

INCORPORATING SPIRITUALITY AND RELIGIOSITY IN SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT

Incorporating Spirituality And Religiosity In Social Work Practice

Master of Social Work, 2019

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This study aims to critically examine the current social work practice which is based on dominant western epistemology and positivism, and which often excludes spiritual and religious aspects of clients. Drawing on Critical Race Theory and a holistic approach from the Indigenous perspective for the theoretical framework, this study challenges the dominant research method of random sampling for research. This study adopts a phenomenological approach which seeks a deep understanding of how three social work practitioners with racially and culturally diverse backgrounds view spiritual and religious dimensions in social work practice, and how they integrate these aspects into their practice. With semi-structured interviews, the findings of the study indicate the essence of the experience of social work practitioners who incorporate spirituality and religiosity in their practice. The findings indicate the need for thoughtful discussions on how to incorporate spirituality and religiosity in social work practice without allowing exclusion and harm through religion.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to my family in South Korea, my father, Hak-Su Choi, who passed away, my mother, Sue-Kyung Kim, my two brothers and three sisters. Thank you for everything you have done for me.

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INTRODUCTION

Who am I? Why am I here in the first place? What is the purpose of life? How should I live? What are all the challenges in my life? How should I manage these challenges in my life? What are all my relationships with family, friends and people I love about? What is my role in my family and community? What happens after my death? These are questions for spirituality, which all religions aim to provide the answers to.

There is growing attention to the spiritual needs of service users in social work. This is particularly the case in a multicultural society such as the Great Toronto Area (GTA) in Canada, which is home for many people with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. In such locales, social work practitioners are required to have a good understanding of the diversity of ones' spiritual and religious aspects and appropriately address the spiritual needs and desires of people they work with. These desires include seeking meaning, joy, love, hope and peace.

Understanding my research requires an understanding of my positionality as a researcher. I identify myself as a Christian, an East Asian female and English language learner. I am a cisgender, first-generation immigrant, and prior to the current MSW program, I was a previous social work practitioner in Canada. As an immigrant, I came from a different culture than that of North America. I have felt that my culture shapes how I see the world and how I understand myself and others. As I have been integrating into Canadian society as a mother with two children, I have faced many challenges as many immigrants do. At one point, I was diagnosed with depression and recommended to take an antidepressant. I did not like the idea of numbing my pain without trying other options. I believed that there was a reason for my suffering, but I did not know how to come out from the grief and hopelessness that I was in. Even though I had some great counsellors who provided me with emotional support, I felt something important was

missing from Western counseling methods. While I was studying in the BSW program, the question was always with me and led me to think about what we can do when other mainstream modalities have fallen short and how to complement the Western approach to healing. As I learned about myself in my journey, I realized that I am a spiritual person who has always been able to find some peace through my Christian faith. I also felt the path to peace is open to anyone through spirituality.

Through my social work experience working with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, I learned that many people I worked with were spiritual whether their faith is organized or not. I could see that they were able to manage all their challenges through their spirituality. Some people said to me that only their faith/spirituality could sustain them in times of hardship or crisis. This encouraged me to work toward becoming a counsellor who adopts different approaches that respond to the spiritual needs of people regardless of whether they have a religion or not. This enabled me to acknowledge that the dimension of spirituality has been undervalued and excluded in our social work practice.

My MRP topic is incorporating spirituality and religiosity in social work practice. The focus of my research is to critically examine the current social work practice based on dominant western epistemology and positivism, which do not include the essential dimension of spirituality in social work practice. The study aims to explore how three social work practitioners with racially and culturally diverse backgrounds view spiritual and religious dimensions in social work practice and how they integrate those aspects into their practice. I conducted semi-structured interviews with three social work practitioners while giving preference to those who have racially and religiously diverse backgrounds. Four research questions guided my research:

- 1) How is spirituality important to social work practitioners who identify themselves as being

spiritual? 2) What do they mean by spirituality and/or religiosity? 3) How does spirituality and/or religiosity help them to serve their clients? 4) Do they experience any barriers that hinder them from providing optimum spiritual care? The findings through the phenomenology approach will indicate the essence of their experience as social work practitioners who incorporate spirituality and religiosity in their practice. Although spiritual and religious aspects are significantly important to the participants, they are able to set aside their own religion and focus on the needs and religions of clients. They suggest a different approach to service provision for immigrants who have diverse backgrounds in terms of cultural, religious, historical and political contexts. They all agree that education or training, and guidelines would be helpful for them to integrate religious and spiritual aspect of clients in their practice. To move forward with the idea of incorporating spirituality and religiosity in social work practice, this study finds that it is imperative to have academy-wide discussions to ensure that using faith as a social work approach would not reproduce exclusion and harm that has been inflicted on certain populations such as LGBTQ and Indigenous people in the name of religion.

This research paper begins with a review of the literature pertaining to incorporating spirituality and religiosity in social work practice. Then, it will challenge the dominant research method that is colour negligence by drawing on Critical Race Theory (CRT) and holistic approach from an Indigenous perspective for the theoretical framework. The methodology section gives a synopsis of phenomenology research. This is followed by the research findings/analysis and discussion of the implications of the research for social work practice. This paper will conclude with the researcher's final thoughts.

CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

As this study aims to contribute to the dialogue about the need for spirituality and religiosity in social work practice, several academic journals and ten empirical studies on the spirituality of social work were reviewed. Several marked themes came to light for the analysis.

Definitions of spirituality and religiosity

The definitions of spirituality and religiosity vary across individuals and helping professions. Although both spirituality and religiosity are often referred to interchangeably, many scholars define spirituality and religiosity as different concepts (Derezotes & Evans, 1996). Drawing from Canda and Furman (1999, p. 37), two prominent scholars in the area of spiritual aspects in social work, Wong and Vinsky (2009) state that spirituality is human nature seeking meaning and being involved in the individual experience of relationship to self, others and to the ultimate. On the other hand, religion is a shared belief, ritual practice and experiences within a faith community, which is aligned with spiritual concerns (Canda & Furman, 1999, p.37 as cited in Wong & Vinsky, 2009).

Genealogy of Social Work

Although the role of religious organizations in social work has depreciated over the time, social work by addressing concerns of the needy was developed from the preaching and practices of major religions around the world (Dulmus, & Sowers, 2012). Early social welfare policies and programs in the US, Europe and Muslim countries were historically modelled on religious practices and beliefs of Judeo-Christian and Muslim faiths, preaching the virtues of helping the poor, sick, widows, orphans, and people with mental health challenges or disability (Dulmus, & Sowers, 2012). According to Oxford Research Encyclopedias (2019), social work has originated from the efforts of non-profit organizations to address the increase in poverty in nations which

were characterized by prosperous economies in Europe and North America in the late 19th century. Social work was recognized as professional by the 1920s and classified as a profession in the 1930 census (Oxford Research Encyclopedias, 2019).

A number of research studies show that contemporary social work was established from the foundation of Christian belief. As an illustration, British and Canadian based literature and documents indicate that the idea of modern social work, which is that society is responsible for those living in poverty and in need of help, can be traced to the idealistic assumption of Christian immanence (Moffatt & Irving, 2002). According to Moffatt and Irving (2002), the idealism of Enlightenment has two paradoxical features. One is the positivist approach to defining truths and reality. The other is an emphasis on spiritual immanence, which leads us to define ourselves based on our relationship to others and the community. These competing perspectives within the idealism of Enlightenment created a tension around how to view social issues in social work history. Urwick, a leading scholar of British and Canadian social work, as cited in Moffatt & Irving (2002), argues that idealism is still the essence of contemporary social work. For instance, the importance of civic engagement and reciprocity in social work illustrates the influence of idealism that informs Christian immanence (Moffatt & Irving, 2002). Moffatt and Irving (2002) argue that we need to revive the central philosophy for social work, which is illustrated in a religious slogan “living for the brethren” (p. 425) in our neoliberal context where social work is dominated by a positivist approach.

Secular context

Another critical theme that emerged from the literature was the political standpoint pertaining to spirituality and religiosity in the social work profession. Although there has been a shift toward considering a more comprehensive approach to meeting client’s needs by including

their spiritual or religious aspects (Kvarfordt, Sheridan, & Taylor, 2018), nothing much has changed in the dominant social work standpoint that upholds a secular stance and is reluctant to adopt new ways of knowing such as spiritual and religious dimensions (Tyson, 1992 as cited in Derezotes, & Evans, 1996).

This phenomenon can be explained in the historical context of social work. According to Wong and Vinsky (2009), social work originated from Christian charitable organizations. As positivism has been the dominant paradigm of academia since the 1960s (Derezotes, & Evans, 1996), social work as a discipline followed the positivist paradigm emphasizing that empirical knowledge should be measurable and verifiable, while explicitly distancing itself from the Christian charity model (Wong and Vinsky (2009). Drawing from Bowpitt (1998, p. 687), Holloway (2007) argues that this avoidance of religion aims to earn professional credibility by adopting a secular stance. Emphasizing spirituality, but depreciating religiosity, called ‘spiritual, but not religious’ discourse was created to address the need for addressing sacred content of spiritual/religious concerns in secular context while establishing distance from religion (Wong and Vinsky, 2009, p. 1343). For example, Canda and Furman (1999, p. 57) as cited in Wong and Vinsky (2009), emphasize the distinctions between spirituality and religiosity by stating that religion does not own spirituality and spirituality itself can express the human need for meaning-seeking without relating to any religions.

However, there is still a tension around whether or not to include spiritual care in mainstream social work and secular public services because the dominant discourse tends to view spirituality as identical to religion (Lasair, 2018). For instance, a recent policy decision made by the Saskatchewan government determined that the government no longer provides funds to spiritual care in public healthcare services because they believe that a secular state

should not support any religious practice (Lasair, 2018). With this present political climate, separating spirituality from the common concerns about transcendence by emphasizing the differences between spirituality and religion might be a great way to navigate the opposition to addressing spiritual/religious concerns (Lasair, 2018). Wong and Vinsky (2009, p. 1343), however, point out that this practice can be a new form of colonialism, which is othering ethnic groups of people of colour who are often represented as religious, thereby further marginalizing them.

