



Journal of Arts & Humanities

Women's Experiences of Spirituality within Activism: Stories of Self-Awareness and Connection

Carolyn L. Gulbrandsen¹, Christine Ann Walsh²

ABSTRACT

This investigation, a secondary data analysis of qualitative exploratory interviews, examined ten women's accounts of their experiences with social activism to determine the ways in which spirituality is related to their social activism. Definitions of spirituality proposed by feminist scholars provided the framework for the data analysis in this study. Women's commentaries supported constructs associated with spirituality that have been identified in feminist literature, where spirituality is defined as a dynamic, continuous process of personal development and self-awareness that involves interpersonal connections with activist peers, community and broader humanity. Women also identified novel themes related to connection that described interpersonal aspects of spirituality that were fulfilled as they participated in activism. Ultimately, women in the study appreciated that despite their own agency, their own affinity for activism and their appreciation for the role of their activism in their lives; they cannot practice activism or effectively work towards social justice in isolation.

Keywords: Activism, connection, self-awareness, spirituality, women.

Available Online: 25th February, 2015.

MIR Centre for Socio-Economic Research, USA.

¹ Faculty of Social Work, University of Calgary, Canada, email: cgulbran@ucalgary.ca.

² Professor, Faculty of Social Work, University of Calgary, Canada, email: cwalsh@ucalgary.ca.

1.0 Introduction

Feminist literature introduces spirituality as an integral dimension of women's experience. According to feminist authors, women subjectively define spirituality by reflecting on their lived experience and experience spirituality via self-awareness and connection to others (Tisdell 2000; Coholic, 2003). Recent feminist scholarship has analyzed women's experiences of spirituality within the contexts of social work practice, social justice education, and activism (Bradley, Maschi, & Gilmore, 2007; Banerjee & Pyles 2004; Krieglstein, 2006). By illuminating women's subjective experiences of feminist activism, we support the assertions of these feminist scholars that women's experiences of spirituality are not necessarily associated with religiosity, that participation in feminist activism can deepen women's reflexivity and self-awareness of their own values and beliefs and that feminist activism is a context where women can express their spirituality, or experience it implicitly. We conducted a secondary data analysis to determine if the experiences and reflections of feminist activists in our study support or elaborate on specific themes identified by feminist scholars related to women's spirituality (Coholic, 2003; Comas-Diaz, 2008, Tolliver & Tisdell, 2006; Tisdell, 2008) and to identify novel themes related to the spiritual aspect of women's participation in feminist activism. The themes we identified in a constructivist grounded theory analysis elaborate on themes identified by feminist scholars. The themes we identified suggest that activism is a context where women glean spiritual meaning by reflecting on their experiences, constructing subjective meanings, reflecting on their connection to others and collaborating with others to create more humane societal conditions. By describing the implicit aspects of women's experiences with feminist activism, we encourage women to appreciate that their activism involves substantially more than visible activities and specific social issues. By sharing their reflections on implicit aspects of their experiences, the women in the study encourage feminist activists to reflect on and value the spiritual aspect of their experiences and to consider how they can support the spiritual development of their peers.

2.0 Literature review

2.01 Separating spirituality from religion

There are a variety of definitions of spirituality proposed in the literature, with many authors offering diverse, yet related conceptualizations. Feminist definitions of spirituality are contrasting alternatives to mainstream definitions of spirituality that necessarily involve religious affiliation or relationships with a deity or "higher power". For many, the starting point in defining spirituality is distinguishing it from religion and proposing that spirituality is not necessarily associated with religious affiliation (Coholic 2003; Comas-Diaz 2008; Tolliver & Tisdale, 2006). Krieglstein (2006) also contrasted spirituality with religion as starting point for discussing spirituality, and argued that even those without religious affiliation can experience spirituality as personal transformation, awareness and connection to larger purposes beyond the self. She further emphasized the complexity of the construct of spirituality and discussed how, in interpersonal contexts such as social work, spirituality must be understood in terms of interpersonal relationships. Hagen, Whitney, Archzynski, Morrow, & Hawhurst (2011) outlined the implications of distinguishing between religion and spirituality in the context of feminist multicultural counselling. To illustrate the implications, the authors described how lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) individuals frequently experience oppression by conservative religious institutions and how the spirituality of some LGBT individuals endures even after they sever ties with religious communities and institutions that have marginalized or condemned them because of their sexual orientation.

