

OCTOBER 16–18, 2026 · WELLESLEY COLLEGE, MASSACHUSETTS

Toward a New Psychology of Women: *50 Years of Connection, Courage, and Change*

FULL CONFERENCE AGENDA

Hosted by **International Center for Growth in Connection** & **Brain Based EMDR Training**

DAY ONE | *Origins & Neurobiology*

Friday

October 16, 2026

8:00 AM
8:45 AM **Registration & Reconnecting**

8:45 AM
9:00 AM **Welcome & Announcements**

Dr. Amy Banks, Moderator

Opening video and introductions to kick off the 50th anniversary celebration.

9:00 AM
10:15 AM **Relational Cultural Theory: The Founding Voices and Early Evolution of a Paradigm Shift**

Jan Surrey, Judy Jordan, Roseann Adams, Dr. Amy Banks, Dr. Maureen Walker, Joyce Fletcher & Christina Robb

This panel explores the origins and early development of RCT as introduced in Jean Baker Miller's *Toward a New Psychology of Women*. Panelists reflect on the historical and cultural context in which RCT emerged and how its emphasis on connection, mutuality, and growth-fostering relationships challenged traditional models of psychological development.

Learning Objectives:

- Recall the historical context and key contributors involved in the early development of RCT.
- Explain core concepts introduced by Jean Baker Miller, including mutuality and growth-fostering relationships.
- Compare RCT with traditional psychological models that emphasized autonomy and separation.
- Summarize how RCT reshaped perspectives on human development and the counseling relationship.

PANEL

10:15 AM
10:30 AM **Break**
BREAK

10:30 AM
12:00 PM **The Neurobiology of Resilience and Relationships: Core Concepts and Applications of Relational-Cultural Theory**

Libby Murdoch, LPCC

Participants will explore the neurobiology of resilience through the lens of RCT and Jean Baker Miller's foundational work. Together, we examine how the nervous system is designed for

survival and how responses to environments, relationships, and lived experiences influence resilience across the lifespan. Participants will also explore how trauma, toxic stress, and disconnection impact the brain and body, and how growth-fostering relationships support healing and regulation.

Learning Objectives:

- Describe resilience as a relational and neurobiological process and identify the connection between resilience and growth-fostering relationships. (Top 5 Relational Resilience & Protective Factors)
- Identify the impact of environments, relationships, and lived experiences including connection and disconnection on learning and the development of wellness and illness.
- Explain how mutuality, relational safety, and connection support individual wellbeing and regulation. (CARE acronym)
- Apply two relationally oriented interventions for enhancing and protecting resilience. (Positive Relational Resource & Outer World Resource)

KEYNOTE

12:00 PM
1:00 PM

Catered Lunch

1:00 PM
2:30 PM

Our Connected World: Integrating Ecology into Relational-Cultural Theory

Dr. Connie Gunderson, Mary Hernandez & Jayme Banks

An interactive workshop introducing participants to an ecological approach to RCT. We are invited to remember ancestral heritage, our senses, and our ecological connections with nature, and to re-commit to deepening our mutual relationship with the natural world by integrating the Five Good Things.

Learning Objectives:

- Examine how ecology and our relationship with the environment is integrated into Relational-Cultural Theory.
- Identify and describe the H.O.M.E. ecological model from a relational-cultural perspective.
- Create a personal/professional action plan to integrate ecology and relationship with the environment to foster sustainability and ecological wellbeing.

PLENARY

2:30 PM
2:45 PM

Break
BREAK

2:45 PM
4:15 PM

Leading with Relationships in Mind: Where We Are and Where We Need to Go

Dr. Amy Banks

Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, and Harvey Milk all led well-known movements to change inequitable social structures. Understanding the biological underpinnings of power-over systems and strategically promoting power-with leadership is essential. This keynote workshop helps attendees understand what the current power-over system is doing to our brains, bodies and relationships, and forge new strategies to lead together.

Learning Objectives:

- Compare the impact of power-over vs. power-with systems on the central nervous system.
- Describe how power-over leadership styles impact the autonomic nervous system and mirror neurons.
- Develop a strategy to create power-with leadership groups in their own local community.

KEYNOTE

5:00 PM
7:00 PM

50th Anniversary Reception

5:00 – 7:00 PM · Join us in celebrating five decades of RCT

CELEBRATION

9:00 AM

10:15 AM

Experiential Exercise on Connection

Ileya Grosman

An experiential session designed to deepen participants understanding of relational connection through guided practice.