Another point of debate surrounding the concept of spirituality is the boundaries of spiritual practice. Kuepfer (2018) expands the understanding of spirituality by defining spirituality as a full dimension of how we understand human experience. She argues that any practice or activities that have to do with meaning, relationship to self, others and the world are regarded as a spiritual practice. It can be both personal and communal, and finds expression in relationship, rituals, traditions, practices, stories, creativity, beliefs and values, which allows us to cope with difficult situations in their life (Kuepfer, 2018). This broad concept of spiritual care brings more discussion in the literature over what types of practices are considered to be spiritual practices (Dane & Moore, 2006).

Spiritual need

An overarching theme across the journal articles and many empirical studies on the topic indicates a favourable attitude toward incorporating spirituality and religiosity into social work practice and education. The majority of the empirical studies called for the need for incorporating more spiritual and religious content into social work practice and education (Canda, Nakashima, & Furman, 2004; Coholic, 2003; Derezotes, & Evans, 1996; Furman, Benson, & Canda, 2011; Furman, Benson, Grimwood, & Canda, 2004; Gilligan, & Furness,

2006; Hohn, McCoy, Ivey, Ude, & Praetorius, 2017; Kvarfordt, Sheridan, & Taylor, 2018; Larsen, 2011; Lee & Barrett, 2007). Historically social work has overlooked the impact of spirituality and religiosity on the lives of clients, thereby failing to incorporate these perspectives into educational and practical contexts (Carrington, 2013). Hodge (2011, as cited in Carrington, 2013), argues that practitioners need to work with all dimensions of clients including their spiritual and religious aspects, which can lead to an effective helping relationship.

Coholic (2007, as cited in Warkentin, 2018), claims that spirituality is tied to how we make sense of our life events, relationships and the self, which is at the core of social work practice. Warkentin (2018) asserts that social workers should be where our clients are by going beyond the categories of religion and/or spirituality or secularism of social services. According to Gilligan and Furness (2006), many practitioner respondents believe that religious and spiritual dimensions are part of the inherited nature of human beings and there is a clear need for social work practitioners and educators to understand the impact of faith and belief in the lives of clients as well as practitioners. Social workers who are expected to be culturally competent need to be able to respond appropriately to the needs of all service users, particularly those who value religious and spiritual aspects (Gilligan & Furness, 2006).

There is an emphasis on the value of spirituality and religiosity to both clients and practitioners. Hohn, McCoy, Ivey, Ude, and Praetorius (2017) assert that Christian social workers at a faith-based non-profit organization felt empowered, not only by being able to incorporate their faith with their practice to connect with women and God, but also by witnessing their clients grow through connecting themselves with God. Whether the calling is related to religions or not, people who view their work as a calling or meaningful tend to have a more positive attitude toward their work and job satisfaction (Steger, Pickering, Shin, & Dik, 2010).

The level of job satisfaction is considered as important as their income and job security (Hall & Chandler, 2005; O'Brien, 1992, as cited in Steger, Pickering, Shin, & Dik, 2010).

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) considers spirituality as cultural competence in the social work profession (section 1.05(a-c)) (Hohn, McCoy, Ivey, Ude, & Praetorius (2017). According to Buckey (2012, p. 260), assessing clients' spiritual and religious domains became a critical skill set of social work professionals as "the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) *Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards* (2008) professional competencies" recently started to require students to obtain assessment skills in the spirituality and religiosity of clients. CSWE in the section of Core Competency 4, highlights the importance of addressing clients' spiritual and religious aspects by stating that different spiritual and religious perspectives are reflective of ones' diverse identities and the social work professional should be engaged in clients' spiritually and religiously diverse backgrounds (Buckey, 2012).

Many studies on spirituality are associated with people facing serious illness and the end of life. Despite the diverse cultures around the world, many people obtain some relief and peace through religious and/or spiritual practices, which are often presented in cultural rituals (Dane & Moore, 2006). Dane and Moore (2006) point out that along with cultural ceremony, spirituality and religion play a significant role in coping with serious illness and distress including dying or loss by providing people with comfort, meaning and peace. Social worker professionals should be trained to help clients with spiritual practices in the form of palliative care (Dane & Moore, 2006).

Obstacles

Another theme that emerged in the literature is that spiritual and religious perspectives need to be better addressed in social work education, practice and research by identifying what

barriers get in the way of optimum spiritual care in social work. Derezotes and Evans (1996) contend that social workers need formal training that would prepare them for addressing clients' spiritual and religious concerns and being aware of their own beliefs and biases about spiritual and religious aspects.

A national survey conducted by Canda, Nakashima, and Furman (2004) explored the ethical consideration of spirituality in social work. The study reports that social service workers regularly deal with spirituality in their practice. This however often takes place without any guidelines in place by their employing agencies. Kvarfordt, Sheridan, and Taylor (2018) assert that when faculty or practitioners lack comprehensive knowledge, they can project their own biases about spirituality and religiosity whether they intend to or not, thereby leading to an ethical concern. The study also indicates that only one-third of Canadian social work programs that participated in the study reported that they had included a spiritual dimension into social work program curriculum; moreover, the level of inclusion was found to rely heavily on the discretion of the instructor (Kvarfordt, Sheridan, & Taylor, 2018). Some of the implications the study suggested are the need for considering contextual issues in developing curricula, the general religiosity of the state and the diverse religious/spiritual perspectives within the people in communities, especially among marginalized populations (Kvarfordt, Sheridan, & Taylor, 2018). Carrington (2013) points out that there has been little discussion of how spiritual theories and practices should be developed into social work profession in order to overcome the shortcomings of current social work theory and practice.

There is another concern about spiritual based social work practice, which is the use of prayer as social work interventions. Sheridan (2010) asserts that the study findings reveal that

almost 90 percent of the practitioners in the study practice praying with their clients and/or praying for their clients; this dynamic often leads to ethical issues in social work.

Furthermore, some Canadian scholars discussed spirituality and religiosity in social work by drawing on critical analysis of power relations with various subjects including ethnography, pedagogical challenge and reflexivity. The findings of a study using an ethnographic approach show that spirituality can be a new avenue for a community-based movement in the context of globalization and transnationalism (Kumsa, 2009). The study explored the revival of ancient ancestral spirituality in the Oromo diaspora. According to Kumsa (2009), Oromo people were marginalized locally due to the suppression imposed by modern Ethiopia which was assisted by continued “European colonialism.” This led the Oromo people to be scattered all over the world in the 1980s and 1990s (p. 88). With this politically unstable environment, Oromo women were more vulnerable than their male counterparts because they were marked as spiritual leaders who kept their collective identity. When Oromo people came to Western countries, they faced marginalization due to their national identity of diaspora, gender, and race. However, Oromo women reclaimed their traditional spirituality through *Ateetee* (the Oromo female deity) rituals celebrating femininity and maternity, which assists them in transforming their diasporic experience of racism and gender discrimination (Kumsa, 2009). For Oromo women, spirituality is embedded in their daily living and it allows them to identify themselves on their own terms in a transnational space. Kumsa argues that Oromo women showcase that one can engage in transformation by embracing their spiritual practice in the era of globalization (2009).

On the other hand, there are tensions between proponents of secular anti-oppressive discourse and advocates of religion, specifically Christian beliefs. Todd and Coholic (2007) point out that Christianity’s fundamentalist view has historically caused harm to, and often continues

to harm, people from LGBTQ communities. In a post-secondary school classroom, anti-oppressive practice educators face a pedagogical dilemma over whom to support – either a student with diverse expressions of gender and sexual orientation or one with Fundamentalist beliefs (Todd & Coholic, 2017).

Given that people from LGBTQ communities are marginalized due to religious values, this dilemma will remain unless thorough discussion and research are undertaken (Todd & Coholic, 2007). For this reason, there have been some limitations on the inclusiveness of fundamentalist students in classrooms (Todd & Coholic, 2007). Todd and Coholic (2007) assert that there is a compelling need for figuring out how to work through the challenging processes of meeting the needs of each group of students, who seem to be competing with each other. It may be necessary for both groups of educators and students to negotiate their own religious beliefs to comply with the values and ethics of anti-oppressive practice in the social work discipline (Todd & Coholic, 2007), which is justice for everyone.

On the other hand, there is a scholar who elucidates that reflecting on their spirituality in their professional setting would be beneficial to social work practitioners (Béres, 2004). In her reflective writing, Béres (2004) asserts that social work professional's spirituality influences their social work practice. Drawing on Jewish ethics and Christian literature, she claims that her spirituality and postmodern approach to social work practice is closely tied to each other and create synergy effects. She also suggests that the Foucauldian approach that reflects on “taken-for-granted”s is a great tool for a self-reflection as it allows us to examine the current spiritual and social work practice by interrogating any influences. She further states that the reflecting process of the Foucauldian approach enables us to recognize that our spirituality and social work practice is socially constructed and better understand that of others, which are shaped in various

ways (Béres, 2004). She argues that the reflecting process is an opportunity to check practitioner themselves by ensuring that their service is considered as fair and ethical practice. In her conclusion, she states that self-reflection on the impact of their own spirituality on their practice allows them to grow personally and professionally.

Literature Gap

Despite growing attention to the needs for the inclusion of a spiritual dimension into social work practice (Kvarfordt, Sheridan, & Taylor, 2018), no attention has been given to studies seeking the perspectives of social work practitioners who have racially and culturally (religiously) diverse backgrounds. This results in a homogenous sampling within studies, which does not reflect various perspectives from diverse populations. Through the literature review, I find that there is an epistemological injustice in knowledge production in this topic area. Among ten empirical studies reviewed, the majority of studies indicate that research participants who are mainly social work practitioners, educators and students are a racially homogenous group of the white females. This data reflects the demographic feature of social work professionals, which illustrates that practitioners who are people of colour and/or male are often excluded in empirical studies. The finding appears to be similar across studies in developed countries across continents including US, Canada, Australia and England. For instance, in a pilot study conducted in the US by Lee and Barrett (2007), 30 social workers were randomly selected for semi-structured interviews. The majority of participants of the study were identified as white women and heterosexual. Nearly half of the participants were Christians with a Roman Catholic background (Lee & Barrett, 2007). In a study in Australia, 20 self-identified feminist social workers were individually interviewed in depth using a semi-structured format (Coholic, 2003). Of the 20

participants, there were three men and 17 women and six participants came from non-English speaking countries. Larsen (2011) conducted a survey in which 225 members of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) across the US participated. The findings show that the participants were racially homogenous, with 88.3% of them being Caucasian. Over half (57.8%) were identified as Christians (Larsen, 2011). The demographic data of the studies suggest some pertinent questions, such as whom the knowledge is for and whose knowledge matters?