2.02 Contributions from feminist research

Coholic (2003) credited feminist approaches for acknowledging the relevance of spirituality to social work practice. She also asserted that feminist research has legitimized spirituality as a valid aspect of subjective experience. Within the feminist theorization, spirituality is defined in terms of both individual

subjective experience and in connection to others (Tisdell, 2000). Coholic (2003) emphasized how spirituality guides the construction of personal meaning from experience.

In alluding to the complexity of women's experiences of spirituality, (Douglas, Jimenez, Lin, & Frisman, 2008) advocated for understanding women's experiences of spirituality through a feminist lens that considers how factors such as race and gender serve as a filter for interpreting subjective experiences. Similarly, (Comas-Diaz, 2008) critiqued mainstream feminism's prescribed normative definitions of spirituality as potentially oppressive and not relevant to the experiences of *all* women. Further, she cautioned against imposing mainstream values associated with spirituality on women of color, who, she asserts have historically been relegated to the margins of feminism. She thus broadly defined spirituality as personal liberation and inclusive of the experiences of women of color. Individual women's spirituality, she contended, contributes to their strength in the face of oppression, their empowerment, their reconciling of decolonization of their spirituality, their understanding of racism and oppression, and the construction of their identities on their own terms. The themes that emerged from Comas-Diaz's work imply the need to consider the relationship between the individual's experience of spirituality and the collective context within which it occurs. Similarly, other feminist scholars of color have discussed how spirituality sources resilience and understanding personal implications of oppression (Hill-Collins 2000; Watt, 2003).

2.03 Engaging spirituality to construct meaning

Lancaster and Palframan (2009) investigated the role of spirituality in interpreting significant life events, emphasizing the dynamic nature of spirituality as a process that unfolds as individuals encounter critical experiences. In this model spirituality is a process that supports complex personal transformation. The two specific constructs they identified as related to spirituality were spiritual expression, which includes service to others and spiritual growth, which includes self-realization. These constructs are compatible with values such as equality, diversity, social justice and participation that have been implicated in feminist research and activism (Reid, 2004).

2.04 Spirituality and identity

Feminist scholars have proposed that spirituality plays a role in women's identity development. For example, (Tolliver and Tisdell, 2006) placed women's processes of identity awareness within the larger context of personal transformation and discussed the role of spirituality in the context of adult learning. They described how engaging spirituality is conducive to enhanced awareness of self as one's identity develops and suggest that spirituality and identity are components of a dynamic interrelationship:

Spirituality also is about developing a more authentic identity. As many authors have noted, those who value spirituality believe there is a divine spark in each person that is central to his or her core essence or authentic self. Those who value spirituality generally believe that it is possible for learners to come to a greater understanding of their core essence through transformative learning experiences that help them reclaim their authenticity. Our point is that this notion of moving toward authenticity is also core to what spirituality is about, though we are always in process of this motion. (Tolliver and Tisdale, 2006, 38)

2.05 Spirituality in women's activism

In acknowledging the scarcity of literature that addresses women's spirituality, (Tisdell, 2000) recommended the need for future research investigating what personal ideologies, world views, understanding of self and understanding of the world that women bring to their social justice work and their activism. She also asserted that the key elements of women's spiritual experiences should be defined in their own terms and that some aspects of spirituality are experiential and emotional, and

consequently, are not easily captured by concise definitions. She further suggested that self-awareness plays a significant, interpretive role in women's spirituality and depicted spirituality as a holistic, encompassing construct, an ongoing evolution and awareness of the self that guides the construction of meaning from experience. Similarly, (Bradley et al., 2007) identified spirituality as a developmental process that unfolds and progresses over the lifespan at individual and interpersonal levels as women choose, approach, participate in and interpret their experiences with activism. According to their multidimensional definition of spirituality, women are drawn to opportunities to participate in activism as an outlet for creating meaning within their lives and in doing so the quest for and interpretation of meaning directs spiritual development. They proposed that spiritual development occurs as women integrate the facets of their experiences and critical experiences within activism and their own lives to achieve deeper meaning, expanded consciousness and self-awareness. Thus, the spiritual development they describe becomes the foundation for connecting to others and to a larger purpose.

