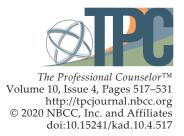# Relational Cultural Theory–Informed Advising in Counselor Education

Kirsis A. Dipre, Melissa Luke

Relational cultural theory emerged in the 1970s as a reaction to the dominant view of women in psychology and continues to challenge societal values while promoting social justice. Key tenets of relational cultural theory are to promote growth-fostering relationships and move toward connection. These may be applied in a variety of contexts within higher education. This conceptual manuscript provides an overview of advising relationships, particularly within counselor education. A thorough review of relational cultural theory and its potential utility in advising is presented. Then a case conceptualization is provided to illustrate how faculty advisors can enhance their advising practices and better address interpersonal dynamics within the advising relationship. Implications for using this framework in multiple higher education settings are discussed.

Keywords: **relational cultural theory, advising, counselor education, higher education, interpersonal dynamics**

Advising is crucial in enhancing counseling students' opportunities for success and for supporting their professional preparation as licensed counselors and/or counselor educators (Barbuto et al., 2011; Knox et al., 2006; Kuo et al., 2017; Mu & Fosnacht, 2019; Robbins, 2012). Yet advising is not always part of the doctoral preparation of faculty members (Ng et al., 2019) and not always adequately prioritized and supported within counselor education programs (Furr, 2018). Further, advising is considered part of teaching responsibilities at some institutions and part of service activities at others (Ng et al., 2019). Depending on the institution, advising may not be prioritized (He & Hutson, 2017). This is concerning considering the importance of advising for the academic success of students (Knox et al., 2006; Kuo et al., 2017) and their further development in the counseling profession (Ng et al., 2019; Sackett et al., 2015). According to the American Counseling Association's *ACA Code of Ethics* (2014), counselor educators have a responsibility to deliver career advisement and expose their students to opportunities for supplementary development. Although faculty advising responsibilities are not clearly defined and remain woefully underexamined (Ng et al. 2019), this conceptualization extends consideration of advising beyond the formulaic tasks of providing course registration support and incorporates exploration of life goals.

Consistent with this new conceptualization, the counselor education advising role has shifted from a perfunctory extracurricular service to a more process-focused co-curricular relationship that can include a systemic approach (Ng et al., 2019). This conceptualization is representative of the functions of a faculty advisor in counselor education, as the profession requires students to consider their investment in being lifelong learners (Kuo et al., 2017; Sackett et al., 2015). Therefore, counselor education advisees are tasked with completing the curricular requirements in their program of study to develop the knowledge and skills needed for professional success in addition to continuing their education through engagement in authentic and developmentally appropriate activities.

Advisors are well positioned to assist in the foundational planning for students' success within the counseling profession. To accomplish this, well-equipped advisors require a strong knowledge

Kirsis A. Dipre, MA, NCC, is a doctoral candidate at Syracuse University. Melissa Luke, PhD, NCC, ACS, LMHC, is Associate Dean for Research and Dean's Professor at Syracuse University. Correspondence may be addressed to Kirsis A. Dipre, 130 College Place, Suite 440, Syracuse, NY 13210, kadipre@syr.edu.

base predicated on theoretical foundations (Musser & Yoder, 2013; Sackett et al., 2015). Although no one advising approach is adequately situated to assist everyone optimally, it is the advisor's ethical obligation to be well informed regarding their own approaches and ways to adjust to meet the individual and contextual needs of their advisees (Kimball & Campbell, 2013). Despite the growing differentiation of advising from mentoring, few theories or models have been purported to undergird the advising process in counselor education (Ng et al., 2019). The present manuscript aims to fill this gap by providing counseling advisors with a theoretically sound and research-grounded framework to enhance their advisory practice using relational cultural theory (RCT). In subsequent sections, the relevance of RCT for advising in counselor education and its central assumptions will be discussed, the current state of advising in counselor education will be described, and a relational cultural advising case conceptualization will be provided to assist counselor educators in better understanding and developing RCT-informed advising practices.

Relevance of RCT to Advising

RCT originated as a developmental model for women; however, broader applicability was quickly recognized given the commonalities across people and the impact of societal values on people's functioning (Jordan, 2018; Jordan et al., 1991; Walker, 2004). Presently, RCT is utilized across a variety of clinical populations as well as in non-clinical settings (Jordan, 2017, 2018; Robb, 2007). For example, Luke (2016) described the use of RCT with children experiencing gender dysphoria; Cannon et al. (2012) described its use in group treatment settings with adult women; and Fletcher and Ragins (2007), as well as Hammer et al. (2014), noted its utility in mentoring contexts. More recently, Schwartz (2019) described the utility of RCT within teaching across higher education contexts. Because RCT is predicated on the co-construction of knowledge both by individuals and groups, RCT is readily translated into new settings and contexts (Rogers & Stanciu, 2015), in this case advising within counselor education programs.