As I believe that human reality is always influenced by the environment, and how we are perceived should be shaped by considering our social context, culture and history, etc. (Preston & Redgrift, 2017), not by viewing it through the lens of dominant western epistemology and discourse. The dominant Euro-Western paradigm is restricted to four approaches to research: “positivist, constructivist, transformative and pragmatic” (Chilisa, Major, & Khudu, 2017, p. 327). Chilisa, Major and Khudu (2017) assert that it would be beneficial if we decolonize all research frameworks including theoretical, conceptual and methodological aspects by adopting “multi-epistemological research” (p. 329) such as a postcolonial indigenous paradigm that allows both the researchers and the researched people to work together to contribute to knowledge production. This approach would be able to appeal to people from the developing nations or the East who do not feel that their worldviews fit into any of dominant epistemological approach (Chilisa, Major & Khudu, 2017).

According to Mathebane (2017), colonial power created the hegemony of the Eurocentric paradigm and “decolonization and indigenization” are required to achieve intellectual justice globally (p.3). As all forms of knowledge are based on their local context, it does not make sense to enforce or export the colonizers’ worldview to other countries. The author argues that social work research, education and practice should adopt a new approach that is compatible with

different socio-cultural contexts around the world, which is called a contrapuntal epistemology. This approach allows two or more independent perspectives in social work to interact with one another equally while representing itself as an epistemological option for the African context (Mathabane, 2017). While my research adopts a critical intersectional epistemological point of view (Hunter, 2002), it will incorporate a contrapuntal epistemology.

Another knowledge gap in the literature is found in the methodologies deployed in the ten studies, which is a dominant epistemological approach of positivism. Six of the ten studies explored the topic through questionnaires. By adopting surveys, these studies are tied to the positivist paradigm that emphasizes scientific methods with which knowledge can be claimed (Neuman, 2006). For instance, a study conducted by Furman, Benson, Grimwood, & Canda, (2004), highlights the validity and reliability of the survey by referring to the religion scale used for the study, which assumes that one's spirituality can be measured.

The focus of my research is to critically examine and challenge the current social work practice based on a dominant western epistemology and paradigm of positivism, which does not include the essential dimension of spirituality in social work practice. Employing a bottom-up approach and by interviewing them, this study gives voice to three racialized front-line practitioners, who are often excluded from empirical studies. My hopes were that their insight might contribute to ongoing discussions around social work program curriculum and practice implications in which spirituality and religious dimension are incorporated.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Troubling Western epistemological and ontological domination

As a researcher who is a member of a racial minority group, I realized that scholars of colour are underrepresented in the academy. I feel that western epistemologies do not reflect the worldviews of people with racially and culturally diverse backgrounds. It is of paramount importance to know how the power hierarchy affects our knowledge production process (Hunter, 2002). Luke (2014, as cited in Ray, Randolph, Underhill, & Luke, 2017), reiterates the public debates on the power of race, class, or culture, which leads to economic inequality. According to Luke (2014), this power hierarchy is also reflected in current scholarship as Western scholars are the ones who determine what knowledge is valid whereas scholars from different cultures are not recognized as important as their counterparts. He suggest that studies need to address this inequity in academia (2014). There is a need for considering other worldviews and ways of knowing that has been excluded in dominant knowledge production, including that of religious minority groups (Baksh, 2016).

Denzin (2017) points out that historically qualitative research has contributed to reinforcing colonialism, the global politics of white, patriarchal capitalism by adopting the positivist paradigm. He emphasizes that the perspectives of people with different ethnic and religious backgrounds should be included in contemporary democratic society. According to Denzin (2017), the critical qualitative inquiry needs to address social injustice by giving priority to the most marginalized in our present day neoliberal context and it is essential for researchers to be ethically responsible by centering the voices of the disadvantaged in the inquiry (Denzin, 2017). There has been a dramatic shift within the international qualitative inquiry associations toward social justice commitments to studies that incorporate diverse individuals' perspectives. This

liberal and radical social movement in academia are led by those whose approaches are informed by feminist, clinical, ethnic, critical, queer, critical race theory and cultural studies investigators. Denzin (2017) points out that the evidence-based inquiry that became popular in the neoliberal context failed to acknowledge that there is no such thing as objective truth since all facts are value-laden. According to Denzin (2017), researchers play a vital role in the findings they derive from their studies because researchers reflect their political and theoretical standpoint based on their historical and cultural engagement. Critical social science should consider how power and ideology intersect, thereby creating a dominant discourse which determines whether a particular cultural context is legitimate or not (Denzin, 2017). Critical social science needs to take into consideration how power and ideology intersect and influence systems of discourse (Denzin, 2017). Furthermore, cultural contents are influenced as well because languages and meanings represent our cultures in which race, gender and class intersect (Denzin, 2017).

I found through my literature review that a critical perspective on racism tends to be overlooked in the scholarship. By adopting Critical Race Theory (CRT) for a theoretical framework, this study conceptualizes the experience of people of colour and analyzes racial inequity found in the literature on the topic of the study.

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

CRT emerged in the 1970s in the United States spearheaded by a group of racialized legal lawyers and scholars as well as activists who sought to reject the colour-blind approach to law (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017). The key founders of critical race theory are Derrick Bell and Richard Delgado (Parker & Lynn, 2002). CRT points out that laws played a crucial role in institutionalizing racism in society (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017). According to Delgado and

Stefanic (2017), by creating new theories and strategies CRT was a response to the rollback of the advancement of civil rights since the 1960s. According to Delgado and Stefanic (2017), CRT became a vehicle for a social movement by allowing activists and scholars whose interests are in the relationship among race, racism and power to collaborate. By adopting a different approach to civil rights discourse, CRT questions the liberal order that upholds neutral propositions of laws and policies (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017). CRT challenges the notion of equal opportunity that the liberal order emphasizes because without taking account of ones' complex identities and differences, the equal opportunities are just a mechanism to serve white elite's interest by reinforcing structural inequalities in our society (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017). CRT views racial inequality as stemming from the social, economic, and legal differences created by white elites who aim to promote their own interests in labour markets and politics; this has led people from racial minority groups to live in poverty or being involved in criminal activity (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017).

Parker and Lynn (2002) argue that CRT interrogates how race and racism operate in the legal and social worlds with three primary goals. First, CRT values the lived experiences and narratives of oppressed people and considers them as effective approaches to challenging race and racism in law and society by and large. CRT views that race is a harmful concept created by society and it needs to be eliminated. CRT also aims to investigate the connections between race and other types of oppression (Parker & Lynn, 2002).

Drawing on two central tenets of critical race theory (normality of racism and interest convergence), this study examines the racial domination in the field of social work, including academia, research and practice. The first tenet of CRT points out that people consider racism as normal and natural. Racial inequity is manifested in scholarship through race-neutral approaches

even though racism is a significant factor affecting the lives of people of colour in contemporary society. There is a need for racial consciousness in understanding our current context as racism is considered as usual and entrenched into our society (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017). Ten empirical studies on the spirituality of social work practitioners were reviewed and not much attention was given to the racial backgrounds of research participants and their clients. The majority of these studies indicate that more than 80 percent of the respondents were White female practitioners and over half of them were identified as Christians. There is not a qualitative study seeking the perspectives of social work practitioners who are religiously and racially diverse.

This reflects the current social work profession which is dominated by white female professionals and indicates that practitioners who are people of colour, with religiously diverse backgrounds are often excluded. This needs to be challenged because it limits the value of knowledge by excluding a number of people of colour that can contribute to knowledge production while creating some questions such as whom the knowledge is for and whose knowledge matters.

Landson-Billings (2003) points out that how we see the world and understand what knowledge is about is shaped by environmental factors such as places to live and to learn. The hegemony of the dominant paradigm is problematic because it does not allow alternative ways of knowing (Landson-Billings, 2003). Landson-Billings (2003) emphasizes that the concept of “double consciousness” coined by Du Bois enables us to understand others who do not reflect the dominant way of knowing, in an inclusive way (p. 257). Landson-Billings (2003) asserts that there is a need for different discourses and epistemologies that challenge this epistemological injustice by offering “counterknowledge”, which can liberate people who struggle to identify themselves due to the lack of epistemological alternatives (p. 257)

Another tenet of CRT is ‘interest convergence’ which was coined by Derrick Bell, indicating that white elites would allow racial advances for blacks only when such advances are aligned with their self-interest (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Along with epistemological social injustice in academia, this study will address the ontological domination of the Western approach which excludes ones’ spiritual aspect in social work. The emerging body of literature supports the inclusion of clients’ spiritual aspect in social work practice, which reflects a Western phenomenon of interest in spiritual practices such as mindfulness, yoga, meditation and natural therapies, but separates religiosity from one’s spiritual entity.

Another perspective that helps understand and analyze the phenomenon explored in this study is a holistic approach from the Indigenous perspective. The holistic approach to understanding the human being as comprised of body, mind, emotion and spirit has been central to Indigenous communities for thousands of years; only recently has mainstream scholarship begun to acknowledge ones’ spiritual needs as it pertains to well-being as evidenced in the growing body of the literature. In literature review above, this study touched upon social work that includes sacred content in a secular context by including spiritual aspects, but leaving out religiosity (Liechty, 2013). This study views this shift within mainstream social work as reflective of interest convergence. In other words, the shift occurs mainly because the white dominant group of scholars begin to view the inclusion of spirituality into social work practice as self-benefitting and for this reason they attempt to adopt the benefits of spiritual practice without acknowledging religiosity. Given the boom in spiritual practices including meditation, mindfulness, or yoga in western society, I am questioning whether the growing interest in spirituality in social work is aligned with the public interest in spiritual practice. As I experienced, people might have witnessed that spirituality provides them with peace and comfort

when mainstream modalities fall short.

Recent studies indicate that mainstream clinical social work practice has a positive attitude toward mindfulness approaches to psychotherapy. A study conducted by Sperry (2012) reports that psychotherapists are increasingly required to incorporate spiritual aspects within their clinical interventions. In a study conducted by Sherman and Siporin (2008), they employed different concepts of contemplative practice and transpersonal theory and explained the transpersonal theory as a non-sectarian conceptual framework for dealing with spirituality in social work. This illustrates that dominant social work discourse intends to distance the idea of spirituality from religiosity while adopting spiritual practices, many of which have originated from religions.