Defining spirituality in terms other than religiosity presents the possibility that women's social activism is a fertile context for spiritual awareness and development. The various definitions of spirituality featured in the literature suggest a diverse range of factors contribute to women's experiences of spirituality. Although variation exists across definitions, a number of consistent themes have been identified in the body of literature on spirituality in relation to women's activism. These include the role of spirituality in the construction of personal identity, spirituality as process of personal transformation, spirituality as the construction of personal meaning, the significance of critical experiences in spirituality, spirituality as a way of life and a foundation of personal ideologies, the relationship between spirituality and resilience, the relationship between spirituality and empowerment, the role of spirituality in connection to others; relationships and community. These themes serve as a starting place for understanding how spirituality plays a role in women's experiences of activism.

3.0 Methodology

3.01 Approach

This study is a secondary analysis of a qualitative investigation that examined women's experiences within social activism. The objective of the original study was to identify what mattered to women within activism and to articulate their individual subjective definitions of social activism. In elaborating on the nuances of their experiences with social activism, women described how their participation consisted of considerably more than the tangible collective activities and actions directed at social justice (Gulbrandsen & Walsh, 2012). Research on feminist conceptions of spirituality, with the emphasis on subjective interpretation of experience and construction of meaning, establishes a rationale for analyzing women's commentaries about their experiences with activism to determine what place, if any, their experiences with spirituality has in their participation. By using definitions of spirituality proposed by feminist theorists as a conceptual framework, we examined women's account of their experiences to see if similar themes related to spirituality were represented. Feminist centered themes also provide a framework for analyzing women's experiences of activism to determine if and to what extent spirituality plays a role in their experiences. Women in the study are in the position to elaborate on the role of spirituality as an implicit aspect of their experience.

The data was analyzed according to the prominent, recurring themes that have been identified by feminist scholars including identity, self-awareness, critical incidences, personal ideologies and values, connection to others, relationships, community and a larger purpose. The primary objective of this analysis was to determine if themes related to spirituality identified by feminist theorists were represented in the experiences of women in the study and to more fully articulate the nature of spirituality within women's activism.

3.02 Procedure

Following institutional ethics approval by the Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board, University of Calgary, participants were recruited from a local women's charitable activist organization. The organization provides a variety of opportunities for women to participate in social activism and offers training for women who wish to discuss social issues and engage in collective activism and advocacy. The organization was chosen for its explicit commitment to feminism and feminist activism.

The written invitation to take part in the study was extended to any woman participating in the organization as a volunteer, board or committee member. Ten women responded to the invitation and provided written informed consent. The lead author conducted individual face-to-face individual interviews, lasting approximately 1-1.5 hours at a convenient time and location for the participants. Interviews were conducted with a field guide, consisting of 12 open-ended questions about participants' personal experiences with collective social activism. Participants were asked to reflect upon their experiences with activism, to define and describe activism according to their own experiences and to highlight what mattered most to them as individuals within activism. Women were asked to identify which social issues were associated with their activism, what factors were significant in their activism journeys; what factors were significant to them at individual and collective levels. Although women were not asked directly about their experiences with spirituality or its role in their experiences, the open ended questions encouraged women to elaborate on personally significant aspects of their experience, which may have included aspects of spirituality or alluded to spirituality. Interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim.

A data management program for qualitative analysis; Atlas Ti, was used to manage interview data. The analysis proceeded according to the constant comparative approach to grounded theory analysis outlined by (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Initially data were analyzed line by line and distinct units of meaning were assigned conceptual labels. Emergent concepts were then grouped together into categories. From open coding, the analysis proceeded to axial coding; categories were grouped together and categories and linkages between concepts were established. The analysis continued with selective coding until an overarching theme that encompassed all other categories was identified. Further analysis examined connections between the categories and the overarching theme. Categories were interrelated and analyzed according to how they described or explained the central theme. Responses were coded according to constructs identified in background literature associated with women's experiences of spirituality and according to additional themes that women identified as relevant to their experiences with social activism.