Relational Cultural Theory

In its most basic form, RCT posits that humans need social connections throughout the life span, placing social connections at the center of human development. Both this basic postulate and the usefulness of RCT have been consistently supported in empirical studies (Eisenberger & Lieberman, 2005; Lenz, 2016; Schore, 2015). To gain an understanding of human development, RCT-oriented practitioners rely on several core assumptions. As outlined by Miller and Stiver (1997) and later Jordan and Dooley (2000), the eight core assumptions are as follows: (a) people grow through and toward relationship; (b) mature functioning is reflected in movement toward mutuality rather than separation; (c) growth is characterized by relationship differentiation and elaboration; (d) growth-fostering relationships are based on mutual empathy and empowerment; (e) authenticity is required for real engagement in growth-fostering relationships; (f) development is a mutual exchange through which all involved contribute, grow, and benefit; (g) the goal is to develop increased relational competence over one's life span; and (h) mutual empathy and mutual empowerment are at the core of human development. Advisors can enhance their advising practices by enacting these eight tenets to provide advisees with opportunities to develop the intra- and interpersonal relational awareness and skills requisite in counseling and counselor education work contexts while also offering greater support for students in navigating graduate training programs within counselor education. The application of RCT tenets will be demonstrated in a later section using a case study.

Development

During the 1970s, a time in which the helping professions were dominated by ideologies developed by White males and the United States was roaring with a desire for change, psychologist Jean Baker Miller transformed the way we think about human development (Cohn, 1997; Hartling, 2008; Robb,

2007). Rather than striving for independence, as posited by the leading psychotherapy theories, Miller (1976) argued that human beings grow through and toward relationship. Almost 20 years after the development of the initial relational model, it underwent a significant shift. As this model evolved and expanded into its current theory, the scope was broadened to include an exploration of power in relationships (Walker, 2004). To this day, the RCT-related literature continues to grow (Comstock et al., 2008; Hall et al., 2018; Hammer et al., 2014; Purgason et al., 2016; Rogers & Stanciu, 2015).

In addition to exploring gender, this work has also focused on understanding the connections of relationships across differences in race (Purgason et al., 2016; Walker, 2004), ethnicity (Hall et al., 2018), sexual/affectional orientation, and gender identity (Luke, 2016) in both counseling and in the workplace. Thus, the scope of RCT has widened from solely focusing on women to addressing identity and power structures within all relationships, and now includes considerable attention to populations of minority status across a variety of contexts (Cannon et al., 2012; Comstock et al., 2008; Hammer et al., 2016; Schwartz, 2019; Walker, 2004, 2010). Similarly, scholars have more recently applied RCT beyond the therapeutic relationship to various processes within academia, including mentorship (Gammel & Rutstein-Riley, 2016; Hammer et al., 2014), clinical supervision (Williams & Raney, 2020), pedagogy (Hall et al., 2018; Schwartz, 2019), and advising for doctoral students of color (Purgason et al., 2016).

Philosophical Underpinnings
Since the inception of RCT, Miller and colleagues recognized the alignment of their observations of women's experiences with the positivistic perspective (Robb, 2007; Rogers & Stanciu, 2015), in that the observable realities could be understood through reason and logic. At the same time, theorists also situated RCT within the postmodern perspective because the theory intentionally acknowledges the possibility for multiple truths (Hansen, 2004; Rigazio-DiGilio, 2001; Rogers & Stanciu, 2015). Epistemologically, the theorists positioned RCT from a social constructivist standpoint (Jordan, 2018), meaning that the theory emphasizes the individual's unique phenomenological experiences in relation to the social systems in which they are embedded. Thus, through RCT, one takes into account historical and cultural contexts that inform one's meaning-making systems. RCT is also grounded on the premise that social construction of identities and the significance of power and hierarchy within relationships limits relational images and expectations (Birrell & Bruns, 2016; Jordan, 2018; Jordan et al., 1991). Broadly, a constructivist theory assumes that reality is created by individuals (Hansen, 2004; Jaccard & Jacoby, 2010), making subjectivity essential in understanding a person's experience of reality. In contrast, a social constructionist theory assumes that reality is constructed by groups and, therefore, subjectivity is removed (Hansen, 2004; Rigazio-DiGilio, 2001). Although these epistemic positions may seem inherently contradictory, they intersect to create an individual–systems dialect within RCT. According to Hansen (2004), the integration of epistemologies permits greater inclusivity, allowing for a more complex conceptualization of the relational processes, particularly those that are part of RCT-informed growth and development (Rogers & Stanciu, 2015), including those in advising (Purgason et al., 2016). Thus, we argue that RCT is well positioned to address the unique needs of advisees as individuals (constructivist) while also addressing these advising needs as they arise within counselor education graduate programs and as part of larger systems (social constructionist).