Holistic approach from the Indigenous perspective

There is a limitation to the current social work theories that stem from the Western worldview in that they often overlook the interconnectedness within ourselves and with other people and nature. According to Baskin (2011), individuals have four different aspects: Spiritual, Physical, Emotional and Psychological components. Mainstream social work theories often keep a distance from spirituality by considering it as part of religion and eliminating it from social work theoretical frameworks, which limits the impact of the interventions which professionals implement in the area of the mental health social work. Also, individuals, families and communities are all connected and affect one another, where healing can happen in relationship with other people and nature (Baskin, 2011). Baskin claims that the Indigenous holistic approach to social work practice in mental health and family counselling incorporates spirituality. With the understanding of oneself as being comprised of four aspects, it is essential to acknowledge the interdependence of all beings in the multi-dimensional world (Baskin, 2011).

The World Health Organization (2014) also emphasizes the importance of environmental factors for one's health and states that mental health is attributed to one's social, economic and physical environment. For instance, if one experiences social inequalities, they are likely to have a higher risk of many common mental disorders than that of their counterparts.

When Morrisseau (1998) talked about his recovery journey as a second-generation survivor of the residential school and alcoholism and family violence, he argues that spirituality is concerned with the relationship to a greater power regardless of how you call that power. Some people have this relationship through religion as a sacred faith. Through the acceptance of our responsibilities as individuals, families and communities, Morrisseau (1998) argues that we will come to realize the real meaning of wholeness. Through the wholeness of individuals and community, we can heal.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

As Carter and Little (2007) explain the connectedness of three elements; epistemology, methodology and method, I am aware that my choice of epistemology would indicate a methodological option that reflects my research questions and the purpose of the research. Thus the methodology would guide my choice of method. As a consequence, the choice of epistemology will be demonstrated through the research method.

Gray, Plath and Webb (2009) emphasize the significance of the lived experience in qualitative studies. They point out that focusing on lived experiences and how respondents feel about a topic in qualitative studies can produce findings that lead to an increase in the effectiveness of social work interventions. Also, qualitative and interpretive research methods enable the researchers to explore “the complexities in social work intervention and their impact” and obtain richer and in-depth information on the impact of social work interventions on clients (Gray, Plath & Webb, 2009, p. 70).

Even though my study adopts an interview method, I have chosen phenomenological inquiry over narrative approach because I am interested in learning about how participants view the phenomenon and what the core aspect of their lived experiences are. I also believe that human reality is always influenced by the environment, and how we are perceived should be shaped by considering our social context, culture and history, etc. (Preston & Redgrift, 2017), not by viewing it through the lens of dominant western epistemology and discourse. According to Creswell & Poth (2018), phenomenology is a qualitative approach to explore participants’ lived experiences and what these experiences mean to them. van Manen (2014) asserts that phenomenological inquiry takes up individuals’ experience pertaining to a phenomenon to explore the essence of their experience. It aims to obtain in-depth knowledge of individuals’

lived experience and their insight into the phenomenon while avoiding conceptualizing or theorizing the findings (van Manen, 2014). According to Preston & Redgrift (2017), the phenomenological approach values the lived experience concerning axiology while drawing on research methods that reflects the epistemological point of view. From the perspective of ontology, phenomenology studies illustrate that one's experiences are an essential attribute for one's reality (Preston & Redgrift, 2017).

Primarily, I employ the interpretive phenomenology approach to the research process because it emphasizes the full aspects of the lived experience by considering ones' historical, cultural and social backgrounds (Preston & Redgrift, 2017). According to Preston & Redgrift (2017), interpretive phenomenology is well aligned with anti-oppressive practice (AOP) research in many aspects. For researchers' role, interpretive phenomenology is premised on the assumption that researchers are not able to be objective and openly recognizes the researcher's impact on the study. When it comes to posing a research question, it allows a researcher and participant to work together in the whole process of the study, including the findings.

In terms of sampling and recruitment process, interpretive phenomenology enables me as a researcher to seek participants as an insider. In the process of data collection during the interviews, researchers do not need to be "bracketed out" of the research process because the researcher and the participants collaborate by listening to each other and learning from each other and finding the meaning together. For the data analysis process, interpretive phenomenology promotes collaboration between the researcher and participants in interpreting the experience (Preston & Redgrift, 2017).

Phenomenology will guide the interview process of this study to describe and explore participants' lived experiences and what these experiences mean to them. This study takes into

account personal human interests and focuses on meanings rather than hard data (Preston & Redgrift, 2017). I conducted semi-structured interviews with three social work practitioners while giving preference to those who have racially and religiously diverse backgrounds. As Preston & Redgrift (2017) suggested, I prepared an interview guide with four questions prior to data collection. Although I also prepared more questions under each of the four as prompts, I followed the flow of participants' narratives by allowing them to lead the storytelling. I am hoping that my lived experience would contribute to knowledge production in such a way that would decolonize the research process, especially the data collection and analysis. I am also aware that ongoing reflexivity would assist me in acknowledging the limitation of my perspective and seeing new perspectives throughout the research process.

Criteria for Participation

My research questions, the goals of the research and the availability of the prospective participants determined the inclusion and exclusion criteria. With that in mind, participants must identify themselves as being spiritual whether that involves an organized religion or not. Also, participants must have work experience as social work practitioners, preferably members of a visible minority group. Any interested participants who did not identify as being spiritual or had no experience in social work were not included in the study.

Procedure

When I recruited participants, it was important for me to collect their demographic information, such as their names, phone numbers, email addresses. I used the information to communicate with them to send a consent form, arrange an interview and for a proof-reading of the transcripts and dissemination throughout the research process. I kept the information confidential and stored it electronically with a lock system that requires a password to access the

information. Only I have access to the information. The participant names are replaced with pseudonyms in the final research paper.

Participant recruitment

As soon as Ryerson University Research Ethics Board (REB) approved my research proposal in March 2019, I started recruiting participants for my study. As I have worked for six years in social services, I employed a snowball sampling technique beginning with my personal contacts. I contacted my previous colleagues and friends to invite them to participate in my study. I managed to find three individuals who were interested in the study. With my initial contact, I provided them with detailed information about my study, including a short description of the study, purpose of the study, consent form, expected time commitment for participation, their rights to withdraw their participation throughout the study, maintenance of confidentiality, and possible risk and benefits so that they could make an informed decision. I ensured them that they could ask any questions on the study in return. Then I sent them a written consent form through email so that they could sign it and return it to me. When I asked my former colleagues to participate in the study, I told them that research participation is totally voluntarily and there is no coercion or obligation for their participation in the study. I also advised them that they could also change their mind later and withdraw from the interview or not answer any of the questions that they do not want to answer. I also told them that even if they said no, that would not affect our relationship and I would continue to consider them as my friends.

Data Collection

The informed consent process began with the recruitment of participants. I informed prospective participants of the voluntariness of their participation. I told them the voluntary nature of participation remains in effect until the dissemination of the research. I was aware that

it was my responsibility as a researcher to remind participants of this important part of the informed consent whenever I interacted with them in person or through phone or email; I especially emphasized this right when I contacted them for the first time and when I sent them the consent form.

To mitigate any possible risks, before the interview, I told participants that they may skip answering a question or stop participation, either temporarily or permanently if they feel uncomfortable. I also let participants know that their information gathered will be destroyed if they decide to withdraw from the study at any point of the study. However, after May 1, 2019, the data would not be removed from the study because it would have already been integrated into the overall data analysis. None of the participants chose to withdraw from the study.

Although there is a very low-risk participant might feel emotional distress during the interview, I provided a list of resources, including counselling support services. Participant's name did not appear in the transcription and the final research paper. Instead, I used pseudonyms in this final research paper. I ensured that no identifying information is contained in this final research paper.

Data Analysis

The data was collected by the researcher through interviews and a film with a narrative from a participant's family member. Then it was transcribed, coded and organized thematically. The findings were reviewed by my supervisor of the study to increase the credibility of the study (Byrne, 2001).

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS/ANALYSIS

I feel grateful that three participants were willing to share their lived experience of spiritual and religious aspects on their personal and professional journey. I was struck by the rich findings which reveal the underlying ideology of social work practice in Canada and require a critical perspective of social work to examine the essence of the experience of the participants who incorporate spiritual and religious perspectives in social work practice. The interviews were guided by a questionnaire, but the findings were not limited to the questions. The findings include their understanding about spirituality and religiosity, their personal experiences of the spiritual journey, factors that influence their spirituality, view on the role of spirituality in social work practice, their own ways of integrating spirituality into social work practice and suggestions on implications for social work.

I believe these participants participated in this study because their values and passion are aligned with the goals of the study, which was to seek a deeper understanding of how social work practitioners with racially and culturally diverse backgrounds view spiritual and religious dimensions in social work practice, and how they integrate these aspects into their practice. I acknowledge that there are two more people who contributed to the data of this study. Jessica's husband showed interest and joined the interview when I was interviewing his wife. Jessica also shared a video that her daughter made because it is relevant to the topic of the study. With permission from her daughter, I included some narratives from the video in this study for supplementary data. After the participants agreed with their participation in the study, I tried to minimize my influence on what story they would share with me whenever I interacted with them. To guide both myself as a researcher and participants, I provided the participants with a questionnaire in advance of interviews. The bolded texts in this chapter are highlights of the

narrative, which can help readers with identifying the themes. I will begin this chapter by introducing the participants. Then I will identify, describe and analyze the major themes found in the data set.

The study sample consisted of three social work practitioners (Jessica, Robert and Erica are pseudonyms) who are first-generation immigrants. As I am a female Christian, previous social work practitioner, I aimed to recruit research participants who have culturally and religiously different backgrounds from my own. Two participants come from Africa and one from South Asia. Two participants are Muslims and one is a Christian. While two participants identify as female, one identified as male.

Jessica: Jessica is Muslim woman. She is in her sixties and currently working as a Settlement Worker at a non-profit organization in Toronto. For the last 13 years, she has been working in the social service field by providing solution-focused counselling for newcomers and immigrants. She was born in Pakistan and came to Canada in 2002 with her family. She can speak English, Urdu which is her mother tongue, and Punjabi, which is spoken in the province she used to live in. She identifies herself as heterosexual.

Robert: Robert is a 54-year-old Christian man. He studied in the Bachelor of the Social Work program at Ryerson University and recently graduated from the program. Currently, he is working as a social worker at a non-profit organization that serves people experiencing homelessness in Toronto. Before becoming a social worker, he had worked as a social service worker for ten years. He was born in Zimbabwe in Africa and he speaks Shona, Zulu, and English. He has been in Canada for 18 years. He identifies himself as heterosexual and does not have any disability.