Ten women participated in the study. Six of the ten participants in the study were Caucasian, the remaining identified as Aboriginal, West Indian, Asian and Chinese.

4.0 Findings and discussion

The women who participated in this investigation offered a diverse range of reflections that elaborated on two key interrelated overarching major themes that feminist literature have implicated in women's spirituality: *self-awareness* and *connection*.

Self-awareness guides the emergence and evolution of spiritual experience and identity. Sub-categories of self-awareness include: (a) values, the awareness of one's principles, ideologies and commitments; (b) agency; the recognition that one's values and principles are expressed as action and; (c) critical experiences, the awareness of how significant experiences have shaped the self.

Connection, the second major overarching theme, refers to women's expression and purposeful presence of their spirituality within the collective and explains how they extend their spirituality beyond the self. The spiritual dimension of connection to others acknowledges the centrality of giving and receiving support. Sub-categories of interpersonal connection are: (a) contribution, women's inclination to participate in improving the circumstances of others and contribute to their communities; (b) relationships that nurture self-awareness and personal agency; and (c) interdependence, defined

as the awareness of one's contribution to the experiences and welfare of others or support extended to others within activism as well as the support one receives from others within activism, and the recognition that the experience of activism cannot be experienced in isolation from others.

The following section outlines each of the themes and sub-themes with illustrative quotes.

Self-awareness. Women described their spirituality according to several interrelated dimensions of conscious, purposeful, and evolving awareness of self that they bring to their participation in activism. They further described how that awareness contributed to their identity formation. The expression of self-extended self-awareness beyond the individual and facilitated connection to others within interpersonal activist contexts.

Values. The women in this study reflected on key personal values, and how their involvement in activism clarified their convictions about their values. One respondent acknowledged the process of self-awareness that involves becoming increasingly conscious of and achieving deeper understanding of one's own values and belief systems:

I guess regardless of who you are, there comes a time in everybody's life where they really need to do an evaluation of who they are and what they believe in. You know, if you can do that when you're nineteen years old and live by your values with integrity, amazing because you will build a life around that and you will have people in your life who support you. But, I don't know if that is possible for most people. You know, if you have this thought inside of you that says, "You know, that's just not right" or "that's unfair" you take a risk, find out more about it.

Another woman identified her commitment to her own value system and described how activist contexts encourage her to critically reflect on her values. She referred to the constant process of interpretation involved in this aspect of self-awareness:

A lot of the values that I have I want to make sure, I don't ever want to be lazy with them, I guess. I want to constantly be challenged with them, and I want to make sure that people are checking in and that I'm checking in and reflecting on them.

Agency. The women in the study reflected on how being conscious of their personal values motivated them to express their values with actions. A participant who was employed as a social worker recognized her own capacity to contribute to her community as a volunteer and further, emphasized that she is compelled by a responsibility to contribute.

I am fortunate that I get paid for doing things I really love to do, but I also feel a responsibility to volunteer and to not just be involved in things because I get paid for them. I need to contribute to the community. It's not enough to just live in the community, you have to participate in it. So, I feel very strongly about that.

Another participant reflected on her involvement in social justice activism. She described how activism is integrated in to her life and contributes to her sense of purpose.

Activism has been a pretty important part of my life all along. I can't imagine sitting home watching television. You know, I get so much energy and even though it sounds contradictory, but do you know what I did this weekend? Yes I did go to a movie with a friend and I did have some time with my partner, but I also went to a Friends of Medicare Annual General meeting because health care is such an important issue. I can't imagine not being part of those groups and not taking part in the actions.

Critical experiences. All participants cited significant experiences and described the meaning of those experiences as essential to understanding themselves as activists. One woman, for example, recalled an early foundation of self-awareness that sensitized her to the need for social justice. She stated, "I've always had this feeling inside of me that I was different. That I didn't really fit into mainstream, that I didn't think the same. I always felt so sad for other people that were not treated fairly". Another participant described how her early experiences doing social justice work and interacting with young social service recipients influenced her personal philosophies related to social justice.