Advising in Counselor Education

For faculty members in counselor education, advising may not be prioritized in terms of responsibilities and may only be considered as part of courses they may be teaching, and/or as part of the tenure and promotion process (He & Hutson, 2017; Kuo et al., 2017). Yet, the advising relationship is one of the few structures in place to facilitate student success (Barbuto et al., 2011; Knox et al., 2006), and

despite its centrality in counselor education (Purgason et al., 2016), the literature on advising and the advisory relationship is scarce within counselor education. Since the publication of the *2016 CACREP Standards* by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP; 2015), there has been increased attention to the advising process (Ng et al., 2019).

Within counselor education, however, the extant literature on advising has focused on the responsibilities and priorities of the advisor (Knox et al., 2006) and neglected the processes involved in engaging in a "positive developmental relationship" (Ng et al., 2019, p. 54). Moreover, the focus of the literature also prioritizes advisement of doctoral students, overlooking the importance of appropriate advising for master's students. Despite CACREP's (2015) recommendations for programs to assign students in entry-level programs an advisor, few scholars have explored advising of master's students in counseling programs. Instead, research has centered on the advising of master's students pursuing doctoral studies (Farmer et al., 2017; Sackett et al., 2015). Still, these studies did not directly investigate the advisory process with master's students in counseling programs, contributing to the widening gap between the limited scholarship focused on advising master's students and the growing doctoral student advising literature. Recently, Rogers and colleagues (2020) discussed master's students' attachment, cognitive distortions, and experience of feedback in supervision. They discovered that attachment anxiety led to increased cognitive distortions, which further contributed to difficulty with corrective feedback during clinical supervision. Similar to feedback within supervisory relationships, advisors provide students with feedback during advising; therefore, it is important for faculty advisors to be aware of their advisees' experiences of this process. As such, RCT provides a theoretical framework to strategically approach such situations with cognitive complexity and clinical sensitivity.

Advising Approaches

Generally, an advisor in higher education is typically a faculty member whose responsibility is to guide their advisees through their programs (Mu & Fosnacht, 2019; Ng et al., 2019). This is usually accomplished through implementation of one of three distinctive approaches to advising outlined by Crookston (1972/2009). The *developmental approach* is used to attend to students' progress throughout their educational careers, making it holistic in nature. Through this approach, the advisor aims at assisting students in the exploration of career and life goals as well as teaching the necessary skills to reach these goals. The *prescriptive advising approach*, in which the role of the advisor is to provide information related to courses, policies, and logistics, may also be adopted. This advising approach is didactic; the advisor's goal is to assist the advisee to meet their academic requirements, and the process is often initiated by the advisee. Finally, advisors may choose to use a *proactive approach* in which the advisor establishes a strong relationship with the advisee. The advisor leads the process and reaches out to the advisee during critical points and when the advisee may be at risk or belong to an underserved population. The goal is to provide additional support to the advisee (He & Hutson, 2017; Mu & Fosnacht, 2019).

Although there have been no counselor education–specific advising theories put forth in the literature to date, the conceptual literature has been informed by mentoring enactment theory (Mansson & Myers, 2012), bioecological systems theory (Ng et al., 2019), and RCT (Hammer et al., 2014; Purgason et al., 2016). Moreover, despite McDonald's (2019) contention of the centrality of theory-informed training for advisors, no research was identified that directly examined advising outcomes resulting from one theoretical approach or that addressed differences across the advising approaches most commonly used within counselor education, although current literature suggests the developmental approach is most widely used in higher education. This is evidenced by the shift away from prescriptive tasks and movement toward advancing career goals that align with advisees' personhood (Kuo et al., 2017; McDonald, 2019). To date no studies have examined if this holds true

in counselor education specifically. That said, the extant advising literature has continued to show that advising is key for ensuring student success (Robbins, 2012; Sackett et al., 2015). Because of the uniqueness of each advisory relationship, as well as the characteristics of each advisee, we can say that no specific approach or strategy of advising will be sufficient in assisting the needs of all advisees. Similar to the supervisory and counseling relationship, there is complexity in attending to individual, developmental, and systemic needs within the advisory relationship (Barbuto et al., 2011; Mu & Fosnacht, 2019). Therefore, it is imperative that counselor educators serving as advisors are well versed in varying approaches to advising, particularly because of the lack of actual training received by faculty serving in this capacity (He & Hutson, 2017; Kimball & Campbell, 2013).