Erica: Erica is a Muslim woman who is in her 40's. She was doing a placement at a non-profit organization in Toronto while studying in a Master of the Social Work program. She has been practicing social work and social service work for more than 15 years; her roles have included: social service worker, liaison, settlement worker, and community worker. She was born in Zanzibar, Tanzania from East Africa. She came to Canada about 22 years ago. She speaks Swahili. Based on her description, her background is a combination of Arab, Persian and the Bantu people living in Lanza. She is the mother of three children and identifies herself as a heterosexual and able-bodied person.

Theme 1: Understanding spirituality and religiosity: Dichotomy vs. duality

As the definitions of spirituality and religiosity vary across the literature, I wanted to know how the research participants understand each concept before exploring their perspectives about the topic of the study. My impression was that the participants were having difficulty articulating their thoughts about those concepts; perhaps it was the first time for them to be questioned about this topic. Each participant attempted to identify these two concepts; however, they struggled with distinguishing each concept.

Jessica has engaged in conversations on spirituality and holistic healing approaches on social media, which functions as her learning platform and ingroup meetings. The following excerpt is Jessica's understanding of these concepts:

*For me, like a religious, we are born like, as a Muslim, as religious, I can say, like I can born [sic] as that is my religion. And there are some ritual and some things we learn. And we, we say that we are Muslim. And we do that all the ritual to. We learned that, and then we do that... But if we don't have any connection with that, like, if we are doing just for the sake of like, we have to do that. It means that there is not included spirituality in that... But if, but later with life, **if we feel that connection with God**, or something else, like some connection with someone like that, that they were thoughtful, like everybody is important. Not only the Muslims are important, like every person in the world that is important, or they have the rights, and they have to be like they should be cared and loved. **I think that spirituality. It's not just the rituals we are doing.** (Jessica)*

My understanding of her explanation is that Jessica views spirituality as an individual connection with God and she thinks that having a religion does not mean that you are spiritual unless you have your own relationship with God.

Robert approaches the concept of spirituality from a different angle, but it is still connected to Jessica's view about spirituality. He considers that spirituality allows people with different religions to be united regardless of how they call God and how they practice their religions.

Spirituality is the belief that brings people together, in believing in one common thing could believe in God, believe in Allah, that is spirituality that brings people together and connecting the families, the people in the community together. Believing in God or Allah, or different names associated with God. I'm a Christian, Christianity, faith, Christian faith. Ah, I believe in Jesus Christ. And I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God. (Robert)

Based on my observation, he thinks spirituality is a relationship with God some people call as Jesus Christ, Allah, Buddha, etc.; therefore, it can connect one another despite different religions that they have. When I asked him the differences between spirituality and religiosity, he stated:

My understanding you know when I grew up with the difference could be so minor, but almost the same. Spirituality it's an inherited feelings, belief that you have. Ah, If you believe in your ancestors, if you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ is the spirit that guides you to that. Religion it's adopting into a certain group of gatherings. The religion that brings into Catholics, Muslim but together this spirituality we all focus on only almighty. That is spirituality that is here. That's the different than other. Spiritual is a broad term. That covers all the nation and everybody who believes in spirituality, where is the religion you kind of adopt you choose to belong to this religion. It's a choice to belong the religion. (Robert)

At the end of his interview, Robert revisited this question saying that he had not known the differences between spirituality and religion and that he researched in preparation for our interview. He wished he would have learned about the differences from the social work program which he attended in post-secondary education.

Likewise, Erica viewed spirituality as ones' own relationship with God and the way she personally practices her religion.

*Ah, for my perspective is the way is, it is like what I see, oh I understand is **religious is like the practice and belief about the trans —transcendence shared by a community of certain people, uh, together, like who they formed, the — there will be like a rules and regulation to follow in that things.** While spirituality is about your own relationship with the whole you, you want to be your guide, it might be God, it might be whoever you is like in your own, in your own spiritual way. Ah, with the, again, with the transcending question that confined to one is a human being. That's for me, it's like **how I practice my religion is my spirituality.** That's how I can see the spirituality because for me, I am a Muslim. So for me, my religion is **religion and spirituality goes hand in hand** and that's what to put it in. Religious and spirituality, they go hand in hand. Religious is like what I have with my other Muslim people together, which transcends in our religious, but spiritual is more personal, how I do my, my religion is the spirituality. (Erica)*

From what I gathered from the interviews, there is a similarity of understanding of the two concepts among the three participants. Jessica and Erica consider spirituality as a more personal relationship with a transcendent God while viewing religion as a path to becoming spiritual or connecting with God, which is often collectively practiced in a religious community through rituals and disciplines. On the other hand, Robert views spirituality as a broader term that is the subject of every religion. As he stated, he thinks the differences between spirituality and religiosity is minor. Similarly, Erica also thinks that her religion is synchronized with spirituality and they cannot be understood separately as she said: “*So for me, my religion is, religion and spirituality goes hand in hand.*”

The stories the participants shared convey the impression that there is a very fine line of difference between the two concepts and that remains ambiguous, especially for those who are spiritual and religious, like these three participants. As opposed to the Western approach of viewing these two concepts as dichotomous for these participants, the two concepts seem to have been merged into a duality in which people can simultaneously uphold both religion and spirituality.

Theme 2: Individual experience of spirituality

All participants described that spirituality is essential to them because individual participants have their own way of developing and practicing spirituality. Jessica expressed how spirituality is vital to her.

*It is important for me, because I learned with time, it was not I can say that, I was always like this, but I can say that it depends upon your circumstances. And also, like, **when you gone through with the different phases of life and have different experience in your life**, and you feel that they are, you feel that they are unique, something other than just that practice, like because as a when you're practicing your religion, but other than that, you need some connection. And at that point, you learn. And also you are thoughtful about everything what's going on around you. And you feel more connected with that. And I think it added with time, and also listening to the other people and also I can say **my own life experiences. And with time, I'm going to be more thoughtful, more spiritual.** (Jessica)*

Similar to Jessica, Erica stated the connectedness between her religious and spiritual practice:

*Not only is with my social work job, or the social service worker job, for me, **spirituality is important to any things that I do. Because I have a strong belief in my religion, and all that teaching and practice is go again, like hand to hand with the spirituality.** So for me, spirituality is really important when I do my job, because, uh, they are some teaching with I see again, in **our social work practice, such as anti-oppressive, ah, like anti-racism, anti-sexism, things like that. Those are the things like which is in, in my spirituality beliefs.** So that is the day to day work as well for me....What to say like, **I cannot practice my social work or social services worker without putting my spirituality in that.***

Calling for their career as a helping professional

Choosing a career path is paramount to many of us because it can be a reflection of what matters to you and what you value. It appears that being a social work practitioner is the right career path for all the participants and they unanimously considered the helping professions as a calling from God. When I asked Jessica what brought her to her work in the social work field, she responded:

*Yeah, I can see that from my family. Like my father was like, very, I can say he was really very spiritual person, I, he is a life [sic], he was the example for me, like he was always ready to do anything from one. And he was like, we can say he was a born volunteer, he was ready to do. So even we can say that if somebody is asking address of the home, he can go to their home [laughing], just to show that this is the place where you want to go like, without any, anyone that he don't want anything from that person, but he was helping, he was facilitating that. And that was just the speech. I think that was just to fulfil her [his] own insight. And I saw that that was the life example for me. And when I came here, I was always like this that I was ready to do. Because **I learned that practice from my father, to help everybody**. When I got this job and I was saying, "Oh my God, I'm getting the, like the paid, I am paid off the work, which I, I 'm doing without [laughing], without paying [being paid]." Like it was some insight, that it's, that's why it's fulfilling for me. So, for me, I can see like the **mostly 80% of the people who are working in the social work, they are that type of**. (Jessica)*

Robert shared his passion for social justice, which led him to be a helping professional:

*Firstly, it's **my passion that I have in social justice** in to make changes in people who are disadvantaged. And to help those who cannot help themselves. Ah, especially and focusing on homelessness, and focusing on our poverty, how do I improve people's lives? is a health and social work, in also, how do we address social justice at different levels?(Robert)*

Robert believes his job is a calling from God because he was given the passion for justice and it led him to work as a helping professional who makes a difference in the lives of people, especially those experiencing homelessness,

*It's really calling because **if you don't have that passion, that calling** like you're saying it, you wouldn't be able to help the poor, you won't be able to advocate for the poverty, you won't be able to advocate for homelessness, you won't be able to advocate for affordable housing. If you don't have that would fit in spiritual belief in you. It's a call that you have to take to do that. That's what I find myself as part of that. I am part of that. Well, once I take off my uniform, I'm no long doing this, but to the social work. Wherever you are, when you see injustice, when you see poverty, when you see homelessness, when you see the suffering, unemployment, social injustice, see **it is a call for you**. that's why we are called according to the code of conducting and ethics that we are supposed to report and abuse or child sexual abuse. But if you think Okay, I'm done I would see that you're not doing **your job is to come from your inner part of it**. (Robert)*

Similarly, Erica explained that the work she is doing as a helping professional is what she always wanted to do:

*I think it's for me to do this kind of work. It started since I was a young child from my school. **I always wanted to help people that was in my, in my blood, I think.** And I wanted to be like a doctor or nurse practitioner. That was my dream at the time. But unfortunately, and I was really, really scared of blood until today. And that's what kept me on the other side. So when I was ready to start, I used to help my friends. Ah, Since I was like, I take — took a lot of initiation when I was in school like to be like a monitor of the class. You know, like, I see like some of my friends that will come for me when they needed advice or opinion. So **I grew up with the kind of intuition. Like, I can do something to help people because I always got a feedback from that thing.** So when I came here, it didn't take me long to realize like there are places where I can, I can practice, this is what I do. Back home, I work as a student liaison, who one go abroad for scholarship. So I act as a liaison from the embassies to the ministry where I was working. And I always meet people, and we negotiate and I negotiate on behalf of the students. That also was part of my social service work... The opportunity, **when the opportunity came for me, I just took it that this is where I wanted to be.** (Erica)*

It appears that the participants' spirituality impacts what they are most concerned about and what they value as they chose a helping profession as their career through spiritual inspiration. This is also supported by a study conducted by Hohn, McCoy, Ivey, Ude, and Praetorius (2017). The study's participants was comprised of Christian social workers who described that they are happy with their job because it is fulfilling and rewarding when they see clients connected to God and their spiritually grows afterwards. The study reported that this job satisfaction is considered as important as their financial compensation from their job (Hall & Chandler, 2005; O'Brien, 1992, as cited in Steger, Pickering, Shin & Dik, 2010).

