

Reframing Spirituality, Reconceptualizing Change:

**critically-informed
spirituality as possibility
and necessity**

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Workshop Goals

- To suggest an imperative for critical social work to address spirituality and meaning
- To put forward the notion of “critically-informed spirituality”
- To explore how critical conceptualizations of spirituality might alter our framing of social and individual change

Background to the Inquiry

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- Current definitions of spirituality in mainstream discourse often confusing and problematic
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- Concern in critical literature about spiritual appropriation and spirituality as a 'slippery slope' away from dealing with difference

The Need for Critical Spirituality

- Gaps in critical literature regarding spirituality and issues of meaning
- Rise of neoliberalism, dismantling of social services, increasing social/economic injustice
- Critical conceptualizations of spirituality may inspire revitalized and more sustainable practices towards justice

Love as Spirituality:

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- Original research explored how **critical** social workers might conceptualize love in practice (Butot, 2004)
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- Spirituality emerged as an essential concept

“Critically-informed Spirituality:

- Recognition of the intrinsic interconnection of all beings, and
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- Recognition of, and respect and reverence for one's own and others' intrinsic wholeness, sacredness, and inherent value as an expression of the diversity of this interconnection”
- (Butot, 2004)

Reframing Change from a Spiritual Perspective (a paradox):

- Inherent wholeness and intrinsic value
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- Non-judgement, non-attachment, acceptance, and non-interference
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- Support and sharing
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- Compassionate challenge

Inherent Wholeness and Intrinsic Value:

- *“People are whole just the way they are ... that doesn't translate into wrong or broken. That is so crucial because we communicate everything ... if we go into something with the assumption that someone is broken and needs to be fixed at some level, they're going to hear that and see that.” (Raven, p.10)*

Compassionate Challenge:

- *“I tell students ‘it's none of my business who you or your parents vote for. However we also need to know the interconnectedness between things. There's a reason why teachers are overloaded in [this province], why people working in the human or social services are leaving the province in droves – why doctors and social workers are vastly underpaid – why [we have] the lowest minimum wage in the entire country. It's because its attention is focused elsewhere and not on human being issues.” (Les, p.24)*

Compassionate Challenge:

- *“If people are confident in your care for them, in your love, your absolute unequivocal acceptance, it is way easier to [say] ‘I’m calling bullshit on that’, or... ‘I’m wondering if I could just challenge you a bit on something you said’.” (Karen, p.26)*
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- *“I don’t have to dismantle, even though I want to, his particular orientation in the world, but he knows a little bit more about mine.” (Karen, p.36)*

Compassionate Challenge:

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- *“I really worried about it, and in my personal heart of hearts I thought, ‘this really isn't good’. I was really concerned. And I would say that sometimes, I would say my truth about it. But I knew she'd have to find her own way.” (Carol, p.38)*

Acceptance and Challenge:

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- “I don't think you can create change without [spirituality/love]. I don't even want to say create change – we're not. We have to create an acceptance, in a sense...which [along with compassionate challenge] is the ground for change.” (Carol, p.6)

Spiritually-informed Critical Practice:

- Practice which is spiritual/loving, *and* critical
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- Recognition of interconnection and inherent value
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- Recognition of diversity and unity as co-existent
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- Compassionate Challenge

Spiritually-informed Critical Practitioners:

- *“we hear the same from the Elders here in Aboriginal traditions as from Eastern traditions, that ‘we're all connected, and we're all one and all part of the same web’...love/[spirituality] extends not just to other human beings but to all of Creation – it's a way of being totally”* (Erika, p.14).

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