

SPIRITUALITY AND EMANCIPATORY ADULT EDUCATION IN WOMEN ADULT EDUCATORS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

ELIZABETH J. TISELL

National-Louis University

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine how spirituality influences the motivations and practices of a multicultural group of 16 women adult educators who are teaching for social change, who were strongly informed by a particular religious tradition as a child, and have renegotiated a more relevant adult spirituality. Findings reveal the following five themes of spiritual experience as described by the participant spirituality as the following: (a) a spiral process of moving beyond and “re-membering” spiritual values and symbols of the culture of origin; (b) life force, interconnectedness, and wholeness; (c) pivotal experience of a perceived higher power that facilitates healing; (d) the development of authentic identity; and (e) a way of life requiring both inner reflection and outward social action.

Teaching for social change is a work of passion for many adult emancipatory educators—a passion fueled by a deep underlying ethical, social, and often a spiritual commitment on the part of the adult educator. It is important work, and at the dawn of the new millennium, many adult educators are attempting to teach across borders of race, gender, class, national origin, and sexual orientation to increase cross-border understanding and to work toward greater equity between dominant and oppressed groups. Some educators are doing this by teaching classes in higher education that explicitly deal with these topics, whereas others are working with grassroots communities on projects aimed at social change.

How adult educators might respond to the educational needs of a multicultural society has been a subject of some discussion in feminist and critical pedagogy in the past few years and in considerations of how adult educators can challenge systems of power, privilege, oppression, and colonization and cross borders of race, gender, class, and national origin in this era of globalization (Brookfield & Preskill, 1999; Giroux, 1992; Hayes & Colin, 1994; Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1998; Tisdell, 1998; Walters & Manicom, 1996). Teaching across these borders for social change is difficult, requiring a willingness to deal with conflict, resistance, and

ELIZABETH J. TISELL is an associate professor in the Department of Adult and Continuing Education at National-Louis University in Chicago, IL.



ADULT EDUCATION QUARTERLY, Vol. 50 No. 4, August 2000 308-335
© 2000 American Association for Adult and Continuing Education

strong emotions as groups engage in critical dialogue and, hopefully, move to social action. What has been missing from the literature is attention to what drives this underlying commitment or how spirituality informs the work of such emancipatory adult educators working from these critical, feminist, or antiracist educational frames. This is somewhat surprising because almost all of those who write about education for social change cite the important influence work of educator and activist Paulo Freire, who was a deeply spiritual man strongly informed by the liberation theology movement of Latin America (Freire, 1997). With the exception of the recent study on community and commitment by Daloz, Keene, Keene, and Parks (1996), in which the connection between spiritual commitment and social action is implied, empirical research on how spirituality relates to a commitment to do social justice work is extremely limited. Clearly, there are both male and female adult educators and activists teaching for social change who are motivated to do so partly because of their spiritual commitments; but many are women of different race and class backgrounds guided by critical, feminist, or antiracist educational perspectives who have also had to renegotiate their adult spirituality in light of having been raised in patriarchal religious traditions. How has their spirituality changed over time, and how does it motivate and influence their adult education practice for social justice? In light of the lack of adult education literature that deals with women, spirituality, and social justice, the purpose of this study was to examine how spirituality influences the motivations and practices of a multicultural group of women adult educators who are teaching for social change, who were strongly informed by a particular religious tradition as a child, and have renegotiated a more relevant adult spirituality. This study suggests implications for how adult educators may draw on spirituality in their own emancipatory adult education practices, and it also offers beginning insight on women's spiritual development in the often ignored (by developmental theorists) sociocultural context.

RELATED LITERATURE

With the exception of the subfield of adult religious education, spirituality has been given little attention in mainstream academic adult education, and its connection to discussions of emancipatory adult education efforts is even more limited. This may simply be because *spirituality* is difficult to define. It is a relatively elusive topic that can sometimes be confused with religion. Indeed, for many of us, our adult spirituality is clearly informed by how we were socialized both religiously and culturally. Yet, spirituality is not the same as religion; religion is an organized community of faith that has written codes of regulatory behavior, whereas spirituality is more about one's personal belief and experience of a higher power or higher purpose. In seeking to give *spirituality* (as opposed to *religion*) a definition, Hamilton and Jackson (1998) conducted a qualitative study of women in the helping professions' conceptions of spirituality. Participants' definitions centered on the following three main themes: further development of self-awareness, a sense of

interconnectedness, and a relationship to a higher power. Although this definition does give a sense of the psychological aspects of spirituality as broadly related to meaning making, it does not get at the potential relationship of cultural experience and spirituality, nor does it get at the connection between spirituality and a commitment to social justice, which is the focus of this article. Nevertheless, these three themes of spirituality—greater self-awareness, a sense of interconnectedness, and an experience of a perceived higher power—appear to be common aspects of what spirituality is about for most who consider it an important meaning-making aspect of their life.

Spirituality in Adult and Higher Education

Despite the fact that there is relatively little direct discussion of spirituality in academic adult education, recently, the recognition of the spiritual dimension has begun to creep into some adult and higher education discussions, and this is likely to be an area of some future discussion. Most of these references focus on spirituality more generally in teaching and learning and is the focus the newly released sourcebook on spirituality edited by English and Gillen (2000). Dirkx (1997) has also noted that attention to “soul” in adult learning is important, particularly in attending to group process. He suggests that our interest is not so much to teach soulwork or spirituality but, rather, to nurture soul; that is, “to recognize what is already inherent within our relationships and experiences, to acknowledge its presence with the teaching and learning environment, to respect its sacred message” (Dirkx, 1997, p. 83). In a similar vein, Palmer (1998) discusses the importance of attending to paradox, sacredness, and graced moments in teaching and learning in developing a spirituality of education. Similarly, Young (1997) describes spirituality as the underpinning of our values in higher education. English (2000) discusses very directly the focus on meaning making in adult learning as intricately related to the spiritual quest of adults, whereas Vella (2000), in her discussion of a spirited epistemology, suggests that attending to the spiritual dimension of adult learning is part of honoring the learner as “subject,” and thus the author of his or her own life in the quest for meaning making. Indeed, the subject of spirituality is currently a hot topic in Human Resources Development (HRD) and some of the workplace-related literature. However, as Fenwick and Lange (1998) suggest in their critique of the spirituality in the workplace literature in the field, most of these discussions have little or nothing to do with the connection of spirituality to social justice or emancipatory education. There are, of course, a few (not specifically connected to HRD or workplace adult education) who more specifically discuss the connection of work, spirituality, and the creation of a more just global economy. For example, Fox (1995) discusses the connection between spirituality as “inner work” and the revisioning of our “outer work” and the importance of ritual and celebration in the creation of a new cosmology as the great paradigm shift of our time.

Not surprisingly, in most references in adult education, spirituality is dealt with only from an individual, psychological perspective and from the standpoint of what is present in the learning environment in how individual participants construct meaning through image, symbol, and graced moments about the purpose of their life journey. Most discussions of spirituality end here; yet, for many adult educators, their perceived purpose in the world relates directly to their emancipatory education efforts. Few adult education writers have discussed this, although the very well-known activist-educators Horton and Freire (1990) were clear about the influence of spirituality on their own work. Hart and Holton (1993) have suggested that spirituality offers hope to emancipatory adult education efforts; Walters and Manicom (1996) discuss the importance of spirituality among grassroots emancipatory adult educators working with women in an international context. They note that spirituality "is a theme that is increasingly significant in popular education practice as culturally distinct groups, women recovering 'womanist' traditions and ethnic collectives, draw on cultural and spiritual symbols in healing and transformative education" (Walters & Manicom, 1996, p. 13). Other than these instances, the field of adult education has been relatively silent about the connection between spirituality and emancipatory education efforts. Yet, more recently and more in discussions of education in general, educators and cultural critics are beginning to discuss the importance of spirituality in antiracist and emancipatory education efforts. In her own education efforts, hooks (1994, 1999) very directly discusses the importance of spirituality, and Simmer-Brown (1999) discusses both commitment and openness in education for cultural diversity and pluralism. These emancipatory education discussions hint at the importance of attending to spirituality in social justice efforts; yet, there is little data-based research that focuses on how it informs the thinking or practices of educators. This study is one effort to get at these issues.