You can't help but feel for these kids. Like, what are their chances when their life starts out on such a rotten note? So, I think I learned really early that people are a victim of their circumstances often and some, you know, with enough support and opportunity and if they're fortunate to have the ability to finish school. If they had help and they may be able to overcome, but it's a lot to overcome.

As one woman described, critical learning experiences as a young adult university student awakened her consciousness of her own agency and affinity for action towards social justice.

Yeah, it was one of the best times of my life, and I got so much energy from other people and their support and it was just an incredible experience. It would be good to know that other universities are helping people to grow and learn and challenge the system.

Connection. While self-awareness refers to the experience within the self, connection refers to the expression of that self-awareness, the explicit demonstration of spirituality within the interpersonal realm and the awareness there is a distinct interpersonal dimension to spirituality, which arises within the individual but extends and connects to the human community. Sub-themes that relate to connection show reciprocity and interconnectedness as deeply embedded in the interpersonal context of social activism.

Contribution. Participants described how their self-awareness connected them to a larger sense of purpose, which they were compelled to contribute to by participating in activism. One respondent reconciled her own place within activism and as part of that, her own role in history of women involved in creating social change. By placing her own activism in historical context, she associated her activism with a larger purpose and with a commitment to future generations of women:

All it takes is a group of people making different decisions and changing it to make it a different world. So having that conversation and making those different decisions, whether it's in our lifetime, our daughter's lifetime, or granddaughter's lifetime, I want to leave that history for them as well. So it's not necessarily that I think by the time I die that you know, women are going to be paid 100 cents on the dollar that every man makes. But to get that ball moving and to keep it rolling and to keep that hope alive so that when our daughters are having the same discussions they can look back and say "The history's there, we've got strength in that past".

Another woman described how for her, contributing to social change and improving communities starts with awareness of one's own experiences, and extends to looking beyond one self and one's own interests.

It's going beyond self-interest to wanting better community for everyone. So it's taking into account somebody other than your own world. Not that people don't learn from their experiences..... I think that's where you have to start. But to me, activism that includes social justice is taking it beyond your own self-interest and looking at the broader world. So, whether it's your local community or your city, your province, your country internationally, it's taking it beyond your own narrow self-interest to make change.

Relationships. One participant commented on how relationships with significant family members and mentors nurtured her interest in social issues and encouraged her to integrate her experiences in to her developing identity as an activist.

Two come to mind as important mentors for me. One was my mother and you know, in the formative stages she indoctrinated me very well. Then, I became good friends with a prisoners' rights activist in the 1980's and she taught me so much about social justice really means. Like, you know, how you have to put your life on the line. That's probably extreme. But you know, you really need to take action. You need to do more than just talk.

Another woman described her affection and gratitude for the mentors she encountered as a young adult when she first became interested in activism. These mentors shared their knowledge and encouraged her to participate in discussion and activist initiatives.

Yeah, when I first came to the [activist organization] I was really quiet and quite young and I just watched and people just allowed me to observe and watch. There were absolutely no judgments, ever. I don't recall any judgments of how much I did or how much I didn't do. Then I just became more vocal over time as I studied women's studies and understood the issues, and had incredible mentors that to this day I'm still in touch with. They talked about how quiet I was and now they can't stop me from talking.

Participants shared experiences that demonstrated the value of extending support to others. One respondent described how her efforts to be inclusive and to empower others involved sensitivity to individual's needs and circumstances.

I've mentored some people with disabilities and helped them to feel empowered and feel that they can do more, or they can do whatever it is they want- at the same time, acknowledging maybe the challenges that they have. So, I just really try to help people feel good about themselves because most often times the people that have come to me haven't felt good about themselves and don't have people encouraging them.