The advising relationship in and of itself has been found to be essential in the success of students in doctoral programs (Knox et al., 2006; McDonald, 2019). Most recently, Purgason and colleagues (2016) used an RCT framework to enhance the advisory process for doctoral students from underrepresented identities in counselor education programs. They argued the RCT framework provided a strong foundation for attending to the multicultural and social justice competencies in the counselor education profession. This argument aligns with our view. Further, we propose that RCT provides a comprehensive foundation for enhancing the advisory relationship of all advisees in counseling programs regardless of program level. Generally, an advisor operating from an RCT-informed perspective may be closely monitoring their advisees' and their own unique ways of interacting within the relationship. Explicit attention to this would be part of ongoing advising discussions. In accordance with the eight basic RCT assumptions, the advisor would approach the advising process as a means for growth and empowerment for both themselves and their advisees. In our own RCT-informed advising practices, we have used the eight RCT assumptions as a guide for process and outcome goal planning and as a framework for recording advisement notes. The current manuscript builds on the extant conceptualization of RCT-informed advising and uses a case vignette to illustrate and discuss the application.

Case Vignette

Dr. Mare Smith is a 36-year-old, White female counselor educator working at Playa Del Rio University in the southwestern region of the United States. Since joining the faculty 5 years ago, Dr. Smith has taught seven different courses: Introduction to Counseling, Counseling Theories and Application, Social and Cultural Issues in Counseling, Couples Counseling, Human Sexuality, Marriage and Family Practicum, and Marriage and Family Internship. Dr. Smith receives one course release from the typical 3:3 annual course load for her work as program coordinator for the Marriage, Couple, and Family Counseling master's program and her service as Chapter Faculty Advisor of the Counselors for Social Justice chapter in her department. In addition, as part of her institution's new strategic plan to expand their online course delivery, Dr. Smith has volunteered to develop online sections of the Introduction to Counseling, Social and Cultural Issues in Counseling, and Human Sexuality courses so that these can be offered in the next academic year. In exchange for this work, she will receive a $4,000 stipend for each course. Although not contractually obligated, Dr. Smith has typically taught two courses each summer; however, this past summer Dr. Smith elected to teach only one course so she could begin preparation of her promotion and tenure dossier, which needs to be submitted by October 15.

While collecting the documentation necessary for her dossier, Dr. Smith reviewed her scholarly productivity, her servant leadership profile, and her teaching evaluations and advising reports. Even though Dr. Smith entered academia with a handful of academic publications co-authored with her doctoral advisor and other graduate students on the research team, she is pleased that she has continued

to publish one piece almost every year for a total of seven peer-reviewed articles (three research, four conceptual) and two book chapters. In addition, Dr. Smith recognized that like many female faculty and faculty from historically marginalized groups, she has continued to engage in a high level of servant leadership across her program, department, college, community, and the counseling profession. In addition to program coordination and chapter faculty advisement, Dr. Smith has chaired and/or served as a member of the admissions committee of her program and the portfolio review committee in her department each year. She has also been a member of the diversity committee in the college for 3 years and was part of four faculty search committees in other departments. Moreover, Dr. Smith has recently been named an ad hoc reviewer for the journal published by the National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC), *The Professional Counselor*, and she also serves as a mentor through the NBCC Minority Fellowship Program. Overall, Dr. Smith's student evaluations have steadily increased over time, and she typically receives scores of approximately 4.5/5 across all courses other than in Social and Cultural Issues in Counseling, where her average evaluations hover at about a 4.0/5. Knowing that student evaluations for online courses tend to be lower than for in-person classes, Dr. Smith is relieved that the online classes will not be completed by the time her dossier is submitted. That said, as a well-respected and sought after advisor to almost 35 students each year, Dr. Smith is hoping that her favorite advisee, Tatyana Acevedo, follows through on her intention to nominate Dr. Smith for the college's Graduate Advisor Award.

Tatyana Acevedo is a 24-year-old, Afro-Latinx second-year student who works at the college library while also completing her master's degree in marriage, couple, and family counseling. Early in her first semester, Tatyana stood out from her classmates in Dr. Smith's Introduction to Counseling class, not only for her exemplary preparation and high level of engagement in class, but also for the complexity and depth with which she approached both academic and professional issues. Through their advising relationship, Dr. Smith had communicated her appreciation for Tatyana's complex ways of thinking and ability to relate to others in class. This paved the way for an advising relationship in which Tatyana felt supported, empowered, and appreciated by Dr. Smith. Following the midterm exam, Tatyana met with Dr. Smith to review the three questions she missed on the exam, and this is where they discovered a shared interest in cultural empathy and cultural humility research. During this meeting, and the bi-weekly meetings thereafter, Tatyana and Dr. Smith discussed a range of topics, including Tatyana's program of study and aspirations after graduation, as well as contemporary professional issues. At the end of the spring semester, Dr. Smith broached the possibility of collaborating with Tatyana on a summer writing project related to cultural humility. Dr. Smith was careful to proactively discuss the parameters of the project and timeline, reviewed what constituted authorship and their respective contributions to the project, and addressed the inherent power dynamics within and across their relational roles and how these might be experienced. This discussion and the many similar ones that ensued throughout the project were all tremendously meaningful to Tatyana. Although she frequently remarked about how much she learned about cultural humility and the technical aspects of scholarly writing from Dr. Smith, Tatyana was also vocal about the growth she experienced as both a person and professional through the project. For these reasons, Tatyana informed Dr. Smith at the end of the summer and before the manuscript was submitted of her intention to apply to doctoral study in counselor education and supervision and nominate Dr. Smith for the annual Playa Del Rio University Graduate Advisor Award, with material for both due in the fall. Although Dr. Smith had always enjoyed Tatyana and believed in her potential, she felt particularly validated by their work together on this project and through learning of its impact on Tatyana's career decisions.