Spiritual Development

This study is primarily about how spirituality informs the work of a multicultural group of feminist or antiracist women emancipatory adult educators. To make sense of how these women perceive and carry out their work as emancipatory educators, it was necessary to understand some of their life history—some of their spiritual journeys or spiritual development as related to their cultural and life experiences. Thus, the literature on spiritual development also informs this study. Weibust and Thomas (1994), in their discussion of learning and spiritual development in adulthood, note that attention to "unity consciousness as knowing" (p. 124) and how adults seek wisdom through spiritual learning and openness to paradox is an important unexplored area of adult development and learning. As I have discussed elsewhere (Tisdell, 1999), so, too, is the area of how culture informs spiritual experience. There is, in fact, a paucity of literature that specifically discusses spiritual development as change over time or that attends to the sociocultural context. Taylor

(1998) makes the observation that some have used Mezirow's theory of transformative learning as a jumping-off point to examine ways adults transform thought processes and develop through other ways of knowing, including through spirituality. However, as Taylor (1998) notes, Mezirow's theory is primarily driven by rationality; he does not discuss transformation as spirituality and neglects the role of unconscious thought processes in learning. The spiritual development literature that does exist tends to cite the landmark Fowler (1981) study of faith development, which resulted in a stage theory (six stages) of faith development based on a sample that was 97% White and Judeo-Christian. Although he draws on the work of Piaget and Kohlberg, he takes issue with them for "their restrictive understanding of the role of imagination in knowing, their neglect of symbolic processes generally and the related lack of attention to unconscious structuring processes other than those constituting reasoning" (Fowler, 1981, p. 103).

Despite some of the limitations to Fowler's study, it contributes to our understanding of how people construct knowledge through image and symbol, an area that has been ignored by most development and learning theorists. Clearly, there are other authors (mostly from the holistic health movement or in the popular press) who have discussed the power of image and symbol in constructing knowledge and in accessing forms of spiritual knowledge. For example, Myss (1996) provides ways of working with and using images and symbols over time to enhance spiritual development, and both Bolen (1994) and Borysenko (1996) specifically discuss women's biological and spiritual development by drawing on myth, metaphor, and symbol. But nearly all authors who discuss spiritual development as change over time tend to ignore the importance of the sociocultural context in development, and in so doing, they tend to privilege a White, middle-class experience primarily informed by the Judeo-Christian tradition. This is why Merriam and Caffarella (1999) are calling for more direct attention to sociocultural issues and more integrative perspectives on all aspects of adult development.

Spirituality and Development in a Sociocultural Context

Wuthnow (1999) recently conducted a study, from more of a sociological perspective, of 200 adults who grew up in religious homes to see what patterns their spirituality has taken since childhood. He gives a bit more attention to the sociocultural context than have other researchers in the past. Although the majority of the sample was White and from the Judeo-Christian tradition, his sample was more diverse than Fowler's, with 20% being people of color, and 13% being Hindu, Muslim, or other non-Judeo-Christian traditions. The study suggests some developmental patterns for those who grew up and were socialized into religious traditions. For example, the spiritual path of the more mature participants required a deep questioning of their childhood traditions and, often, specific points of departure from it. Maintaining the identity affirming parts, however, in addition to insights from a more broadened and inclusive perspective, often led to a renewed

and more developed spiritual practice. In fact, it often led to an increased appreciation of diversity not only of spiritual perspectives but also of interest and desire to work against religious and racial bigotry and for their particular traditions to be more culturally inclusive. Thus, Wuthnow's (1999) study suggests the beginnings of attending to sociocultural issues in religion and spirituality.

There is clearly a lack of research-based literature about spiritual development in general. What literature that does exist gives almost no attention to cultural issues, so there is precious little about the spiritual development of women of color. Thus, the best source of knowledge about this is probably women writers of color who allude to spiritual issues. In regard to her own work as an educator, hooks (1994, 1999) very clearly addresses this, attempting to teach to challenge systems of oppression based on race, gender, and class. Hill Collins (1998), speaking a bit more generally, notes that "spirituality provides an important way that many African-American women are moved to struggle for justice. . . . Spirituality remains deeply intertwined with justice in Black women's intellectual history . . . and thus influences Black women's critical social theory in particularly ways" (p. 244). Similarly, Gunn Allen (1992) speaks to the connection between culture, spiritual symbol, and the "personal choice-community responsibility" dialectic in American Indian communities. Chicana feminist writers Anzaldua (1987) and Castillo (1996), in discussing identity and political issues of Chicana feminists, discuss the significance of the psychological, spiritual, and political symbol of La Virgen de Guadalupe in Chicano culture. They suggest that Chicana feminists frame La Virgen as the Aztec/mother/goddess and two-in-one-culture liberator in a way that creates a meaningful, life-enhancing, woman-positive spirituality that informs working for justice in the world. None of these writers are writing about spiritual development or even emancipatory education efforts per se. They are, however, writing about the larger experience of women of their own cultural group and how spirituality relates to their identity and to their working for social justice in the world. Their work, in addition to the work of feminist theologians as discussed in such edited works as Ruether (1996) and King (1996) (who discuss women's social action efforts grounded in feminist theology), offers insights both from a sociocultural perspective on spiritual development as well as how spirituality informs women's teaching for social change.

METHOD

This was a qualitative research study, and the purpose was to determine how spirituality influences the motivations and practices of a multicultural group of women adult educators who are teaching for social change, were strongly informed by a specific religious tradition as a child, and have renegotiated a more relevant adult spirituality. In this case, women teaching for social change included the following two groups of women: (a) women working in higher education either teaching classes that were specifically about gender, race, class, sexual orientation, or

TABLE 1
The Participants

<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>	<i>Childhood Religious Background</i>	<i>Work Context</i>
Afua	44	African American	Protestant/Catholic	Higher education
Anna	53	African American	Presbyterian/Baptist/ Catholic	Higher education
Ava	37	Creole/Latina	Catholic	Higher education/CBO
Beverly	55	Native American	Catholic	Higher education/CBO
Elise	48	African American	Congregational	Higher education
Greta	51	White	Catholic	Higher education
Harriet	44	White	Pentecostal	CBO
Julia	46	Chicana	Catholic	CBO
Lisa	40	White	Unitarian ^a	CBO/nonprofit
Mariposa	50	Chinese American	Baptist	CBO/nonprofit
Maureen	56	White	Methodist	Higher education
Nancy	50	White	Jewish	Higher education
Patricia	40	White	Presbyterian	Higher education
Rachael	50	White	Jewish	CBO/nonprofit
Shirley	50	African American	Baptist	Higher education
Sue	69	Korean American	Presbyterian	Higher education

Note: CBO = community-based organization.

a. Lisa only very loosely grew up influenced by the Unitarian tradition.

disability issues, or working in programs aimed at meeting the education needs of a specific marginalized group; and (b) women working as educators (in the broad sense) as community activists. There were a total of 16 participants: 4 African American, 2 Latina, 2 Asian American, 1 Native American, and 7 European American. (See Table 1 for more information on the participants.) The participants were well-educated (all had bachelor's degrees, most also had master's degrees, and 9 participants had doctoral degrees), and many participants were strongly informed by the critical, feminist, or antiracist education literature cited earlier. Criteria for participant selection were that they (a) be women adult educators teaching across borders for social change either in higher education or as community activists in the ways noted above, (b) had grown up or were strongly informed by a specific religious tradition as a child, and (c) note that their adult spirituality (either based on a reappropriation of the religious tradition of their childhood or a different spirituality) strongly motivated them to do their social justice work. With the exception of Lisa (a pseudonym), all of the participants were strongly socialized in a specific religious tradition as a child. Lisa's growing up was informed by the Unitarian tradition in the sense that her mother was a Unitarian, although Lisa was never required to attend the Unitarian church. Although it may be that Lisa only loosely fit

the “growing up in a religious tradition” criterion for selection, she was kept in the study because she offered some very interesting insights about spirituality as a social activist and educator whose spirituality informed her work.