WORKSHOP

10:15 AM

10:30 AM

Break

BREAK

10:30 AM

12:00 PM

From Brain to Belonging: Relational-Cultural Therapy Across the Lifespan and Life Domains

Mary Vicario, Dr. Veronica Barrios, Meechie Poston & Nichole McCoy

This presentation explores RCT in practice across multiple marginalized communities. With a focus on Black and Brown women, the Latinx community, justice-involved individuals, children, and individuals with developmental differences, presenters demonstrate real-world applications of RCT in collectivistic, culturally nuanced contexts.

Learning Objectives:

- Demonstrate applications of RCT across various cultural domains.
- Explain the foundational principles of RCT through a collectivistic lens.
- Identify areas of growth in the application of RCT.
- Draw connections between neuroscience and relational-cultural theory.

PLENARY

12:00 PM

1:00 PM

Catered Lunch

1:00 PM

2:45 PM

Connection in Action: Expanding the Reach of Relational Cultural Practice

Amy Makice, Kevin Makice, Nate Smith, Alicia Wargo, Meenaxi Palaniappan, Ileya Grosman, Libby Murdoch & Mary Vicario

RCT continues to evolve as clinicians, educators, and practitioners apply its principles across diverse professional and cultural contexts. This panel highlights innovative applications in clinical practice, education, leadership, and community-based work, exploring how growth-fostering relationships can be intentionally cultivated to support healing, resilience, and wellbeing.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify ways RCT is currently being implemented in clinical, educational, and community settings.
- Illustrate how growth-fostering relationships contribute to resilience, regulation, and psychological wellbeing.
- Examine how relational-cultural principles support trauma-responsive and culturally responsive counseling practice.
- Use relational-cultural concepts to strengthen connection within therapeutic and professional relationships.

PANEL

2:45 PM

3:00 PM

Break

BREAK

3:00 PM
4:00 PM

Learning is Movement: Shared Space, Curiosity, and Connection in Times of Polycrisis

Dr. Harriet Schwartz

War. Climate crisis. Rising authoritarianism. Deepening resource and wealth gaps. These forces combine into what some call a state of polycrisis. In this session, we explore the power and potential of relational learning in times of severe distress. Shared learning spaces can foster growth-in-connection as we reconnect with purpose and plan next steps for change.

Learning Objectives:

- Recognize the potential presence of The Five Good Things in shared learning experiences.
- Identify elements of learning experiences that provide personal sustenance and movement.
- Construct a plan for future learning engagements and contributions.

PLENARY

4:00 PM
5:00 PM

Poster Session

Participants share and explore poster presentations highlighting RCT-informed research and practice.

POSTER SESSION

DAY THREE | *Future & Possibility*

Sunday October 18, 2026

9:00 AM
10:30 AM

See the Girl: How RCT Guides Our Organization

Vicky Basra & Team

An exploration of how Relational-Cultural Theory guides organizational practice, culture, and mission-driven work in real-world settings.

PLENARY

10:30 AM
10:45 AM

Break
BREAK

10:45 AM
12:00 PM

Imagining What is Possible: The Future of Growth-Fostering Relationships in Expanding Human Possibility

All panelists & speakers

As the field reflects on fifty years of RCT, this panel invites participants to consider future directions and possibilities of relational-cultural work. Panelists explore emerging questions, evolving applications, and opportunities for integrating relational principles into counseling practice, research, leadership, and systems-level change.

Learning Objectives:

- Interpret emerging directions for RCT in counseling practice, research, and leadership.
- Analyze how relational-cultural principles may inform responses to contemporary mental health and societal challenges.
- Develop ideas for integrating RCT perspectives into future counseling practice and professional roles.
- Identify opportunities to integrate relational-cultural perspectives into leadership and systems-level initiatives.

PANEL

12:00 PM
1:00 PM

Catered Lunch

1:00 PM

2:00 PM

Embracing Relational Complexity

Dr. Maureen Walker

This talk weaves anchoring tenets of Relational-Cultural Theory together with insights from eco-psychology and post-humanist theories. The overarching objective is to identify perspectives and practices that foster courage and humility as we navigate the inextricable entanglements integral to our shared humanity.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify the factors that define complexity as an agentive and relational phenomenon.
- Critique the cultural norms that undermine our understanding of complexity as a multi-vocal reality.
- Integrate transdisciplinary insights that foster capacity to navigate complexities as they emerge in ever-evolving cultural and political contexts.

KEYNOTE

**Schedule is tentative and subject to change. | brainbasedemdr.com*