Nonetheless, Tatyana and Dr. Smith missed their agreed-upon deadline for the manuscript submission and eventually decided that they would suspend their work until applications and the dossier were submitted in the fall. As Tatyana developed the nomination letter and secured three

letters of support for Dr. Smith, she was also completing her applications for admissions to doctoral programs. Concurrently, Dr. Smith worked on finalizing her own candidate statements and dossier to be submitted for promotion and tenure. Though their meetings became less frequent, Tatyana and Dr. Smith joked about embarking on new stages of their respective journeys and that they "would meet up again" once applications were submitted. Tatyana tried to hold on to this plan when Dr. Smith did not respond to a request to share her CV and advising statement/mentoring philosophy for the award nomination packet, as well as when she learned that Dr. Smith was delayed in submitting Tatyana's recommendation forms for doctoral study. Although no communication occurred between them, Tatyana became increasingly worried that Dr. Smith would either refuse to submit or fail to submit her recommendation letters by the programmatic deadlines. Regardless of her growing nervousness Tatyana tried to be understanding, but things came to a head in today's advisement meeting.

Despite Tatyana having emailed Dr. Smith 3 weeks ahead to schedule an advising meeting and having listed the items she wished to discuss, Dr. Smith seemed surprised and unfocused when Tatyana arrived on time for the meeting. Tatyana reflected that Dr. Smith seemed distracted and then recounted examples of similar observed behavior over the past month and a half. Although Tatyana's initial observation was couched in empathy and concern, she became increasingly animated in her frustration with Dr. Smith's unavailability and her anxiety about the possibility that Dr. Smith might not meet impending deadlines. Tatyana's disappointment was evident when she indicated that she thought Dr. Smith was prioritizing the development of her online courses because she was getting paid and her promotion and tenure dossier because it benefitted her, and that she was putting Tatyana's requests for recommendation letters on the "back burner." With irritation spilling over, Tatyana finally said, "Since I don't have your materials for the packet, I am not sure how I can move ahead with the nomination, not that it makes as much sense now anyway." At this point, Dr. Smith became aware of the multiplicity of roles and inherent power differentials between herself and Tatyana, which she had not addressed, complicating the issue further. Dr. Smith also realized she had not explicitly discussed the various roles she and Tatyana were operating under and how the interactions between these roles may cause some friction, especially if some roles were prioritized over others. With increased awareness regarding the nature of the situation, Dr. Smith recognized the opportunity to intentionally enact her theoretical grounding in RCT within her advisement relationship with Tatyana.

RCT Application

Grounded in the bioecological systemic considerations discussed by Ng and colleagues (2019), Dr. Smith could choose a variety of RCT-based interventions to address the advisement rupture with Tatyana. In its most basic form, bioecological systems theory suggests a person's development and interactions with their environment are influenced by biological and psychological factors, all of which should be considered in the advising process. This means that the advising process is dependent on the advisor's understanding of the advisee's contextual situation as it pertains to the training program, institutional characteristics, and individual factors. To demonstrate the multiple potential "points of entry" (Luke & Bernard, 2006), the following section will present brief illustrations of the RCT tenets in action when applied to the case vignette of Tatyana and Dr. Smith.

It is important to note that the authors are providing one possible way an RCT-oriented advisor would demonstrate their alignment with the theory through the case study. Therefore, the authors recognize there are a myriad of options for how to apply RCT in advising relationships, all of which are individual and context specific. The reader is encouraged to consider their unique situation and use the information presented in this article to guide their choices when implementing a relational cultural approach to their advising practices.

Considering Dr. Smith's new understanding of her failure to attend to ethical issues and rupture that arose as a result of the multiplicity of roles with Tatyana, Dr. Smith would have to address this regardless of her chosen point of entry and intervention. In addition, Dr. Smith's recognition of her failure to maintain an RCT-oriented advising framework throughout their relationship is essential in the process to repair the rupture with Tatyana. This process would begin with an acknowledgement of Dr. Smith becoming sidetracked and self-focused, failing to communicate in the middle when the advising relationship was no longer a mutual exchange, and further, Dr. Smith's lack of awareness of her impact on Tatyana. For instance, it was clear that Dr. Smith became focused on the pressures of her promotion and tenure process, in which advising of students is highly undervalued with the focus being primarily teaching, research, and service (Furr, 2018), therefore neglecting her advising practices with Tatyana.