Theoretical Framework

In general, qualitative research attempts to find out how people make meaning or interpret a phenomenon (Merriam, 1998). Some forms are strictly interpretive and only want to know how participants make meaning of their life experience. Other forms, with critical, feminist, or cultural theoretical underpinnings, are concerned with giving voice to those who have been silenced or marginalized (McLaughlin & Tierney, 1993; Vaz, 1997) and with the emancipatory possibility for those participating in the research (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1999; Lather, 1991). This study was informed by a critical poststructural feminist theoretical frame that is concerned with giving voice to participants whose perspectives have been marginalized or ignored. Such a framework suggests that the positionality (race, gender, class, etc.) of researchers, teachers, participants, and students affects how one gathers and accesses data and how one constructs and views knowledge as well as how one deals with crossing borders in research and teaching (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Fine, 1998; Tisdell, 1998). Thus, my own positionality as a White, middle-class woman who grew up Catholic and has tried to negotiate a more relevant adult spirituality in addition to the fact that I teach classes specifically about race, class, and gender issues were factors that affected the data collection and analysis processes (see below). Furthermore, this study was about a multicultural group of women adult educators, in which more than half of the participants were women of color. My primary purpose was to find out how these women interpret how their spirituality influences their work in their attempts to teach for social change and how their spirituality has changed over time since their childhood. I was attempting not only to provide some data-based information about how their spirituality informs their work but I was also trying to examine the cultural aspects of spirituality. In essence, I was interested in looking at the often ignored sociocultural dimensions of spirituality and to explicitly make visible the spiritual experience of women of color as well as the experience of White, Anglo women.

Data Collection and Analysis

The primary means of data collection were audiotaped (and transcribed), semistructured interviews that lasted from 1½ to 3 hours. To explain why I was interested in the topic, I did share with all of the participants some of my own background (in roughly 5 to 10 minutes) prior to the data collection process. I gave participants a snippet of my own attempts as a White woman at antiracist and gender-inclusive adult education in addition to the general way in which my background and current spirituality inform my work. Due to time constraints, this was kept to a

minimum, although I did tell participants that I would be happy to share more about that at a later time, and I also asked participants if they had questions prior to the interview. I believe this provided a context for why I was doing this work, helped create a rapport with participants, and made the interviews a shared conversation in which specific topics were pursued as they arose naturally. Furthermore, I was attempting to avoid what Fine (1998) and others refer to as “othering” the participants: gathering very personal data from participants while giving none about myself. Thus, I gave participants the opportunity to ask me questions if they so desired. Interviews focused on participants’ definitions of spirituality, the sharing of three significant spiritual experiences, how their spirituality has changed over the years and motivates and informs their adult education practice, and how their spirituality relates to their own race, ethnicity, and cultural background. Many participants also provided written documents of their own writing that addressed some of their involvement in social action pursuits and/or issues directly related to their spirituality, or they sent e-mails offering further clarification on issues we had discussed. Thus, the multiple sources of data collection methods of interviews and documents was a means of triangulation.

Data were analyzed throughout the study. At the suggestion of Merriam (1998), a preliminary analysis was done after each interview. Data were coded and re-coded according to the constant comparative method until themes began to emerge. At this point, member checks were conducted with several of the participants to increase dependability of findings. In 6 instances, a summary vignette was written up and sent to the participants for their feedback and for further detailed member checks, and corrections were made and any omissions were added. These 6 participants were chosen specifically because their cultural and class backgrounds were the most different from my own, and I wanted to ensure that I was accurately portraying the central points of their stories. This was particularly important because there were times when I had misunderstood some of the nuances of what they had shared during the interview. This was not only another way of member checking but it was also a way of ensuring what Fine (1998) refers to as “writing against ‘othering’”—a way of guarding against inadvertently projecting my own experience onto these women while missing the real salient points of their own race, cultural, or class experiences from their perspectives.

FINDINGS

As an introduction to the findings, it is interesting to note some significant commonalities among participants that were not specific to the criteria for sample selection. First, although all of these women were socialized very specifically in a specific faith tradition as a child (with the possible exception of Lisa), only one is currently an active participant in her childhood religion. Second, all of these women have personal experiences of marginalization. Obviously, the 9 women of color experience this based on their race or ethnicity, but of the 7 White women, 3

are lesbians, 2 are Jewish, and 4 are from working-class backgrounds. Patricia, the only White, heterosexual, upper-middle-class background participant, had been married to a Muslim North African man for 15 years and had spent time living in North Africa, so she also had personal experiences of marginalization. Perhaps because of their experiences of marginalization, these participants have a greater interest in teaching across the borders of race, gender, and culture. Third, these women range in age between 37 and 69 years, most of whom were strongly influenced by the civil rights movements and other social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Thus, there may be strong cohort effects in light of this sample. There were five overlapping themes of spiritual experience that focus on the interconnection of spirituality, culture, and social justice education that emerged from the data.

A Spiral Process of Moving Beyond and “Re-Membering”

Broadly speaking, the spiritual experiences and development of the participants are characterized by a spiral process of moving beyond the religious tradition of their childhood and then, later, “re-membering” in the sense of reconsidering and reframing the life-enhancing elements of their religious tradition and their culture of origin while developing a more meaningful adult spirituality. In this sense, *re-membering* is different than simply remembering and connotes a reevaluation process of reworking of such childhood symbols and traditions and reshaping them to be more relevant to an adult spirituality.

Moving away. The early adulthood of most of these participants was characterized by questioning their childhood religious understanding. For most, the initial moving away was largely a result of what they perceived as their institutionalized religion’s hypocrisy, sexism, heterosexism, lack of personal or cultural support, or general irrelevance in relation to liberation politics. For example, Julia, a Chicana, noted that “I went away to college [in the early ’70s], and I stopped going to church. It was those rebellious times, the church, an institution . . . and the contradictions, the sexism, I started to question all of it.” Julia more or less drifted away during those times, whereas Shirley, an African American woman and civil rights activist, noted that at about the same age, her move away was even more intentional: “I became convinced Christianity was a trick—the oppressor to keep us humble and in bondage. . . . Even the terminology *Lord, Master, Father/God*—I had serious issue with it and stopped going to church.” Greta’s move away was also more intentional and occurred while she was developing a political consciousness. She notes,

This was the ’60s, and I renounced my Catholicism and became officially an atheist. It was like a liberation. At first I thought, “I am going to die in hell,” and then I became interested in all the events that were going on . . . ’60s stuff was happening and it was very political. This was the beginning of my Marxist phase, not very spiritual.

“Re-membering.” Despite this move away, all of the participants reported going back and re-membering in the sense of reframing and reconfiguring the meaning aspects of their childhood faith culture that were important and life giving, and then reshaping them and applying such meaning perspectives to an adult context. For example, although Greta still feels largely negative toward the Catholicism of her upbringing, she notes,

It took me decades to realize that it’s the ritualistic aspect of my religious upbringing I really cherished. Easter. I just *loved* Easter Saturday when we went to church and it’s all quiet, and it’s all dark, and there’s no sound, no music, and when the resurrection moment came then all the lights turned on and there was music . . . and I think that has really profoundly affected me. That Easter—there’s always some resurrection. You go to hell, you die and you’re really at the bottom of mystery, but then you get resurrected. Often I think about when I’m in bad shape—that resurrection.

For Greta, this concept of resurrection, or new life after a dark night of the soul, continues to be an important spiritual concept, although she has never had any desire to reconnect with the Catholic Church.