Lived experience of spiritual growth

The stories the participants shared illustrated that each has their own spiritual journey. Jessica shared her lived experience of embracing her spirituality:

*Definitely, like my own life experience. Ah, There, I don't want to like lecture detail (inaudible – 9.55). But there was a time that **I gone through like, a very challenging situation about my family, family member. And that was a very, very difficult time for me.** But I can say definitely, that, my that spirituality my belief, and these all things, **I was be bought thoughtful after that,** that they. This is a process first, like it was like, I want to fix everything. But anyway. But with time, I learned that it is not possible. And that was a very challenging situation. And but I can right now, I can still say about that, that this was challenging, but maybe blessing us. **Because I learned a lot, I'm a totally different***

person after that experience.... And definitely, this is helping in my whole life, and also my clients. Because when you gone through – through that, and you – you live that, that is something totally different. Then you can see like all challenge as a blessing, I think it takes a long journey to be there. You can see that how it was blessed. how that challenge could be changed into a blessing. How it connect [sic] your family. Like everything, one time, it looked like that everything is shattered. But they maybe it's more united your family, you become more united, you know each other more, you learn a lot for your life. And also, in the end, you can learn that this is the process. This is, this is not like, life is not a, it is a prop. This is the process. This is not an end project. We have to gone through the process. And every full your life is a process. (Jessica)

Jessica continued:

You gone through that process. And also now you're so hopeful that yes, there could be a light, there is a tunnel, but there is definitely a light at the end of the tunnel, you can see that and you can show that to your clients. Even there is all dark, to go through that. And you will believe is so strong that this, this help you and your clients. They feel connection, when you are involved. And also I can give one example that there is a like my client and she was like everything was trying we're trying many things, but nothing was working. And then I just said like, this is the process and we have to surrender. At this point we just have to surrender, otherwise we will not able to get any peace. That something is happening, it could, it is out of our control. We have to learn that at some point. (Jessica)

What I observed through the interview is that Jessica provides clients with services from her lived experiences and her heart, which I think can appeal more to her clients.

Robert described how his migration to Canada impacted his faith and spirituality:

Ah, in my life is the - the migration that I did, for my country, which is much the most spiritually in the religion focus like a Christians. When I moved to Canada, I met different religions, Muslims, Hindus and different religions. So I was a little bit affected in a way that I didn't know what to believe, am I in the right side of the spiritual, my spiritual was a bit affected in a way that I thought maybe, I am not following my spiritual in the right way. Because there was so many religions in Canada. And they need a relevant in my spiritual belief that in a way that will. I think the Muslims are better people when they're doing, oh, I believe the Christianity is better than Muslim. So I was a little bit confused and affected by that. So it was the relocation from my country to Canada. Migration is mostly that does affect the religion.... In these changes people's spiritual beliefs. The thing that I want to explain is that my migration like when I came to Canada, you find that there are some of the things, that are certain religion, to accept is normal, in my Bible, in my faith in my spiritual that I follow....Thou should not kill, it's a sin. But when I migrated to come to Canada, it's kind of like something probably normal to kill. Or almost extraordinary. It could be something that I actually learned and understand. Now, when I moved to Canada, which has never been practiced back in my home, in my own country. It was extraordinary is that it is a sin. So I moved here, my

spirituality in my religion was affected that I changes. Okay, at least, it's acceptable to practice on homosexuality or religion. When I came to Canada. Sexuality here, right? Acceptable than back home. (Robert)

Erica shared her lived experiences to illustrate how she became spiritual:

*My life has been, has been ups and down for quite a while. Ah, I lost my husband, suddenly. And he left me three young children who I have to take care of. That was that time **when I realize take instead of being with anxiety, panic attack most of the time and exhausted myself**, that's going to lead to depression. So **with my spirituality and belief, I will pray, I would ask the Lord to give me an answer of my problem**. And I really find out one day like, for me in order to be who I wanted to be is to put this aside and sacrifice everything then go back to school. That's when I went to do my Bachelor of Social Work. And here I am now to do my Master of social work. Because every time whenever I have this kind of problem, instead of doing our regular prayers for five days, five times a day, **I will do an extra prayers if I have something which really needs an answer, and I will get an answer from that, that is my way of using my spirituality**. I need to get myself sometimes just myself, then I will pretend like I'm there and there is no one there except God who will be there to listen to me...And it works out fine for me. And it's really helped my spiritual growth. (Erica)*

Other factors that influence their spirituality or religiosity

The participants stated that their ethnicity, family and social work education attributed to their spirituality. Jessica previously stated that her ethnicity and family also had influenced her spirituality. She elucidated that religious rituals are also helpful as they discipline us:

There is something is planned. And I think this is the spirituality. This is really helpful that we should let it go and we have to learn that no, there – there is something that is going to be happen. Something good, for me like hopeful, one should be hopeful that there is – is something good is coming on this. We – I watched that, I learned that...I saw like, even the spirituality we can say like the religious even we, I saw in the family that all the time someone is practicing. Maybe that that is also helpful, but it gives some discipline. This ritual gives some disciplines, but that discipline also help you for growth. (Jessica)

When I asked Robert whether his ethnicity influences his life or spirituality, he shared:

*Yes, my culture in my spirituality, there was always conflicted back home there was like a conflict. Ah, There is tradition, right, traditional beliefs. And the westernized, which is the western belief which is comes in the form of spiritual beliefs. What do I mean by that? Ah, before we were colonized for my country. Our culture, ah, we believe in our ancestors. Our fathers. Right? Before we know about Jesus Christ, so it was affected his spirituality **when the western people, the white people came, there was a change from***

*our culture, to believe that Jesus Christ is the only way to the Lord. Where is my ancestors, our forefathers who used to call them upon them never want anything could call upon our forefathers that's on the culture side. But then when it comes to spiritual in the Christianity, it brought this way that okay, you should offer Jesus Christ forget about your ancestors. **Forget about your forefathers. So this was a bit of conflict. On my side.** (Robert)*

Robert provided background information on the country he came from:

*It's, it's a, it's a it's such it was evolving through civilization. When the education or the civilization was brought into Africa. We moved our country. They brought in some **civilization to change and cast away, or trying to say your culture is bad, what you're doing is a sin.** Why do you wash up the dead? Why do you believe in somebody who died 10 years ago? Right? So with how to say **we're brainwashed to believe that the only way we can go and believe in spirituality is through Jesus Christ.** So it was kind of evolving. On my side. Most of the family, or people coming from developing countries? It happened someday. (Robert)*

Robert recognized the impact of the social work education he received, from which he learned about acceptance and respect of others despite the differences in their social locations:

Especially everyone through my course from social workers SSW in social work. It gives me the light to understand and see in the acceptance in the respect to both the spiritual in the religion some of religions. Respect who we are, who he is, it doesn't matter. We're all the same. (Robert)

Similar to Jessica and Robert, Erica stated that her ethnicity of Arabic has culturally and traditionally influenced who she is, including her religion, which is Islam:

*My greatest spiritual influence is my, is my religion background. And definitely my culture and my ethnicity influenced my spirituality because for me where I come from we have different religion is all over the world, there is Christianity, there are Buddhism, there are Hinduism. And but Muslim is predominantly because **we have been colonized by Arabic people. So culturally, traditionally most we, we are on the Arabic side** in some part of these is coming within our religious so that's what I was going to say like everything is go hand to hand, and my culture this the what you see in here is more of a culture things for me. The needs for religious. (Erica)*

Ethnicity was indicated across all participants as a key factor in spirituality; both Robert and Jessica referred to their ethnicity as culture or tradition. Both Robert and Erica mentioned about the colonization of the country they came from when they were talking about any

influence on their spirituality. Jessica's daughter whom I briefly introduced at the beginning of this chapter, also expressed her identity crisis in her video that she shared with me for this study. If we look at our history of colonization, religions have been adopted in cultural contexts where people are situated. The variation of religious practice within the same religion could be attributed to differences in the culture they come from. Erica indicated that "*Wearing hijab is from the - from the culture, but it is within the religion.*"

She also shared:

That's what makes the whole conflict in the Muslim world. Again, we are like Cristian like Hinduism. There's a different groups as a Christianity like they have Catholic, Anglican, you know, Lutheran thing that same as in Muslim, we have Sunni, we have shirdi Muslim. We have Baccarat Muslim, we have Hambali, things like that. They, we all believe in one God, we all believe in prophets, For prophets. Mohammed is a messenger of God, we all believe that Jesus is one of the Prophet. But the problem is those highly like those people who came after the Prophet, they have their different teachings. So people decided to follow these people with their teaching.

In addition to the participants' own family and upbringing, their ethnicity influenced their religion and spirituality while establishing the cultural context. The impact of their ethnicity on their religious and spiritual perspectives might be another reason why their understanding of spirituality and religions is different. Jessica and Erica shared the same religion as Muslims, and Robert and Erica, both shared a colonial history of the continent they came from. These factors may impact how they regard spirituality and religion. I will discuss further in the next chapter the inner conflict between traditional beliefs and the Christian faith that Robert mentioned and the identity crisis that Jessica's daughter expressed.

Theme 3: Role of spirituality in their social work practice

The majority of the studies concerning spirituality and religiosity in social work shared a common finding that religious and spiritual dimensions are part of our nature as human beings (Gilligan & Furness, 2006). Social work needs to acknowledge the impact of faith and belief in

the lives of both clients and social work practitioners, particularly for clients who are spiritual or religious (Gilligan & Furness, 2006).

This study emerged from my experience as an immigrant and social work practitioner. I believed that there is so much more in terms of research findings and implications for social work if a study has a sampling of those with culturally and religiously diverse backgrounds. This study, therefore, was designed to understand how social work practitioners who have racially and religiously diverse backgrounds experience the phenomenon of spirituality and/or religiosity. My hope, furthermore, was to gain in-depth knowledge on how spirituality would help their social work practice. This section covers how spirituality helps them in working with clients.