Consistent with tenet (f) of RCT, development is a mutual exchange through which all involved contribute, grow, and benefit (Jordan, 2018; Rogers & Stanciu, 2015), one possible point of entry would be for Dr. Smith to receive Tatyana's feedback with openness and avoidance of defensiveness while also acknowledging her limitations within the advising relationship. In addition, Dr. Smith would be recognizing the impact of this breach on her own and Tatyana's development as advisor and advisee in this process. By responding with receptiveness, Dr. Smith will communicate to Tatyana that she is respected and valued in the relationship. Further, with acknowledgement of her limitations, particularly her lack of awareness of Tatyana's experience, Dr. Smith will be assuming a place of vulnerability. As an advisor, in a position with inherent power over her advisee, recognition of her lack of knowledge and awareness may bring about discomfort. This discomfort when coupled with her identity as a White woman, in which she has been afforded unearned advantages over her advisee, may intensify the feelings of vulnerability Dr. Smith may experience.

On the other hand, Tatyana risked vulnerability by naming the lack of responsiveness from Dr. Smith, challenging the inherent power differential in the relationship and leaving her in a place of uncertainty. Despite the discomfort being experienced by both Tatyana and Dr. Smith, there is a demonstration of tenet (b), mature functioning is reflected in movement toward mutuality rather than separation (Jordan, 2018). In accordance with her RCT theoretical grounding, Dr. Smith must be careful to attend to the shared vulnerability in the space, meaning sharing her experience authentically without asking for Tatyana to "take care of her." She can accomplish this by making her intention clear to Tatyana and expressing that her actions were not okay, accepting responsibility while conveying the inevitable nature of disconnections within the advisory relationship. Through these interventions, which are consistent with the aforementioned tenets of RCT and the latter with tenet (e), authenticity is required for real engagement in growth-fostering relationships (Jordan, 2018; Walker, 2004), Dr. Smith and Tatyana would be able to bring themselves fully and authentically into connection, which is crucial for moving the advisory relationship forward and is an indication of engagement in a growth-fostering relationship.

Another point of entry demonstrating tenet (c) of RCT, which states that growth is characterized by relationship differentiation and elaboration (Comstock et al., 2008; Jordan, 2018), would be to leverage the previous conversation that Dr. Smith had initiated with Tatyana around the inherent power dynamics that exist in the advising relationship. In this illustration, Dr. Smith would be anchoring on the elaboration of their identities and their impact on their advisory relationship. Further, Dr. Smith would acknowledge the risks taken by Tatyana in confronting Dr. Smith and how these risks are being experienced, therefore demonstrating exploration beyond the immediate context. Through this acknowledgement Dr. Smith would be validating Tatyana's experiences of the varying levels of power Dr. Smith holds as a White woman and advisor. The acknowledgement should integrate the social context and the impact of larger systems on Tatyana as a young Afro-Latinx woman in the United

States. In this conversation Dr. Smith could reflect to Tatyana how Dr. Smith's lack of responsiveness may be emulating Tatyana's experiences of larger societal systems that disregard her needs, as is the experience of many Black people in the United States (Walker, 2004). In acknowledging the personal and professional risks for Tatyana of reflecting her experiences of being put on the "back burner," Dr. Smith would be collaborating with her in rebuilding a sense of safety in the ruptured connection. This experience may then lead to Dr. Smith working to empower Tatyana to name the destructive practices and recognize the oppressive impact of controlling images that may be playing a role in their interaction, which demonstrates an alignment with tenet (h), which states that mutual empathy and mutual empowerment are at the core of human development (Jordan, 2018). At this point, Dr. Smith may struggle with feelings of discomfort around her White privilege and use of power-over dynamics rather than power-with dynamics by temporarily prioritizing her own needs related to the promotion and tenure process over her advising relationship with Tatyana. Recognizing the lack of program support and unrecognized work that is required of the advising role, Dr. Smith may also struggle with the realization of her own discomfort as a female faculty member seeking tenure and how this may have contributed to the lack of attention to her advising duties and eventually the rupture with Tatyana.

Similarly, Dr. Smith may choose to begin by fostering empowerment and expressing mutual empathy for both herself and Tatyana. This choice demonstrates consistency with tenet (d), growth-fostering relationships are based on mutual empathy and empowerment (Jordan, 2018; Rogers & Stanciu, 2015), through which Dr. Smith could apologize to her advisee for putting her on the "back burner" while remaining open to the possibility that the apology may not be accepted and that this would be the first step in moving the advisory relationship forward. Dr. Smith could provide Tatyana with an explanation for her lack of responsiveness and then redress her delay by honoring the commitment to submit the recommendations immediately. Dr. Smith could take responsibility for missing the collaboratively developed manuscript submission deadline and then provide Tatyana with a clear date by which she will submit Tatyana's recommendation letters before the institutional deadlines. This may provide reassurance to Tatyana while also encouraging an exploration of her own reactions to Dr. Smith and how they may be influenced by past experiences. Consistent with the assumptions of RCT, Dr. Smith should engage Tatyana in a discussion of the unique ways in which each of them conceptualized and enacted their relational images within their advising relationship and invite collaborative processing of how these learnings can inform not only their ongoing work together but also their respective future professional relationships with others. Through engagement in this type of self-exploration to understand their own relational images and sources of disconnection, Dr. Smith and Tatyana can then alter their conceptualization of themselves and one another, allowing for an even more transparent discussion of shared responsibility.

