easy or being perpetually "nice."

Women's Growth in Diversity brought a phenomenological focus to the experience of women whose voices had been historically marginalized from the mainstream writing about women's development. The inclusion of these voices was intended to challenge our assumptions of a powerful mythic norm that would define "woman" as a white, economically privileged, able-bodied, and heterosexual female. Unchallenged, this norm becomes a standard against which all women's experience is interpreted and evaluated. Therefore, the extent to which any individual woman conforms to this norm becomes almost by default the measure by which she is deemed worthy of notice or fit for connection. The publication of *Women's Growth in Diversity* was therefore a critical step in the evolution of the model, one that emphasized the significance of cultural context to human development.

In this third volume of Stone Center papers, readers will see a further shift from the relational model to relational–cultural theory (RCT). This represents our growing awareness of the impact of culture. It follows from increased recognition that relationships do not exist as atomized units—separate and distinct from the larger culture. Indeed, relationships may both represent and reproduce the cultures in which they are embedded. Accordingly, theories about human development must answer the question: What purpose and whose interests does the theory serve? The history of psychological theory is replete with evidence of complicity with cultural arrangements and power practices that divide people into groups of dominants and subordinates. One ex-

ample of this complicity was the proliferation of psychiatric diagnoses in the 19th century ascribing certain "personality traits" to African slaves that supposedly made them susceptible to "rascality, episodes of running away and disregard for owner's property" (Thomas & Sillen, 1972). More recently, feminist theorists (Broverman, Broverman, Clarkson, Rosenkranz, & Vogel, 1970; Gilligan, 1982; Jordan et al., 1991; Miller, 1976, 1987; Miller & Stiver, 1997) have noted how the traditional theories of psychological maturity tended to overpathologize women as inherently needy, overly emotional, and dependent. Rarely was there any attention to the social structures and power arrangements that circumscribed the relational roles designated for women in a gender-stratified culture. When "personality traits" are attributed to a subordinate group and pathologized, psychological theories help to justify and preserve the culture's power stratifications. In sum, the shift from self-in-relation to RCT signifies an intentional focus on the social implications of theory development.

Through exploring connection and disconnection at both the individual and social levels, we begin to understand how the political becomes psychological/personal and vice versa. Connections form or fail to form within a web of other social and cultural relationships. As we more deeply understood the central role of culture and power differentials on relationships, we felt the model's name needed to signal this.

To place culture, alongside connection, at the center of the theory is to break a critical silence. First, it acknowledges that social and political values inform theories of human psychology, including those that valorize separation and autonomy. Relational–cultural theory does not pretend to be value neutral. RTC recognizes that to feign value neutrality is to perpetuate the distortions of the stratified culture in rather predictable ways. First, theory itself becomes exempt from social scrutiny and takes on an aura of truth. Second, such hierarchical "power over" theories control how all members of the culture are defined and known. Third, it does this by tending to degrade or pathologize the experiences of marginalized people. Fourth, it tends to overvalue and privilege the perspectives of people who are culturally dominant. Miller (1976) and others have pointed out that as one gains dominance in a culture of stratified power, enabling supports and connections are rendered invisible. By placing culture at the center of the model, RCT strives to make visible the multilayered connections that belie the myth of separation (Miller & Stiver, 1997).

In a culture that valorizes separation and autonomy, persons with cultural privilege can falsely appear more self-sufficient and so will be judged as healthier, more mature, more worthy of the privilege the society affords. Those who enjoy less cultural privilege (whether by virtue

of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or economic status) will more likely be viewed as deficient and needy. They are more likely to be subject to systematic disadvantage and culture shaming.

By bringing a phenomenological focus to cultural context, a more complete and accurate picture of human experience and possibility emerges. Without such a focus, the experiences of both the socially privileged and the socially disadvantaged are subject to distortion. A brief example might illustrate this point.

"Sarah" was a late-middle-aged white woman who had just completed her graduate degree in history. As she spoke with her counselor about her career prospects, she began to bemoan the fact that she lacked a "spirit of adventure." As if to prove her point, she recounted a media story she had heard about a young woman who was described as having dropped everything to travel to another continent to study and write about tribal naming practices. As the conversation progressed, Sarah's counselor encouraged her to consider the contextual factors that informed her career path and to speculate as to whether there might be meaningful differences between her own situation and that of the "adventurous" younger woman. Sarah had started graduate school following an economically devastating divorce. Although she did not bear economic responsibility for her grown children, she did assist in providing resources and caretaking for her aging father. Sarah began to see that she did not suffer from lack of ambition or adventurous spirit, but rather that her relational context—including the changing nature of her relationship with her father and her socioeconomic status—required exquisite attunement to contingencies and complexities of life. She also began to see the irony in a story that would applaud individual pluck and ambition, when an intricate web of relational supports must be in place before someone could "drop everything."

The illusion of separation and the mistaken belief in autonomy contribute to the denial of the basic human need to participate in the growth of others and to being open to being moved by others. And yet the power to move others, to find responsiveness, to effect change, to create movement together is a vital part of good connection. How power is defined and expressed is crucial. For instance there is the power to name, to shame, and to define another's value or lack thereof, the power to distribute resources. If this power is expressed unilaterally, it reduces the strength and power of the other person or group of people who do not hold this power. As it is held onto and denied to others, it creates disconnections and disempowerment. Inequalities in power distribution occur in families, in therapy relationships, in work relationships. At a societal level, unequal distribution of power among groups—those largely defined as marginal by dominant center groups—

is rampant and the source of pain and disconnection among the members of the marginalized groups.