According to Jessica, her spirituality taught her how to work with clients, especially when there is nothing more a helping professional can offer a client. Through her experience in working with clients, she was able to learn that she has to acknowledge transcendent power which can transform the lives of clients, instead of feeling responsible for providing clients with a solution to the problem. Jessica states that she learned that she is not a problem solver for her clients, but she can share with clients her experience in having peace through spirituality and guide them on how to be peaceful, which includes providing various resources for them:

*With time when I'm seeing like the people, ha, like, especially when someone come to see me or they are asking for something or they are, I, **I want to help them**, I want to jump in that. And with time, I learned that this is not possible that this is the process from God or from some – some **superpower**, and **everything is not in my control** and even the other person control. And we have to learn that and this is **we can learn through our spirituality**, that there is something there is a planning there, and everything will be fine, but it takes time, we cannot like we are not we are not the only person who can help that. And maybe this is not the time for that. And we have to we have to be patient and we can say we should have to be surrender with that, that otherwise will feel we cannot find like any peace in life, **we have to surrender**, that **it will take time** or what is what is going on that there is some planning there. And **we have to learn our self and also give that to our clients to make them peaceful**, that there is a process for that. (Jessica)*

Jessica continued to explain her understanding of spirituality:

Everybody's journey is different, we cannot say that one client they can get, for example, I'm working with the newcomer, they can learn English, within six months, and then then they can go for some certification, and then they can get a good job or the other person maybe take five years. We cannot judge that. Because ***this journey is different. And this gives you something like some – some peace... It's everything is not in your hands.*** But as the empathic person we just certainly jump in or fix that....But we cannot. But with time, I learned like many, even skills like thoughtfulness and I'm giving that and even yoga about yoga and many things I am giving all the information if some client is interested, I'm giving that that other like venues up showing them that there are some other things they can. (Jessica)

She shared an important message that “*Spirituality we learned with time I can say it is not like. Someone cannot teach us that. We have to gone through that we learn.*” When Jessica was asked whether she provides clients with comfort and insight into spirituality, she stated that “*Because when you believe in that, then you can give something you can tell something that other people.*” She elaborated:

When you are practicing that you can definitely help your clients. Other than providing the solution for the housing for the employment when you give that something. To be really helpful. They can learn.... Maybe you are the first person who gave that hope that. You showed that the other prospect of the, their life... With the same condition. (Jessica)

For Robert, on the contrary, his spirituality and religion allowed him to better understand where clients come from:

My spirituality and religion helps in understanding the different dynamics behaviors among my clients that I'm working with, how to approach different clients with a different religion. But my focus in my understanding is we all belong to one spiritual guidance. So it helps me to understand both the religion with. Someone is coming from.... The choice of his religion. But at the same time, by the end of the day, the spirituality we all come together. In worship on board. (Robert)

He explained that spirituality helped him in perceiving others from anti-oppressive perspectives:

Yeah, the greatest spirituality that I in my life, in that I've learned? Is the acceptance of human being who you are ... without being judgmental? Who you are? That's my [cross talk]... Accepting who you are without being judgmental, having the freedom of

what to do, what you are, who you practice your own religion, without being persecuted. No one is going to kill you for that. (Robert)

He also emphasized that spirituality provides him with insight into what God wants to do for his clients:

*It is very important in my practice, and without judging or criticizing. Or pre-emptively say this choosing which spiritual or religion is better than the other, **I view them and the respect them is the same in the level of the eyes of God.** (Robert)*

Likewise, Erica reiterated integration between her spirituality and faith:

*As I say, my spirituality and faith, it goes hand in hand with my integration. So whenever there's some conflict or anything I would, I would like to, to hear from the other side, and then I can manage like, where where this things will go, what is the consequences? And if there's any way like to, to **reach compromising**, then that would be my way because conflict is not a good thing. So that's one of my my belief. And this is **how I, I practice my spirituality.** (Erica)*

As Jessica stated, she connected her clients to transcendent power through spirituality when nothing could further help her clients. For Robert, he views his clients in the eyes of God. Similarly, Erica has been acting as a liaison between individuals. As they have their own spiritual experience, these practitioners actively engage in a spiritual journey with their clients. It seems that they play a role as a spiritual mentor who can walk clients through difficult times.

Listening to their stories, I found a commonality in discussing their experiences of integrating their spirituality in practice. These three practitioners use themselves as a tool to facilitate opportunities that lead clients to make differences in their lives. There is a notion of self-as-instrument-of-care metaphor which was coined by Schwind, a nursing professor at Ryerson University (Schwind, Cameron, Franks, Graham & Robinson, 2012). The use of self for service users is also supported by the social work literature, as a study states that social workers can be regarded as a means of providing services (Cournoyer, 2000, p. 35, as cited in Reupert, 2007). Given that social workers offer a variety of services including information and referrals,

supportive counselling, comfort and encouragement, which clients need, this metaphor of use of self for social work well depicts the role of social work practitioners.

Moreover, Schwind, Cameron, Franks, Graham and Robinson (2012) argue that nurses are considered as “instruments-of-care”: therefore, nurses need to reflect upon themselves and how their subjectivities may impact the interactions with clients. Likewise, social work, in fact, emphasizes self-reflection about who we are as service providers in order for social workers to be aware of their impact on the wellbeing of clients as we transmit our “knowledge”, “attitude” and “skill” to clients (Cournoyer, 2000, p. 35, as cited in Reupert, 2007, p. 107).

Theme 4: Integrating spirituality into social work practice

Although all participants integrate spirituality in their practice, they are all aware that the services they provide for clients should not promote any particular religion or contain any biases toward any religions. Jessica disclosed that her religious background helps her in establishing an instant rapport with a client who has the same religion as her. When her client wants to talk about the common religion between her and the client, she uses this opportunity to speak about spirituality:

*They saw my name and they know that I'm Muslim. And there are many clients they are – are Muslim... Like, it's not my background, like from Africa from other, they just feel a connection. Even with that. And if they are, – there's something is happening in their mind, they, it's easy for them to share with me. And we can talk, Okay, it will be fine. And we can talk, we can talk about the religion also, which we cannot talk with everyone. But if the person want, we can talk about the religion and that this, it – it can go to spirituality towards spirituality. It's like, Yeah, **everybody in my practice, I saw mostly immigrants, they are already connected with some religion and spirituality is also they are in on their path.** I feel that. Just we can realize that, or we acknowledge that, it will be helpful for them. To use that. I am also doing like some **group sessions**. And I added in that I can say spirituality in that because many people these days, they are talking about meditation and yoga, even I can say for few years back, I don't know even what is that, but everything, all these things are going towards the peaceful and these are helpful for the for the peace. And I invited some people who have like a certification in that, they are the doctors. She's a doctor, I invited her, she created some workshops around that. And she teaches about that, like **what is meditation, and what are the different skills and be,***

*and they found out that people are already using that. But they don't know exactly that how they can practice it better. Because they are they are using like for their own ritual for that. They were saying we are praying, we are doing something. But this is also the focus of the mind. And this focus of the mind is helpful to quiet your mind. And this is a skill. And it also helped goes through. We can say that when it's very hard because they are saying in one minute, there are 80,000 thoughts are coming in mind and meditation is to quiet our mind. And it is not easy for everyone. But when we learn that, it is it gives us peace and spirit. **What is spirituality? It's –it's the journey to peace.** So it was really helpful for my clients. Also, when we are doing like, ah, these workshops, **we learn about even the western concept like power of now.** And also the thoughtfulness, this is, these are, they **because they are so smart, they become westernized them, but it is from somewhere else, Yoga is from South Asia. Like everything is everywhere. But now it's good that they are we, we are already using everything.** (Jessica)*

Jessica shared that she is very careful when she provides clients with any suggestions for incorporating spiritual practice into their lives. For example, she did not describe them as either spiritual or religious practices, but referred to them as thoughtfulness exercises because she wanted to avoid giving the impression that her services are associated with any religion or sacredness, especially before establishing rapport with clients:

*We are not saying this is something spiritual or something. We can say this is the **thoughtfulness**. Maybe you can use this and it will be helpful for your stress. I can definitely, it is not like in the first session, we can do that. If we have that rapport, we have with the client. We can ask questions what do you think about that?* (Jessica)

Jessica continued:

I can say because now I am reading about the power of now in thoughtfulness from that client, we use that. And there are some examples, there are some like with they can even Google that. And there are some apps they can use. And we can suggest, okay, try this. And sometimes it's helpful. (Jessica)

In contrast, Robert is cautious about the possibility that his religious bias might affect the services he is providing for clients. He shared:

*Ah, my spiritual belief, my religion beliefs comes second if I'm dealing with my clients. So I put my clients first. Because they need help. And then putting myself as a helper, I'm not going to be judgmental, putting my spiritual head on them. But **I put their spiritual beliefs. Ahead of them so that I can help them.** Identify what's the solution to help them. From their perspective. Now that I'm wearing a social worker jacket. I have that. I put my sign my spiritual or religious belief. And concentrate on my clients. So as the only*

way can able to identify their needs. Only way to be able to help them live get the problems that they're facing in the society. (Robert)

Erica described her way to initiate a conversation on spirituality or religiosity with a client that *“In terms of social service activities, or even on their personal way, so I will just **put this example over how spiritual growth is helping me as a whole example.**”*. She believes sharing her personal experience would help clients to feel comfortable to share their stories without fear of being judged. She also commented that she is doing so only if she has established a rapport with the client.