As part of this discussion, Dr. Smith should express genuine understanding that given all of what has occurred, Tatyana may still no longer wish to submit the nomination packet. She could further express commitment to Tatyana's continued success and offer to collaborate with her in developing a plan of action for their ongoing advising relationship. In taking this course of action, Dr. Smith would further display consistency with tenet (a), people grow through and toward relationship (Comstock et al., 2008; Jordan, 2018), by building on the relational resilience already demonstrated by Tatyana's broaching of the problematic dynamics impinging on the advisory relationship. By intentionally focusing on relational resilience Dr. Smith would be reworking the empathic failure that occurred within the advisory relationship. This would communicate to Tatyana that not only is the advisory relationship important, but that she is important and therefore the relational courage she demonstrated is valued by Dr. Smith, as both she and Tatyana have been changed by their interactions.

Dr. Smith may also choose to enact her theoretical grounding in RCT by validating Tatyana's experience of disconnection verbally and non-verbally. It is important that Dr. Smith communicate her appreciation for Tatyana's expression of her experiences in the advisory relationship as well as Tatyana's advisory needs. This approach demonstrates an alignment with tenet (g), the goal is to develop increased relational competence over one's life span (Jordan, 2018), as Dr. Smith works to create an open space for Tatyana to continue to express herself by making her respect for Tatyana and her experiences clear, and further develop Tatyana's relational competence. Once Tatyana can share her experience Dr. Smith may choose to clarify Tatyana's interpretation of the rupture as a lack of responsiveness. In doing so, Dr. Smith would gain a greater understanding of Tatyana's strategies of disconnection. By actively assessing for Tatyana's strategies of disconnection (Jordan, 2017, 2018; Robb, 2007) that could be present, Dr. Smith may be able to assume appropriate responsibility for her contribution to the advising rupture. Dr. Smith may then be able to elicit Tatyana's collaboration in negotiating ways to move forward from a difficult place in the relationship, exemplifying tenet (f), development is a mutual exchange through which all involved contribute, grow, and benefit (Jordan, 2018; Rogers & Stanciu, 2015), by highlighting mutual investment in the process and relationship. She may ask the following questions to achieve this goal: Can we do something about this difficulty in our relationship? What do I or we need to do to shift toward a trusting and collaborative relationship? By asking questions like these, both Dr. Smith and Tatyana are developing a template for negotiating difficulties in the advisory relationship. Further, Dr. Smith may use this interaction to empower Tatyana in using the advisory relationship as an indicator of personal and professional growth by highlighting the risks taken and the relational courage Tatyana displayed through expression of her disappointment and frustration to Dr. Smith.

Discussion

As highlighted above, there are multiple possible points of entry for Dr. Smith to embody an RCT-informed theoretical grounding. Regardless of the selected point of entry (Luke & Bernard, 2006), it is imperative that Dr. Smith be authentic with her discomfort while being guided by anticipatory empathy as understood in RCT (Jordan, 2018; Rogers & Stanciu, 2015). To do so, Dr. Smith must acknowledge her limitations in awareness, and further express openness to learning about the parts she does not know. Consistent with the RCT tenets and recommendations for effective advising relationships (Ng et al., 2019), there is a call for intentionality from both the advisee and advisor. By intentionally attending to the rupture in the advising relationship, Dr. Smith has the opportunity of strengthening the advising relationship and modeling the negotiation of boundaries, roles, and expectations that in turn has the potential to foster relational resilience in both herself and Tatyana.

Application of RCT-informed advising with Dr. Smith and Tatyana illuminates the salience of mutuality within the working alliance in the advisory relationship as part of effective advising practice. Other scholars have stressed this saliency as well. First, empirically explored by Schlosser and Gelso (2001), the advisory working alliance was defined as "the portion of the relationship that reflects the connection between advisor and advisee that is made during work toward a common goal" (p. 158). When framed in this way, it is evident that the advisory relationship is delineated through a relational perspective that includes the basic tenets of RCT, primarily mutuality, authenticity, and engagement in a growth-fostering relationship (Jordan, 2018). Further, the outcome of advising, whether positive or negative, is dependent on the characteristics of both the advisor and advisee (Knox et al., 2006). This consideration is highlighted in the case presented through Dr. Smith's careful consideration of the salient characteristics of both Tatyana and herself as she determines an appropriate course of action.