For many of the participants, the reframing of their faith of origin was related to an understanding of their core values. The White women tended to center more on the genesis of their values. Maureen, who had been heavily involved in the social action movements sponsored by the Methodist Church in the 1960s, noted that “it was from this crucible of spirituality and social action that my own sense of identity and core beliefs were formed.” Similarly, Patricia reported that she came from a long line of preachers, teachers, and farmers that valued ethics, fairness, and justice, which continued to inform her social justice work. Others, particularly the women of color, described an ancestral connection that was also present in their faith of origin. For example, Anna, an African American woman, described the music of Aretha Franklin and its connection to the church of her ancestors as particularly significant and as also related to her earlier church experiences. She states,

The way that Aretha sings is very old, so when I go back to my childhood, it’s really connected to my parents’ childhood, and so on, and so on, so she takes me back to places I don’t even know that I know about. There are ancient roots that are beyond my memory of this time and place. . . . When I listen to Aretha—all of those songs are songs of struggle . . . about how to survive, how to resist oppression, and I got to thinking about other spirituals that I know, and they’re all at that level.

Similarly, Afua, who leads trips to Africa, discussed at length the spiritual connection to ancestors as a significant part of her spirituality that is renewed in such trips and that it is always present with her in her daily meditation.

Julia also discussed this ancestral connection and, in critically reflecting on her Latino-Catholic roots, she discussed her current connection to her grandmother and *La Virgen de Guadalupe*.

I think part of my journey is going back to my heritage, my Aztec and indigenous roots. . . . Ana Castillo gives a different picture of what La Virgen could represent in terms of powerful women. . . . But there's another side to it. . . . I don't always just go with "this is the way that it is" because I do question was that a way for the Spaniards to . . . convert the Aztecs into Catholicism? Or is it really an Aztec goddess? . . . But I do believe it's a spirit—a spirit that kind of watches over me.

In addition to the ancestral connection and reexamining their core values, the participants also re-membered their culture of origin by looking for specific feminine examples of spiritual power and wisdom both from within and beyond their culture of origin and applied this to their adult spiritual lives. We see evidence of this in the importance of *La Virgen de Guadalupe* to Julia and with Aretha Franklin to Anna as noted above. Harriet, a White lesbian activist, takes inspiration in the work of Harriet Tubman, and Rachael, a social activist, notes,

It took nearly thirty years of my life for me to embrace my Jewishness in a deep emotional way, and so to claim my Jewishness as a significant part of my heritage and identity. My reading . . . along with my mentoring friendships with Jewish women activists—filled me with stories I related to, helping me access my own cultural background through women I identified with.

In sum, although these women needed to move beyond their childhood religious tradition to develop a meaningful adult spirituality, they often spiraled back to re-connect with and redefine important aspects of that culture that affirmed their gender and cultural identity.

Spirituality as Life Force, Interconnectedness, and Wholeness

All of the participants struggled to give *spirituality* concrete definition, noting that somehow language was inadequate to describe spiritual experience. As Lisa notes,

You're just in two different paradigms. For me it's an experience, which is why it's hard to translate. It has to do with the experience of the life-force. . . . Spirituality is some kind of aware honoring of that life-force that is happening through everything.

Like Lisa, most participants discussed spirituality as related to a sense of wholeness, interconnectedness, and order to all of creation as well as related to life force or a higher power. As Anna said,

I think of [spirituality] in terms of connections to all things, not just things here, but also things in the past, and things in the future. . . . Spirituality to me is not something that you can hold down. . . . It's something that's intuitive, and intuitive things are hard to express; it's something that's felt, and sensed, and not necessarily "thought."

Furthermore, many of the participants discussed the fact that the more one has a sense of spirituality as connection, the more one's behavior is affected. In reflecting on this, Afua notes,

The more you're connected to that notion of spirit and spiritness, the more you will do what you're supposed to do. . . . If you believe that you are connected to other beings and other things and you share divinity, then you know if you harm somebody else, you're really harming yourself and vice-versa, and so you are going to be less likely to harm them because you know that's a part of you.

Although some participants discussed the sense of connection and oneness of all things more conceptually, most gave concrete examples of how they experienced spiritual experience as providing a sense of wholeness. For example, Julia noted,

We have this ritual in my family—every time I go home, and when I'm getting ready to leave, I ask for my parents' blessing, and so they'll take me into their room, and each one of them will bless me. . . . And I don't feel complete if I don't do that. . . . So my father will bless me, "te encomiendo a Dios Padre . . . y a la Virgen de Guadalupe," and ask my grandmother and La Virgen to watch over me, and so I feel like my grandmother's watching over me!

For Julia, this sense of completeness or wholeness was ritualized in her parents' blessing that connected her with her grandmother and the important spiritual symbol of *La Virgen de Guadalupe*. Most participants also experienced it in the interconnectedness of all things, sometimes in a sense of synchronicity and in uncanny connections to other people. Many participants reported synchronous events such as when someone from long ago had been on their minds and that person would suddenly call, or the synchronistic meeting of specific people at various points in their lives. Others discussed a sense of spiritual connectedness both in personal significant love relationships and more broadly to others. Elise, an African American woman who had grown up in a largely White northern community, discussed the significance of living in a southern city as a young adult and experiencing a cultural interconnectedness to others of African descent as a spiritual connection. She noted that "in Atlanta, my beauty was affirmed. I could walk down the street and see myself; there was a sense of connectedness . . . that I would consider a spiritual connection."

For many of these participants, this wholeness or life force that is, as Lisa says, "happening through everything" was manifested in experiences beyond the cognitive that brought together the physical, the emotional, and the wholeness of creation and one's being. One participant described the three most significant spiritual experiences in her life as being related to the physical and the life force, which provided a sense of oneness and affirmation of life. These included giving birth, a deeply significant sexual and spiritual experience making love that gave her a new sense of identity, and a serious accident that left her near death and in a coma. Greta also described the significance of the physical in spiritual experience, such as experience

in the martial arts and meditation practices that are part of them, that put her in touch with a source within and that resulted in a greater sense of spiritual connectedness with a life force within and beyond herself. Lisa, a White woman who grew up in Alaska and who also spent significant time living and working with Native people there, also described experiencing and witnessing a sense of oneness in watching a 2-year-old do the Raven dance.

And she *got it*. She *was* Raven, and that's what the dance was teaching—sort of a mystical spirituality where you *are* coyote or you *are* whatever this is, and it transforms the way you are—your consciousness is different. And it was a *wonderful* moment, seeing this little tiny being who was already there.

The sense of the physical embodying of Raven in the dance of the 2-year-old and her sense of the oneness to the point that she became Raven in that moment was key for Lisa. Like Lisa and Greta, many participants described spiritual experiences of becoming and witnessing a sense of wholeness and interconnectedness of all things: in nature, in relationship with others, and in connection with one's self. Beverly, an Alaska Native woman, talked specifically about her spiritual connection to nature as a runner in the woods of Alaska, where she has to negotiate the reality of moose and bear. She also connects this to some of her own cultural background and notes,

I really am not [afraid], because as I have seen these animals, I respect them, and I actually talk to them when we've bumped into each other. It's an acknowledgment and awareness, because *we're* animals. We're all on this earth together, and we just go about it in a different way. And because [I'm] Tlinket . . . there is a real kinship and a dependency on animals.

Like Beverly, Lisa also spoke of this relationship with the wilderness as a spiritual reminder of the connectedness of all creation.

Pivotal Experience of a Perceived Higher Power That Facilitates Healing

All of the participants discussed at length significant experiences related to a perceived higher power that specifically facilitated healing. In several cases, these experiences resulted in the courage to take new action in their personal lives. Most of these experiences were quite emotional and also were connected to a sense of wonder and mystery. Harriet, who grew up Pentecostal in a working-class community in the rural South, described an extremely significant spiritual experience that helped her come to terms with being a lesbian.

I got hurt playing softball and I tore my quadriceps so bad I passed out. I went to the best orthopedist in town, who put a splint on it which hurt really bad. I also believed in faith healing, and one night I went to the altar I felt this real coldness go into my leg,

and then [it] got really hot, and I thought “wow” and the minister told me—I took the splint off, and the big lump that was on my leg, it was gone! . . . Well that was a turning point for me, because I thought, “Why would God heal me, if I was this person that was condemned to hell?” God wouldn’t do that for me, and I thought, “OK, this is my sign” that it’s OK for me to be a lesbian.