Interdependence. Women reinforced the importance of the support they received from their activist peers and emphasized how the support women extend to each other is a cornerstone of solidarity in working towards social change. As an example, one woman commented on how social change is achieved by individuals working together. She articulated:

I had this experience when I was young, at the university level. I came out of it thinking I am going to do stuff on my own instead, that's exactly what I thought. I went off and had some other experiences, but quickly realized you don't do this on your own. For me, it is most effective if you can work with other people. Part of working in a group is learning how to trust each other, trust that we won't turn on each other. Ego has to be small. We have to realize we are part of larger movements. We have to understand the needs for networks and alliances.

Another participant reinforced how the support of the collective is essential to her involvement in activism:

I honestly cannot even imagine working in isolation. There is so much knowledge out there. There is so much support. ...just power in numbers, strength together... all of those kind of things. I can't see it any other way, actually.

Our analysis supports a flexible, subjective feminist conceptualization of spirituality that challenges assumptions that spirituality necessarily consists of or is associated with religiosity. Our examination of women's experiences with activism placed the individual woman at the centre of activism and looked both inward and outward from that vantage point, to women's connections with herself and her own values and understandings, and beyond herself to her activist community and to broader humanity. Lending authority to women's voices and describing spirituality in their own words and according to their experiences is a priority that guided this research. We contend that women are the legitimate experts in their own experiences with activism and spirituality and are therefore in the position to confirm or refute whether feminist scholars' conceptualizations of women's spirituality relate to their own experiences of social activism.

Watkins (2008) referred to spiritual formation as a dynamic form of spirituality, and proposed the following definition, "spiritual formation is the continual process of conforming one's thinking and behaviour to one's internalized belief system and world view" (2008, 9). This definition is compatible with the evolving process of self-awareness that participants in this study describe as inextricably linked to their experiences with activism. Women in this study traced their awareness to formative experiences that contributed to their affinity for social activism and describe their awareness as a dynamic growth process that evolves over time.

Watkins (2008) elaborated on the process of spiritual formation by describing how individuals seek alignment between their internalized belief system and the lives they lead. This definition lends itself well to an understanding of how women's experiences with activism are grounded in their individual spiritual experiences, which the women described as evolving self-awareness. Women's experiences suggest that self-awareness gains further significance as they reflect on their connection to others and a larger purpose. It is evident from women's accounts that social activism provides a context for personal transformation; women describe how they extend their self-awareness to incorporate connection with others within activism.

Bradley et al. (2007) reinforced spirituality as a growth process that can be discussed in relation to women's experiences with activism and emphasized spiritual growth processes as interrelated dimensions of self-awareness and experiential learning that take place across the lifespan and represented by a personal, internalized value system. In a similar way, women in the study described the influence of critical incidences in their own lives and within their own experiences of activism and how the interpretation of the meaning and significance of the events shaped their experiences with activism. Participants articulated how they construct meaning from critical events and how new meanings are incorporated into their evolving self-awareness.

The reflections of women on their experiences align with factors that feminist researchers have associated with women's spirituality, including self-awareness and processes of personal growth that influenced, and were influenced by their involvement with social activism (Coholic, 2003; Tisdell, 2000; Tolliver & Tisdell, 2006). Women in this investigation did not explicitly use the term "spirituality" in reference to their activism. This aligns with (Tisdell's, 2000) assertion that women are aware of their spirituality and its influence on their activism although they do not tend to publicly acknowledge or refer directly to it. It follows, then, that the experience of spirituality can be understood as an underlying process or force that may be inferred from the narratives of women activists in this study.

Women in this study reinforced the constructs associated with women's spirituality identified in literature at subjective, personal and interpersonal levels, and related them to their experiences with activism. Feminist literature highlights the individual experience of spirituality and its role in women's identity development. By discussing their lived experiences with social activism, the women in this study contributed novel constructs related to connection. The sub-themes related to connection describe ways that women may express their spirituality within the collective and how connecting with others can deepen the interpersonal aspect of their spirituality. The women in the study described how connection involved looking beyond themselves and realizing the immediacy of interdependence and

its significance within their feminist activism communities. Ultimately, women in the study appreciated that despite their own agency, their own affinity for activism and their appreciation for the role of their activism in their lives; they cannot practice activism or effectively work towards social justice in isolation. Thus, women in the study demonstrated and reinforced the interdependence of self-awareness and connection, which were key factors that feminist scholars have associated with women's spirituality (Banerjee & Pyles, 2006; Krieglstein, 2006; Tolliver & Tisdale, 2006).