Another important consideration is the advisee's level of development, which may vary widely. As Kimball and Campbell (2013) suggested, one's advising approach emerges through a process guided by one's interpretations of how best to support the developmental needs of students. Therefore, it is important to adopt a guiding theory to advising that attends to the uniqueness of each supervisee and their experiences (Kuo et al., 2017; McDonald, 2019) and reflects a responsiveness to their developmental needs (Barbuto et al., 2011). Similar to the role of the supervisor's development within developmental theories of supervision (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019), the advising process is further influenced by the advisor's own level of development, including their values and beliefs, assumptions, ascribed theories, and advising approaches and strategies. Within counselor education, it is common for one's counseling theory to serve as a guiding framework across other roles and contexts, including academic advising (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019). This practice is seen across disciplines, where advising scholars often borrow theoretical insights from other disciplines to inform their current knowledge base (McDonald, 2019; Musser & Yoder, 2013). This exchange has enriched our understanding of advising and further illuminated the opportunity to use RCT-informed advising within counselor education.

In the case of Dr. Smith, it is evident her grounding in RCT provided multiple points of intervention through which to address the rupture with Tatyana. These points of entry are conducive to the desired outcomes of advising and attentive to the needs of the advising process in general. Although the case illustration above focused on the rupture in the relationship, it is important to highlight the appropriateness of RCT in advising in general. Advisors can also use an RCT-informed perspective to meet a broader range of the developmental advising needs of their advisees in a way that is conducive to both personal and professional growth (Purgason et al., 2016). Doing so is consistent with advising literature that emphasizes the importance of theory-consistent and growth-promoting courses of action within the advising space (Kimball & Campbell, 2013; Musser & Yoder, 2013).

Implications

Despite the lack of formal training in advising (Barbuto et al., 2011), as well as the lack of institutional support for advising practices (Furr, 2018; Ng et al., 2019), advising continues to be an essential component of the duties of counselor educators. This manuscript illustrates an application of RCT-informed advising with the aim of promoting a theory-based approach to enhance the quality of the advisory process for both advisors and advisees. There are multiple implications for training, practice, and research.

We encourage incorporation of RCT-informed advising into the curriculum of doctoral students in counselor education. A natural fit for such integration would be intentional inclusion of advising training as part of professional issues and/or pedagogy instruction. This topic warrants increased attention within counselor education doctoral training. Supervision of RCT-informed advising could also familiarize new professionals with the additional requirements of their roles. Extending advising training into the doctoral internship experience or as a potential supervised or apprenticeship activity could provide ongoing mutual, authentic, growth-promoting engagements wherein the tenets of RCT are enacted and experienced in training, hopefully paralleling what the student replicates with their future advisees.

There are important implications for the practice of RCT-informed advising as well. First, as the theory-based advising and mentoring literature expands, there is a viable frame for the dissemination of RCT-informed advising into a wide range of disciplines across higher education. RCT-informed advising offers a practical option for incorporation and adaptation into relationally focused disciplines

like counselor education. In addition to its natural fit to relationally oriented disciplines, we contend that RCT-informed advising may in fact hold a particular promise in disciplines that have not traditionally attended to the inter- and intrapersonal processes associated with educational and professional development. Advising has moved beyond the academic domain of selecting appropriate classes for advancement in each field. Instead, it has shifted toward a multilayered and complex interaction between the developmental, academic, social, and institutional domains (Musser & Yoder, 2013). Therefore, a theoretical grounding in RCT would provide advisors with a framework that is easily translated into the shifting advising practice.

Although there is support for the application of RCT to varying domains within counselor education, specifically supervision and mentorship, there remains little research around RCT-informed advising. To advance the empirical grounding, researchers could begin to examine the outcomes of RCT-informed advising in counselor education, as well as across other disciplines. We encourage researchers to build on existing scholarship addressing the impact of the advising working alliance, particularly the impact of an RCT-informed advising working alliance. In addition, future research can investigate the differences across RCT-informed advising and other models of advising. To do so, both qualitative and quantitative inquiry are needed, and both can increase the visibility of RCT-informed advising as a viable option to be utilized across higher education.

Conclusion

RCT provides a powerful tool for the enhancement of advising across disciplines in higher education, particularly within counselor education and supervision. Counselor educators who can engage with their advisees through this lens may find that they are attending to the complex interactions between the multiple domains involved in advising, fostering greater personal and professional growth within themselves and their advisees. RCT advising offers a viable opportunity for new advising techniques to be implemented to promote creative ways of meeting the ever-increasing demands of higher education. Considering the increased attention of RCT in the counselor education literature in the last decade (Hammer et al., 2014; Lenz, 2016; Purgason et al., 2016; Rogers & Stanciu, 2015), RCT-informed advising can promote not only individual development, but also that of the larger profession through a shared language for collaboration in developing strategies, skills, and resources.

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