From that day forward, she worked on behalf of women’s rights, lesbian and gay rights, and on social issues of all kinds and also had a renewed appreciation for the mysterious and healing power of connecting to what was perceived as a divine presence.

Some of the participants reported experiences that were related to grief and new life. For example, Anna described an experience immediately after her mother died, when she was traveling on a train to her mother’s funeral. She notes,

I was watching the telephone poles go by, and a black bird flew past the window and came real close, and in my ear, I heard my mother’s voice say “I’m free!” and it was like a major relief because I’d been grieving and crying and as soon as I heard that voice say “I’m free,” it was OK.

Elise described a similar experience of the grief associated with having a miscarriage and a troubled relationship with her own mother. She described going to a meditation service led by a woman in the Siddha Yoga tradition, shortly after her miscarriage, and explains,

Well I closed my eyes and everything was silent, and for the first time there is no internal dialogue. . . . And all of a sudden there’s a voice in my head that is not my voice that says, “Why are you upset with your mother. I am the mother. Why blame her?” . . . After the program was over . . . I went up and when I did this woman said to me “You’ve been working very hard,” and immediately I broke out into tears . . . and I was just weeping and weeping and weeping, and at that moment my life changed.

Elise then went on to describe how she went about the healing of her relationship with her mother. Patricia described some significant dream experiences in the aftermath of her divorce that were seen as “graced moments” as offering a path for healing that helped her move on with her life. In short, all the participants described significant moments in which they had a strong sense of a divine presence that facilitated healing and the courage to take new action in their personal lives.

The Facilitation of the Development of Authentic Identity

Virtually all of the participants discussed spiritual experiences such as those noted above as experiences that facilitated the development of what many referred to as their authentic identity. Furthermore, for many participants, their ongoing personal identity development could not be separated from their spirituality. Ava, who grew up in Central America, after describing parts of her mixed cultural heritage

along with some of her Mayan ancestry, noted, “I think that spirituality is to know who you are, and to be able to define who you are, wherever you are, despite the changing conditions of your life.” Harriet’s experience of her physical healing also assured her of the authenticity of her own lesbian identity, and Elise’s spiritual experience helped her deal more proactively and more maturely with her own relationship with her mother. Furthermore, for Elise, the fact that her healing was facilitated by a woman was significant, and in explaining the incident noted above, she noted,

I needed that woman energy. I needed it. I needed a mother. I didn’t need a tangible mother. I needed to know and experience that love energy, that nurturing energy that my mother could not give, so I could forgive my mother. The actual quotation [she used] was “I am God the father and the mother” but the part that was for me—the mother part. And that’s the part I latched onto because I really needed a mother and I didn’t have it. So to be able to have that experience was part of my personal development.

Some of the participants described experiences of moving away from their childhood religious traditions to develop other parts of themselves as an important part of both their spiritual development and the development of their identity. Patricia, a White woman and psychology professor, described recognizing a need when she was in her early 20s to develop the cognitive aspects of her identity and forego some of her involvements in a quasi-fundamentalist Christian community to develop both intellectually and spiritually. Anna also described her move away from her childhood religion at about the same age in addition to her involvement in neo-Marxist social movements as facilitating a greater understanding of spirituality and her own identity. She notes,

I think Marxism is a form of spirituality because it really is about connections with other people; it’s a rather earthly bound nature of connections, but it’s still about looking back and looking forward, and taking care of each other. . . . So I guess it became in my Marxist period, which lasted until I was in my 30s; it was a transformation of God being outside of me who controlled all things [to] an inside internal controlling force—that human, or that life-on-the-planet work was involved in making change, involved in creating reality, taking care of each other . . . that those connections happen here because of what we do as opposed to some other something outside of you doing something, and so I think in retrospect, my spirituality was still there.

Thus, Anna’s ongoing cognitive development and understanding of her identity that included communal responsibility was related to her personal and her spiritual identity development. Similarly, Greta and Shirley also described their foray into neo-Marxist political literature and social movements in addition to their “atheist phase” as related to their overall spiritual development.

Some of the participants discussed their spirituality in conjunction with their identity development as in the case of those cited above. Others described it more as a source of support in their own identity development. For example, Beverly noted,

“It certainly got me through a lot when I was going through my divorce, because I did spend a lot of time addressing issues that I had never addressed in my adult life.” In essence, Beverly described the fact that her spirituality gave her the courage to face her own issues with the help and spiritual support of a couple of friends. Nancy, who grew up Jewish but now practices in the Siddha Yoga tradition, reported that her current spirituality and meditation practice help her stay focused on what is important in her life and who she is as a person rather than being focused on her own ambition and ego, which she says was a trap she fell into earlier in her career as an academic. Sue, an Asian American woman, described living for a time overseas away from her husband and finding a more solid independent identity apart from her husband as a spiritual experience that facilitated her authentic identity. Furthermore, she noted that her spirituality also helped her accept her daughter’s lesbian identity. All of the participants viewed their spiritual development as related to a more authentic identity and, consequently, to also be more accepting of the identities of others.

A Way of Life Requiring Inner Reflection and Action for Social Change

Perhaps somewhat a function of the criteria for participant selection, yet extremely significant, was the participants’ commitment to work for social change in light of their spirituality. Participants saw this not only as an ethical responsibility but also as a way of life that affected their emancipatory educational practices.

An integrated approach to living. All of the participants discussed the importance of trying to create an integrated and balanced approach to living that was grounded in their spirituality. All of them also discussed struggling to try to actually do this while maintaining a commitment to the importance of a holistic spiritual grounding place. In considering how this integrated approach manifests itself in her work and personal life, Shirley noted, “I am always teaching whether I’m at [the community college] or not.” In essence, this sense of nurturing a way of life required inner reflection and connecting to one’s center or life force, the realm of mystery, or perceived higher power. Greta speaks specifically to this point and notes that there is an “ethical underpinning” to why she values spiritual practice.

One of the things I’ve learned over the years is that if you practice a certain way it’s like you become *one*—you don’t have the mind/body split anymore; there’s kind of a sense of oneness; and the sense of oneness for me translates into or is strongly related to [living] in the world. Everybody is separated, split, fragmented, except in bits and pieces—to try to translate a sense of oneness that’s more like a mental/spiritual/emotional . . . [the point is] to live that out when you’re not in a meditative state.

She goes on to elaborate that spirituality is about cherishing as opposed to extracting life and is also core to one’s deepest identity.

[Life] is there to maintain, to nurture. . . . And people are split and at war with each other because they don't cherish life the way it should be. So I guess it's kind of the spiritual foundation of the kind of calmness; if you want to meditate you have to have a sense of how important calmness is, and how important it is to be clear about the way you are, and who you are with that work; otherwise, you don't see what's going on.

Thus, for Greta and most of the participants, having a spirituality was foundational both to their core identities and to their social justice work. As Anna noted,

It is the reason really I am here, on a spiritual plane, but on a real plane, I have no alternative. There is really no alternative to doing this work because of the devastation, I mean what else do you do? It is my responsibility, my duty, my reason, my history, my spirit, my soul.

Although their spirituality was foundational to both their social justice work and their core identities, it also moved participants beyond themselves to develop more of a global consciousness. As Julia remarks,

It's bigger than just being Chicana. I'm also a member of a global community—it encompasses more. . . . For me, working for social justice isn't just done 5 days a week; it's in every part of my life . . . it's a way of living. I call it spirituality.

For many, this greater sense of having a global consciousness was also oriented to trying to build community. Mariposa, a Chinese American educator and activist, notes that spirituality for her is about “building community. I try to do that wherever I am; I know [it's] what helps me stay grounded.” This sense of orientation toward community included a global community, but for many, it also included a historical community and legacy. As Shirley explains,

I think my responsibility is great because I know what people went through so that I could have the freedom and the power to move forward in the world, so I must get up! And I must dig deep! And I must do good! And to not do that would be an affront to my ancestors who stayed alive, and stayed strong, and stayed spiritually connected through centuries of brutality and everything, beyond slavery. That's what it is for me.