One limitation of this study is that the findings cannot be generalized beyond the women who participated. Also women were not asked specifically about their experiences with spirituality, which would presumably have yielded a deeper understanding of the nature of spirituality within women's activism.

5.0 Conclusion

Women in the study contributed further understanding about the role of spirituality in feminist activism and how women express and experience spirituality in the context of activism. Future research is needed which invites women to speak directly to the role spirituality plays in their social justice focused activities and their development and identities as feminist activists. Sharing their experiences with spirituality within their activist community could provide a way to connect with other women who participate in activism. It could also contribute to a shared understanding of spirituality, a process that previous research suggests women typically grapple with on their own, beneath the surface of their activism. Future research could focus on broadening and deepening women's personal understanding of spirituality and making this aspect of their experience more explicit so that they can create activist movements that support the spiritual growth of the women who participate.

References

- Banerjee, M., & Pyles, L. (2004). Spirituality: A source of resilience for African American women in the era of welfare reform. *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in Social Work, 13*(2), 45-69.
- Bradley, C., Maschi, T., & Gilmore, K. (2007). One woman's life journey: A case study of spirituality and activism. *Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Social Work, 26*(4), 21-46.
- Coholic, D. (2003). Incorporating spirituality in feminist social work perspectives. *Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work, 18*(1), 49-67.
- Cole, E. (2008). Coalitions as a model for intersectionality: From practice to theory. *Sex Roles, 15*, 443-453.
- Comas-Diaz, L. (2008). Spirit: Reclaiming womanist sacredness into feminism. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 32*, 13-21.
- Douglas, A., Jimenez, S., Lin, H., & Frisman, L. (2008). Ethnic differences in the effects of spiritual well-being on long-term psychological and behavioural outcomes within a sample of homeless women. *Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 14*(4), 344-352.
- Dugan, K. & Reger, J. (2006). Voice and agency in social movement outcomes. *Qualitative Sociology, 29*, 467-484.
- Denzin, N. & Lincoln, Y. (1994). *Handbook of qualitative research*. California: Sage Publications.
- Gerring, J. (2007). *Case study research: Principles and practices*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Gulbrandsen, C., & Walsh, C.A. (2012). It starts with me: Women mediate power within feminist activism. *Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work, 27*(3), 275-288
- Hagen, W., Arczynski, A., Morrow, S. & Hawxhurst, D. (2011). Lesbian, bisexual, and queer women's spirituality in feminist multicultural counseling. *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling, 5*(3/4), 220-236.
- Hill Collins, P. (2000). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness and the politics of empowerment*. New York: Routledge.
- Kriegelstein, M. (2006). Spirituality and Social work. *Dialogue and Universalism, 5*, 21-28.
- Lancaster, B., & Palframan, J. (2009). Coping with major life events: The role of spirituality and self-transformation. *Mental Health, Religion and Culture, 12*(3), 257-276.
- Reid, C. (2004). Advancing women's social justice social justice agendas: A feminist action research framework. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 3*(3), 2-22.
- Reger, J. (2004). Organizational "emotion work" through consciousness raising: An analysis of a feminist organization. *Qualitative Sociology, 21*(2), 205-220.
- Sowards, S. & Renegar (2004). The rhetorical functions of consciousness-raising in third wave feminism. *Communication Studies, 55*(4), 535-552.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Tisdell, E. (2000). Spirituality and emancipatory adult education in women adult educators for social change. *Adult Education Quarterly, 50*(4): 308-335.
- Tisdell, E. (2008). Spirituality and adult learning. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, 119*, 27-36.
- Tolliver, D., & Tisdell, E. (2006). Engaging spirituality in the transformative higher education classroom. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, 109*, 37-47.
- Watkins, D. (2008). Spiritual formation of older persons. *Journal of Religion, Spirituality & Aging, 21*(1-2), 7-16.
- Watt, S. (2003). Come to the river: Using spirituality to cope, resist, and develop identity. *New Directions for Student Services, 104*, 29-40.