The complexity of connection and of relationships arises from unequal power, from working with difference, or from trying to manage conflict creatively. RCT recognizes that all relationships are punctuated by disconnections, misunderstandings, and conflict. Connecting in a real, growthful way with others is not always harmonious or comfortable; we all experience fear, anger, and shame. We move away to protect ourselves, particularly if we are not met with empathic responsiveness or if we feel we do not matter to the other person. But when we can renegotiate these inevitable disconnections, the relationship is enhanced and personal feelings of well-being, creativity, and clarity increase.

The path of connection is filled with disconnections, the vulnerability of seeking reconnection, and the tension around needing to move away, possibly to hide in protective inauthenticity. But we believe there is a powerful force behind the movement toward connection, a yearning for connection, a desire to contribute to others, to serve something larger than "the self."

In this volume we turn toward the complexity of connection. These papers ask: How can we create a radical new language of connection and fully appreciate the fundamental contribution of relationship to human development? How can we appreciate the power of "controlling images?" Described so powerfully by Patricia Hill Collins (1990), these images are often about race, class, gender, and sexual orientation, and are imposed by the dominant culture to disempower and marginalize subordinate groups. This volume seeks to examine how cultural stratification along multiple social identities shapes developmental experiences and relational possibilities. Specifically, many of the authors explore how experiences of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, class, and gender affect the development of authenticity and mutual empathy in relationship. In previous volumes, we have elucidated the relational consequences of interpersonal disconnection, describing it as a primary source of human suffering. As we further examine the complexities of connection, we will explore the thesis that a "power over" culture is itself an agent of disconnection that, left unchallenged, effectively diminishes the relational capacities and confidence of all its members. For example, because unilateral power breeds fear, it also diminishes the relational capacities of those who hold power over others. When the purpose of a relationship is to protect the power differential (maintain the gap between those who hold privilege and those who do not), it is highly unlikely that authentic responsiveness can unfold. Indeed, authentic engagement and openness to mutual influence may be viewed as dangerous practices.

True to Jean Baker Miller's original conception, the writings emanating from RCT are still referred to as "works in progress." These ideas have evolved in a relational context characterized by responsiveness and mutual creation. As a group we revisit, rethink, and question our own formulations with the same curiosity and, at times, uneasiness with which we address other models

We have published more than 100 works in progress and many books. Our group has been changed by time and sadly the deaths of one of our founding members, Irene P. Stiver, and of our very early important contributor, Alexandra G. Kaplan, Both of these colleagues were crucial to the growth of our ideas and practices. Despite our personal and professional grief at these losses, we continue with new core contributors, new directions, and new energy. The coeditors of this volume, Maureen Walker and Linda M. Hartling, are two of these very treasured and core voices.

Part I of this volume, "Deepening Our Understanding of Relationship," begins with new theoretical contributions that seek to apply a relational rather than a separation model to competence (Chapter 1), resilience (Chapter 2), and relational awareness (Chapter 3). These chapters challenge the notion that resilience and other characteristics attributed to individuals are really internal, individual traits. Chapter 4 examines therapists' authenticity. Chapters 5, 7, and 8 specifically address an RCT theoretical understanding of race and racism. In a culture where race is a central stratifier, those on both the dominant and the subjugated sides of the racial divide are likely to experience significantly distorted relational expectancies and possibilities. Chapter 6 examines how shame and humiliation can disrupt connection and lead to isolation; the privilege–power dimension is always at the core of this inquiry, whether it be about race, gender, or sexual orientation. How does a group with less power, given less respect by the dominant groups, maintain a sense of dignity? How do marginalized people resist the forces of shame that are directed at them to disempower and silence them? Moreover, as with other social stratifiers, the experience of race and racism also affects how one interprets other aspects of a complex cultural environment.

Part II of the book, "Applying the Power of Connection," RCT is applied in Chapter 9 to couple therapy, work that depends on establishing a "we" relationship and addressing the relationship itself. Our more recent work with groups and time-limited therapy is included in Chapters 10 and 12, respectively. In Chapter 11 we also look at the ways in which this model helps us better understand boys and men. The book ends in Chapter 13 with our most recent application of RCT to the workplace and organizations. How can we rethink the place of relation-

ship in the workplace, making the invisible strengths of connection visible and validated?

We hope that readers who know our earlier work will find a deepening of understanding in this volume. For those of you new to this work, we hope you find resonance and a sense of possibility. We also hope that questions will arise for all who join us in this journey: How is RCT different from other models of therapy? What are the implications for organizing social institutions differently around a core belief in connection rather than separation? We also continue to live with these recurring questions: What makes for change in therapy? How can we use what we learn in psychological practice and theory to facilitate social change? Psychological theory and feminist practice in no way have all the answers. The path of connection is filled with complexity, contradiction, and uncertainty. In the face of the unknowns and the humbling blindspots, we are dedicated to learning, to being responsive. In a world that is increasingly disconnected, violent, and filled with fear, where community needs are obscured by individual greed and competition, we feel a commitment to connection. And in turning to connection, we feel hope.

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