That is what it is for the participants in this study: a way of life that requires attention to the inner world through centering and meditation, but it also requires action in the world.

Spirituality as a noncoercive presence in emancipatory educational practice. Part of what the action in the world for these women included was a commitment to teach or work with community groups in a way that challenged power relations. Participants indicated that spirituality indeed informed their educational practices, although most participants were somewhat tentative in how they discussed it or drew on it in educational settings. None of the participants wanted to be seen as

doing anything coercive or in any way as pushing a spiritual or religious agenda. All of the participants were comfortable drawing on it in more subtle ways, noting that it was often present in learning environments in the lives of the learners as well as themselves. For example, many participants reported that, in discussions of crossing borders of race, class, or culture, classroom or workshop participants will often bring representations from their cultural background that are also spiritual symbols. Most of the participants also noted that spiritual experience itself is not primarily a rational experience. Rachael reflected on this in relationship to culture.

They [culture and spirituality] are not separate, because what's culture? It's music, it's singing; it's dancing; it's storytelling; it's presentational knowing. . . . They're both less about what's happening in my head; they're more about what's happening in my body and my heart. . . . Culture is a way to express spirituality; they're very interwoven.

As Nancy noted in describing her experience with Siddha Yoga in meditating and chanting, spirituality was partially about learning to listen with her heart: "For me, being an intellectual academic person, I have to suspend my academic intellectual beliefs, and that it's really all about faith in your heart. So I really listen with my heart. That's what was transforming."

Perhaps because spiritual experience is not primarily about rational processes, there was a difference between the higher educators (9 participants) and the community-based educators (7 participants) in how directly participants discussed or drew on spirituality in educational activities. Of the higher educators, Afua, a psychology professor, was most direct in her use of it in her classes, but she noted that she rarely uses the word *spirituality* but, rather, would draw on it and make connections to cultural aspects of symbol when appropriate. For example, she begins many of her classes with a centering exercise, and when she teaches classes in psychology from an Africentric perspective, she may begin with a libation because she sees this as grounded in the culture she's studying with students. In general, the higher educators tended to draw on spirituality more in preparation for classes (through meditation and centering exercise) or in less formal work with colleagues or students, such as in advising sessions where it may be directly discussed. Elise noted that she needed to pray to get through teaching classes about racism when she has to teach in the suburbs, and Nancy discussed the chanting and centering activities she uses in preparation to teach classes about social justice. Most of the higher educators reported that in actual classroom activities, spiritual issues would be acknowledged as they arose and would be drawn on implicitly, such as in the use of music, symbols, art forms, or in an occasional or one-time activity that might suggest a spiritual connection that moves beyond conflict. But many educators were hesitant to discuss it too directly or obviously so that, as one participant noted, "people don't feel coerced."

On the other hand, those who worked in nonprofit or community-based organizations reported that issues of spirituality come up more often in their work with

communities; it is brought up and drawn on by community members themselves. For example, Mariposa reported that in her social justice work with a Latino community, the participants cocreated an educational activity done in the context of a Mass, and in her work with a Native American community, a ritual ceremony was created by participants as empowerment of the group. Harriet, who co-runs an adult popular education center in the South, reported that, as part of their social justice work, they host monthly spirituality circles that are made available to the community in which prayer, meditation, and ritual are used both to affirm people's identity and move them to action.

In general, those who work in community-based or nonprofit settings seemed to feel less confined by the rationalistic structures of higher education, so they felt freer to use different modalities to provide different kinds of experience for people. Spirituality was more or less accepted as a dimension of human experience that needed to be attended to on some level in potentially educating for social change. Lisa, who does antiracism workshops and is a singer-songwriter whose music and concerts focus on social justice issues, discusses the fact that spirituality is very much a part of her work as both a performer and an educator. In speaking broadly of spirituality and its connection to how she attempts to educate about justice issues, she emphasized the importance of setting a tone and notes,

Music, of course, is evocative of the soul and of the emotions, so I'm modeling I think to a lot of people that really in fact it is not only safe, but *it's great* to put this stuff out there. That's what I mean partly by tone—I have a great deal of confidence in my perspective drawing as it does from the larger wild community, and a lot of people have lost that confidence, particularly urban or raised urban—or just to have somebody who sort of looks like them, they can “pew,” be there, be safe, be connected. I totally get that we should be and are grieving for what's happening on the planet. Of course we are! . . . When I'm structuring experience for people, I'm very aware of the effect of tone so that the deeper the material, the lighter you have to have something else happening so that most people cannot sink . . . it allows people to stay with me.

Lisa's concern, like many of those who are doing educational work in community-based or nonprofit settings, was creating an atmosphere that helps people be more present and open to new kinds of learning that included an affective component to hopefully facilitate social change. Educators in these settings were not concerned that such learning experiences necessarily be explained in rational terms.

Although spirituality was the grounding place for the participants' social justice work, nearly all of them expressed the desire to more directly draw on it a bit more consciously in their educational practices. Most of the participants reported that there has been little direct or intentional discussion of it among their colleagues but that, more often, people are spontaneously bringing up what could be conceived of as spiritual issues, particularly in relation to teaching for social justice. Julia, who works with an educational consulting group on diversity issues, notes,

I find there is a dimension of spirituality in the way we relate to each other and in the way we collectively approach the work of social change. Because we are each from a different cultural background, we express our spirituality in different ways: Hawaiian chants, prayers to the four directions, Christian prayer. . . . The interesting thing though, as I think more about it, I suspect that there are also atheists among the group, yet we somehow seem to delve into spirit. It might be striving to be human . . . I don't know. But we all believe in the goodness of people and the possibility of change while trying to live a life of community.

Although all of the participants drew on their spirituality in their practice, they expressed a desire to perhaps do this more directly but were struggling to find a way to do it in a way that would not be coercive.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The findings of the study offer some interesting insights about the relationship between spirituality and emancipatory adult education efforts and potentially to the broader area of adult learning and development. They do need to be interpreted with caution because these findings are related to a particularly purposeful sample of women adult educators chosen specifically because of their involvement in social action efforts and because of their spiritual commitments; thus, these findings are not intended to be generalizable to all adult educators.

A primary finding of this study is that these participants saw their spirituality and their social justice efforts as an integrated way of life and as a way of thinking and being in the world. They had a strong sense of mission, fueled by their spirituality, of challenging systems of oppression based on race, class, gender, ability, and sexual orientation in their adult education practices. But their involvement in social action efforts also called them back to their spirituality. Such an integrated view of their work as a way of life was reminiscent of Fox's (1995) discussion of the reinvention of work as related to what he refers to as the interconnection of inner work (through centering, meditation, and experience of the realm of mystery) and outer work (working for greater balance in the world). Furthermore, the participants saw these integrated modes of work both in the paid and not-for-pay workforce as part of their life purpose and were also integrated with their personal and cultural history and, in many cases, an ancestral connection as well. There was a strong desire both to give back to their own communities and to create a more equitable society. This notion of creating community in a larger, more global sense was significant to most of them. In this respect, their stories are similar to some of the participants in the Daloz et al. (1996) study on community and commitment.

Although the notion of community was important, it was initially perplexing to me that only one of the participants (Sue) was still active as a regular attendee at services in the religion of her childhood. Given that spirituality was extremely important for all of them and strongly informed their social justice work, one might expect that more might have a desire to be involved with a spiritual community

through organized religion. This was not the case for most participants; furthermore, most were quite personally leery of organized religion. Given that they are teaching classes or working in programs in which they are problematizing and trying to change structural power relations based on gender, race, class, sexual orientation, and disability, it is perhaps no surprise that these women would also have trouble with similar structural oppression in aspects of organized religion. Class issues were alluded to by several of the participants, but most often, what was specifically mentioned as problematic aspects of their childhood religious tradition was the sexism and for many, the heterosexism as well, particularly for participants who grew up Catholic or in the more conservative Protestant denominations. Many participants did discuss feeling a need for an occasional communal experience of spirituality, but not of organized religion. In some cases, this need for a spiritual communal experience was filled through the use of ritual and symbol built into their activist activities with specific groups and communities.

Despite having serious issues with structural systems of oppression in their faiths of origin, most of the participants were strongly attached to the symbols, music, and some of the rituals from their childhood religious traditions and the conceptual meanings attached to them. For example, although Greta has long since moved away from Catholicism, the symbolic meaning of Resurrection (the promise of new life after a dark night of the soul) continues to be an important metaphor for her. Similarly, although these women had moved beyond their childhood religious tradition, they often spiraled back and re-membered those aspects of it that were life giving at the same time that they integrated and were exposed to new ideas and new spiritual traditions and had further spiritual experiences as an adult. This aspect of the study is similar to what Wuthnow (1999) found in his study of people who grew up religious. However, what the women in this study seemed to be most attentive to as they re-membered their faith of origin was related to symbolic forms of knowing and unconscious processes: the music, aspects of ritual, and particular symbols. This was reminiscent of Fowler's (1981) remarks in his critiquing of Piaget and Kohlberg for "their restrictive understanding of the role of imagination in knowing, their neglect of symbolic processes generally and the related lack of attention to unconscious structuring processes other than those constituting reasoning" (p. 103).

It is important to also note that the aspects of their childhood tradition that they were particularly attached to were also deeply rooted in a cultural identity. For example, we see evidence of this in the cultural and spiritual significance for Julia as Chicana of *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, in what the music of Aretha Franklin brought up for Anna of the African American experience, the significance of the wilderness for both Beverly, an Alaska Native woman, and for Lisa, who also grew up in Alaska. This aspect of the cultural significance of spirituality may also be in part why Sue continued to attend services in the Korean Presbyterian church; although there were aspects she found problematic, it was affirming of her cultural identity as a Korean American. In any event, this aspect of the study offers some beginning insights to the relation between cultural and spiritual significance that

has been little discussed in the spiritual development or the adult development literature. Furthermore, what was most often mentioned as an important spiritual symbol for these women was a feminine symbol, embodied in one reminiscent of their culture or in who participants had framed as an important current spiritual symbol for them. (Some of the spiritual figures mentioned in addition to Aretha Franklin and *La Virgen de Guadalupe* were Harriet Tubman, the feminine Buddhist wisdom figure Kuan Yin, female ancestors, and Sojourner Truth, to name a few.) It is interesting to note that currently, 3 of the participants (Maureen, Nancy, and Elise) now identify largely with the Siddha Yoga tradition, which is led by a woman. Although only a couple of participants noted that feminine figures were important spiritual figures for them specifically because they were women, it may be that on an unconscious level these spiritual figures are important in affirming their gender identity and their spirituality as women.

The primary purpose of this study was to examine how spirituality influences the motivations and practices of these women activist adult educators; it was not initially about their spiritual development. However, in sharing significant aspects of their own spiritual journeys and how their spirituality unfolded over time in relationship to their activism and emancipatory adult education efforts, they actually did discuss how their spirituality has changed over time. Thus, the findings have some strong implications for our understanding of spiritual development, although such implications need to be interpreted with caution. One cannot assume, based on the findings of this study, that spiritual commitment necessarily leads to working for social action or that involvement in social action necessarily presumes a spiritual commitment. Indeed, there are many adults whose spirituality is important in their lives, but they are not involved in social action efforts, and there are many activists who are atheists or who otherwise find spirituality irrelevant to their lives. Fowler's (1981) answer to why only some adults whose spirituality is important to them are involved in social action efforts whereas others are not would be that they are at different stages of spiritual development. The fact that these women did indeed have a spiritual commitment that required social action that directly challenged structural systems of oppression was a specific criterion for participant selection. This criterion was chosen to understand how spirituality informs their emancipatory education efforts, not consciously to choose people at a particular stage of spiritual development or of a particular age. Nevertheless, the fact that these participants were women at midlife, in their 40s and 50s, may suggest that the development of their spirituality in consort with their activism is somewhat age related. Virtually all of the participants reported that reframing their social justice work from a spiritual perspective has become more important with age, but cohort effects are also likely at play here as well; most of these women were strongly affected by the civil rights movements and the women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s that did influence their involvement in and attitudes about the importance of social action. Although the data does not suggest that there is a cause-effect relationship between spiritual commitment and social action work as part of spiritual

development, it does suggest that there may be a relationship in many cases. However, this would need to be the subject of further study.

From a developmental perspective, it is also interesting to note that in many cases, what was described as significant spiritual experiences did result in the courage to take new action first in their personal lives. For example, Harriet's healing experience that helped her come to terms with being a lesbian, Elise's experience that facilitated her working on her relationship with her mother, and Lisa's experience of watching the 2-year-old do the Raven dance and her resultant belief in the oneness and unity of all things resulted in their decision to live differently and more proactively. Although many of the experiences described led to action in their personal lives, and not necessarily immediately to social action in the sense of directly challenging structural systems of privilege and oppression, it may be that these significant spiritual experiences that changed their personal lives were a necessary part of their development, which may also have been pivotal in eventually leading them to more structural social action.

As many participants discussed, spiritual experience is not primarily about rationality. For the participants, spirituality was about experiences of a perceived higher power or a life force, about an understanding of the wholeness of all of creation, and about making ultimate meaning out of one's life purpose, which, for these participants, was partly working for social justice. Spirituality was also about an experience of realm of mystery. In Fowler's (1981) terms, spirituality is largely about symbolic processes that are not rational. As Lisa and others noted, it is difficult to put language around spiritual experience because language, in many ways, forces people to map rational processes around what is experienced outside of rationality. Yet, at the same time, none of the participants suspended their rationality in the process of describing their own spiritual journey. Part of what their spiritual development seemed to be about was having spiritual experiences and critically and rationally analyzing some of what those experiences were about while continuing to be open to new spiritual experiences. The move away from their childhood spirituality was partly a result of rational thinking processes—thinking rationally about aspects of their childhood traditions and finding some of what was taught problematic. Furthermore, integrating new insights from different paradigms and new spiritual traditions was an important part of spiritual development. For example, Greta, Anna, and Shirley went through an atheist phase that was influenced partly by a foray into Marxism, the Black Power movement, and other social movements on an intellectual level. Yet, similar to Freire (1997), who discusses the similarities between Marxism and Christianity, they eventually were able to integrate the aspects of Marxism that focus on challenging structural oppression with their spiritual beliefs to develop new aspects of their spirituality. However, these aspects of rationally thinking about these ideas or their spiritual experience was not a substitute for spiritual experience itself, which was viewed as being outside of the realm of the rational. Thus, what may fuel spiritual development is the integration of symbolic knowing and spiritual experience with the rational process of thinking about

those experiences. This potentially includes attending to the cultural and gendered nature of those experiences.

What do these insights about the relationship between spirituality and emancipatory education efforts suggest for the practice of emancipatory education? It is probably not surprising that the community-based educators felt a bit more free than the higher educators to discuss and draw on their own and participants' spirituality in educating for social change, particularly when it arose from learners themselves. People in higher education were indeed aware of the almost exclusive focus on rationality that has been the tradition of higher education, which made them hesitant to discuss or draw on spirituality too overtly. However, all of the participants recognized that the work of social transformation cannot be accomplished entirely through rational processes. As hooks (1999) notes in her discussion of spirituality and liberatory education, people need to be inspired and have their affective, spiritual, and physical selves involved in order for emancipatory education around challenging systems of structural oppression to happen. Although the participants in this study agree, they also felt that attention to the spiritual needs to be handled carefully so that they are not seen as pushing a religious or spiritual agenda. Nevertheless, a few suggestions for practice can be gleaned from this study.

First, it is important to remember that adult learners bring their whole selves, including their spirituality, with them when they enter the learning environment. Dirkx (1997) suggests that adult educators do not necessarily need to "teach soulwork" or spirituality but, rather, "to recognize its presence and to respect its sacred message" (p. 83). Mariposa referred to this phenomenon in her popular education work with grassroots communities: Spirituality is often present in learning communities because learners bring it up, refer to spiritual issues, and/or create rituals and celebrations that help ground their own social change work. When it arises from participants, it is less likely to be impositional.

Second, given that spirituality is about the wholeness of life and, as Fowler (1981) suggests, is often related to knowledge constructed through image and symbol or manifested through story and music, occasional use of art forms, symbol, music, drama, and dance can perhaps be a way of touching on the spiritual in educational activities. Although this may be appropriate only in occasional settings, often educators can, as Lisa says, create a tone or a space in which such an activity can facilitate new learning, new insight, or perhaps a move to action. One participant had learners create a readers theater based on a particularly provocative piece used in a multicultural class on manifestations of various forms of structural oppression. Because it involved the affective and physical, many reported back to her that there was a spiritual dimension to what they had done rather spontaneously. Such venues may touch on the spiritual dimension for people and, at the same time, the term *spirituality* may never be used.

Finally, in considering the relationship between spirituality and emancipatory education efforts, it is important to remember that rationality and spirituality are not complete opposites to each other. In fact, the study suggests that spiritual

development appears to require a rational component; it is important to critically think about one's spiritual experience not as a substitute for the spiritual experience itself, but because critically analyzing messages from the larger culture, including one's religion of origin, is an important part of claiming one's own identity. Such critical analysis is clearly an important component of emancipatory education. Yet, it may also be that having a sense of one's life's mission and drawing regularly on what gives one sustenance to do that social change work, which for many is related to the spiritual, is a needed component for emancipatory education efforts. Clearly, more research is needed in this area, but so also are more collective opportunities for emancipatory adult educators to both experience and discuss the nature of spirituality in social change work. Indeed, this is something that the participants in this study, as well as many other adult educators, long for.

In sum, *spirituality* is an elusive term and an elusive concept, but perhaps this is so because it is all encompassing and cannot be torn from other aspects of one's life, including one's cultural experience, one's further development, or one's social change work in the world. For many, it is a term that connotes wholeness and what gives meaning and coherence to life. It connects and encompasses everything from the creativity of artists and poets, to our connections with loved ones, to the way that we act as cultural workers and actors for justice in the world, and to our understanding of a higher power or life force. It is difficult to discuss what is so elusive and at the same time so personal and so encompassing, and it was indeed an honor to listen to these women's spiritual experiences of this life force and their thoughts on how their spirituality informs their work for social justice. I found myself often inspired by their stories and uplifted by their efforts, and I felt a sense of wholeness and connection with them in this soul work that was part of our shared dialogue that bridged our similarities and differences. It gave me a renewed sense of my own ongoing life work. Although this study is limited, it offers a beginning to a dialogue that has barely begun about the connection between spirituality and emancipatory education practice and the sociocultural context that informs spiritual development.

REFERENCES

- Anzaldúa, G. (1987). *Borderlands/La frontera: The new mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute.
- Bolen, J. (1994). *Crossing to Avalon: A women's midlife pilgrimage*. San Francisco: Harper.
- Borysenko, J. (1996). *A woman's book of life: The biology, psychology, and spirituality of the feminine life cycle*. New York: Riverhead Books.
- Brookfield, S., & Preskill, S. (1999). *Discussion as a way of teaching*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Castillo, A. (1996). *Massacre of the dreamers: Essays on xicanisma*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
- Daloz, L., Keene, C., Keene, J., & Parks, S. (1996). *Common fire: Lives of commitment in a complex world*. Boston: Beacon.
- Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. (1998). *The landscape of qualitative research*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Dirkx, J. (1997). Nurturing soul in adult learning. In P. Cranton (Ed.), *Transformative learning in action: Insights from practice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- English, L. (2000). Spiritual dimensions of informal learning. In L. English & M. Gillen (Eds.), *Addressing the spiritual dimensions of adult learning; What educators can do* (pp. 29-38). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- English, L., & Gillen, M. (Eds.). (2000). *Addressing the spiritual dimensions of adult learning; What educators can do*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Fenwick, T. J., & Lange, E. (1998). Spirituality in the workplace: The new frontier of HRD. *Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education*, 12(1), 63-87.
- Fine, M. (1998). Working the hyphens. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The landscape of qualitative research* (pp. 130-155). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Fox, M. (1995). *The reinvention of work*. San Francisco: HarperCollins.
- Fowler, J. (1981). *Stages of faith: The psychology of human development and the quest for meaning*. San Francisco: Harper & Row.
- Freire, P. (1997). *Letters to Christina*. New York: Routledge.
- Giroux, H. (1992). *Border crossings*. New York: Routledge.
- Gunn Allen, P. (1992). *The sacred hoop*. Boston: Beacon.
- Hamilton, D., & Jackson, M. (1998). Spiritual development: Paths and processes. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, 25(4), 262-270.
- Hart, M., & Holton, D. (1993). Beyond God the father and mother: Adult education and spirituality. In P. Jarvis & N. Walters (Eds.), *Adult education and theological interpretations* (pp. 237-258). Malabar, FL: Krieger.
- Hayes, E., & Colin, S. (Eds.). (1994). *Confronting racism and sexism in adult education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Hill Collins, P. (1998). *Fighting words: Black women and the search for justice*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress*. New York: Routledge.
- hooks, b. (1999). Embracing freedom: Spirituality and liberation. In S. Glazer (Ed.), *The heart of learning: Spirituality in education*. New York: Putnum.
- Horton, M., & Freire, P. (1990). *We make the road by walking: Conversations on education and social change*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Johnson-Bailey, J., & Cervero, R. (1998). Power dynamics in teaching and learning practices: An examination of two adult education classrooms. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 17(6), 389-399.
- Kincheloe, J., & McLaren, P. (1999). Rethinking critical theory and qualitative research.. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The landscape of qualitative research* (pp. 260-399). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- King, U. (Ed.). (1996). *Feminist theology from the third world*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis.
- Lather, P. (1991). *Getting smart*. Routledge: New York.
- McLaughlin, D., & Tierney, W. (Eds.). (1993). *Naming silenced lives*. New York: Routledge.
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam, S., & Caffarella, R. (1999). *Learning in adulthood*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Myss, C. (1996). *Anatomy of the spirit: The seven stages of power and healing*. New York: Random House.
- Palmer, P. (1998). *The courage to teach*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Ruether, R. (Ed.). (1996). *Women healing earth*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis.
- Simmer-Brown, J. (1999). Commitment and openness: A contemplative approach to pluralism. In S. Glazer (Ed.), *The heart of learning: Spirituality in education* (pp. 97-112). New York: Putnum.
- Taylor, E. (1998). *The theory and practice of transformative learning: A critical review* (Information Series No. 374). Columbus, OH: ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career and Vocational Education.
- Tisdell, E. (1998). Poststructural feminist pedagogies: The possibilities and limitations of a feminist emancipatory adult learning theory and practice. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 48(3), 139-156.

- Tisdell, E. (1999). The spiritual dimension of adult development. In M.C. Clark & R. Caffarella (Eds.), *An update on adult development theory* (pp. 87-96). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Vaz, K. (Ed.). (1997). *Oral narrative research with Black women*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Vella, J. (2000). A spirited epistemology: Honoring the adult learner as subject. In L. English & M. Gillen (Eds.), *Addressing the spiritual dimensions of adult learning; What educators can do* (pp. 7-6). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Walters, S., & Manicom, L. (Eds.). (1996). *Gender in popular education*. London: Zed Press.
- Weibust, P., & Thomas, L. E. (1994). Learning and spirituality in adulthood. In J. Sinnott (Ed.), *Interdisciplinary handbook of adult lifespan learning*. Westport, CT: Greenwood.
- Wuthnow, R. (1999). *Growing up religious*. Boston: Beacon.
- Young, R. (1997). *No neutral ground*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.