By giving my own example to to disclose myself with, with a client after we establish rapport and then you want the client to be, to feel easy when they talk to you so what, what do you share your story? It's easy for the client to share their. (Erica)

Real stories: Working with clients pertaining to spiritual or religious concerns (question: 3-2)

Jessica described a time when a client was experiencing frustration. The client did not know what to do and sought advice:

***She was asking that “Why me? Why me?”** Like, I tried so much. I'm trying this. I'm trying this, but it's nothing is happening. And then **we discuss about the surrender**, that we have to Senator, sometimes we have to accept that. What's going on, we just have to accept. We don't have any power on that and it's because otherwise we, at least give us peace. And she said thing, “Really?” Like we “yes”. I said “yes,” we need to accept this. At this point. **We don't have any other solution.** And if we are looking for any other solution, it just give you unrest. **We have to accept.** (Jessica)*

Another example Jessica shared illustrates her role as a liaison between schools and immigrant parents by translating the pitch for the new curriculum for sex-education; many of these immigrant parents disagreed with sex-education for elementary students in Ontario:

Maybe you remember a few years back, there were some changes in the school curriculum. And there was like, a lot of my Muslim clients, they were really very concerned about that. And maybe they were not able – able to read that, because it was an English and there was many things like, I create I arrange like a workshop I invited someone who has — was keep providing the workshops on that and we try to give them like, what is exactly that mean? It is not that something because they were taking this religiously because in in because according to them, it is dangerous for our children at

*that, at that, like age to learn about that, but there is a different concept if we can give them that it is not they are giving them that you have to do this. They are giving you that you have to protect how you can protect yourself like they are (inaudible – 29.42) what is the curriculum saying or the western things are doing. Everything is going to save them. Some will be able to understand, and some will not be able to understand, but I tried for that. Because they were saying **according to their religion, this is not the right age to learn all these things**, but we have to give them the concept. This is we are not they are giving you that you do that things. **They are just trying to protect that the children know and they can be safe.** Understanding, talk, even talk about that. **Translate that pitch.** (Jessica)*

On the other hand, while Robert acknowledged his own limitation on knowledge about spirituality or religions, he described how he handles spiritual or religious concerns that the clients bring to him, such as a request for accommodation for food or a place to pray:

*I'm not an expert on that (when a client brought to me about spirituality or religion) I might be able to refer the client. To other resources or try the organization. That can help the clients' problems, identify which religion, which your spirituality does this claim to believe in? Ah, there are so many organization churches, mosques. Temples. We can say that to believe. From my own perspective, I cannot really put that. I had one client. What happened to be, **from the Middle East?** And he had his own belief, his own spiritual beliefs. He didn't want to mix with other people. And he didn't want to like, he specially comes to food. **There is a belief like food, what do you eat, what do you do?** So this spirituality effect of it is you have to check make sure you transfer like this shelter setting layer within a shelter, in shelters, right? So you find such people that's very common kind of those. **"Halal", those Kind of food. They don't eat meat.** You know, so then, that's what he do summary fair, **other systems that can help that individual to continue with his own life.** Rather no, say, well, you're not going to do that. **You don't need to oppress the feeling of somebody.** Another issue, again, is **the request for prayer time** they asked (noise came from the outside the interview room in the school library). That's okay. Every six o'clock we need to do a prayer. So what they do is a shelter, waiting for the social worker, accommodate keep accommodation, ah, give a room for that prayer, in the respect the need of the spiritual belief, that individual? So that's what I'm meeting right now and meeting those.*

Robert had told me that he had to go to a meeting after the interview.

Erica shared her story that a group of her clients asked her about her wearing a hijab. She explained her cultural background's association with wearing a hijab and educated them on the complexity of cultural and religious practice:

Wearing hijab is from the - from the culture, but it is within the religion. Hijab has more broad meaning.... But in short ways like hijab is a, the way of protect yourself. Is a way to protect yourself. From the people who cannot be like your relatives. Yeah. Just you protect yourself within your, like to see how you will look alike inside. That's the meaning of hijab. So and that including like, you can only is better for you to have your face. Like to show others. And not these other things, but I can wear this. In here. It just like a scarf. It, this is not for me to identify to you to identify me as a Muslim. (Erica)

Erica continued:

It has nothing to do with religion, because I practice religion. But when you come to my house, you will never see me wearing a hijab, if I go somewhere, is my choice if I want to wear it or not. (Erica)

She emphasized that “*You can be a Muslim. It doesn't matter where you wear a hijab or not. Muslim is in your heart*”.

Suggestions for how to address clients’ spiritual and religious concerns for social work practitioners

Jessica stated:

I think we practice you learn that, that how to calm down first, yourself? And how should be aware, awareness, your own awareness of your own biases, you are, it’s more learning about — about yourself, and then you can give some solution to the other? (Jessica)

Robert and Erica emphasized that listening to clients is critical to help them with their concerns. Robert stated that “*Communication, listening, and respect of Somebody’s perspective.*”

When I asked him what he, as a practitioner, can do to assist a client who has a different religion from his own or does not have any religion, Robert shared:

*There was influx of the refugees from Syria, right? So what you need to **find the community that do believe in the same spirituality with them, before they get into depression, or you know, or stress and all those things, so is to connect with them, and then connect with the people within same spiritual beliefs. So it's important to find the resources for them.** (Robert)*

For spirituality, Robert stated:

Well, the spirituality, I think it's an inner belief that is to be left for to an individual to decide. I don't need to tell you what you do with your spiritual - spiritual beliefs is selected individual decides. It should be left individual to practice. (Robert)

He also shared:

If you have a client, who doesn't believe someone spiritual religion, the most important thing is to try and approach the client. Talk to him, talk to him or her educate, the most important thing is education. Offer some education about what's involved in Canada, what is Canada, what you believe in, everybody is with a freedom of assembly in in a way that it doesn't offend the other person. (Robert)

Similarly, Erica shared, “We really need to listen to what they're trying to tell us in order to serve them.

Erica also mentioned that if social workers do not feel comfortable with clients who are challenging their religion, then they could ask their manager to find another staff to serve the client as this would safeguard the best interests of the client:

I will just say my, my point of view, maybe to the supervisor or to the, to the manager, if I think that I'm not comfortable over trying to help this client.. But I will use my, I will use my tools. I will use all the access that I can do in order to help this client. And then wanted really talking about that, so you feel that you might not the best person to serve the client. ...They just need the help to figure out what to do. (Erica)

However, she added that “I work with people who different religious, and spiritual. Most of the time. Yeah. And we are just getting along fine personally and professionally.” She also suggested:

It's an honor for any social work practitioner, not to get distracted with religion or spirituality, but to honor what they- they do in terms of working and help people way, while in my own experience, in doing that, you need to incorporate your spirituality and your religious beliefs in order to get a good result. (Erica)

Theme 5: Recommendations/Implications for social work practice

Raising public awareness of ones' spiritual dimension and improving the accessibility to the services

Jessica shared a story illustrating the lack of knowledge about spiritual practice within our community. She stated, “*Because it is from India. And they were saying it is only for the Hindus, and it's not for the Muslims. [laughing].*” She continues to say that “*I saw that change.... Uh, just getting the knowledge. Some, it's not like I'm not saying that everybody, but I, I saw.*”

In contrast, “*Religion shouldn't be an obstacle for us to do our job,*” said Erica. Given her experience at the placement, she pointed out the lack of diversity among the populations the agency serves. She emphasized the need for outreach into the community to disseminate information about their services and resources:

*So I think even the place where I do my placement, now they're becoming aware of this kind of **talking of racialized minority** whether within religious capacity within spirituality. But I think we need as a social practitioner, we need to do something of our awareness to people to know exactly what you, you will encounter in your day to day.*
(Erica)

Barriers to the services

Erica also expressed her concern about the inaccessibility of community services for people from racialized minority communities because they face language barriers in accessing the services and interpretation service is often not provided for them:

It's some kind of barriers. There might be language barriers, there might be like, they don't like to be question more. This is one of the like, regular or like rules of you having to get it some people they don't want to disclose what do they have about so, is like to give awareness for these people to go get the service? That's what I realized that too. To make these people aware of what they are outside there. In how they can go and get it.
Racialized minority. (Erica)

Like Erica, Robert also pointed out language barriers and culture shock immigrants face in integrating in Canada, as well as lack of funding to help them in understanding the inclusivity of people with diverse backgrounds:

*In my practices Social Worker. **Number one is the language barrier.** The language. Right. I will try to explain the language, you need to really focus. And you need to take*

*somebody back from Asia or from Africa, to walk you through until he gets to Canada. Explain the changes that happens once you get to Canada. So you find it so **difficult for somebody to leave his culture or leave my African culture, and start in those the western style of life. Those are the challenges.** In social work. I try myself what I've tried is to have some workshops. Get some movies or some film movies, shows them some videos. Get all the two groups together, Asia, Africa, white, black never get them together. Show them some movies. The movies that shows ah, unity, inclusiveness. And then they have to watch that movie. And then you throw some questions. You get into discussion. That's how you get them together. But **the barrier get becomes of like, these programs are not supported by the government.** (Robert)*

Educating social work practitioners and students on spirituality and religions

All participants suggested that there is a need to include education for post-secondary educational programs and training for staff. Jessica shared:

*Yeah, the first thing is like, I think, if **we can add in a curriculum** that it will be easy. For, for the, for the, **for the workers.** To talk about that. And even to **ask for the professional development. Because maybe they are confused.** If it is really they need to do that, or they can do that, or they cannot do that. There are, there are many professional developments, I, I sometimes I can see that. But I hesitate that because **we never talk about all these things before. It could be helpful for the our, our clients.***

Robert stated that “*They should have religious studies in the syllabus. I think that'll be the best so that people will choose elective course.*” He continued that,

“*It's a broad topic. Maybe? That's why they don't want to bring it, but it's so helpful, I think. Because we go there to practice as social workers, we should be knowing all these.*” He emphasized that “*We need to know this from school.*”

Similar to Robert, Erica also stated: “*We see a lot of conflicts regarding religious and beliefs, but we don't know how to confront these things, because we have no background of training.*”

She continued:

*One of the elective for those people who want to continue work with these diverse background, what do you say again, with diversity, it's a human being. So they might be with different religion, they maybe with different beliefs. So I think **we will get some***

training, in order to work together in collaboration with people who has different background in religious [sic] beliefs it will help very much further social work practice. (Erica)

Agency's guidelines for addressing spiritual or religious needs of clients

All three participants pointed out that the agencies they had worked for did not provide any guidelines. Jessica also explained that the management of the agency she had worked for is mindful of the need for accommodation for immigrants' religious practice, by adjusting program schedules during Ramadan and providing a space for prayer for staff:

They give respect to all religion. And even if something is coming, they acknowledge that, they acknowledge Ramadan, they acknowledge Tivoli they acknowledge little things at least and they give specially Ramadan because it just like one month. And they especially acknowledge that if they need, they even change the schedule the timings. Thoughtful. They're mindful about that. Even a small room. But the for the client. That's for staff. (Jessica)

However, she pointed out:

*I can see some managers, or some directors also now very much interested in that and they are sharing something individually, like on there, this is a good article about something to share that. They're talking about mindfulness, they are talking about, we are providing yoga classes. And when I created that workshops, I talked with my manager she was okay....**They are ready, but there is not any structure.** (Jessica)*

Robert stated that "There's no guidelines." And elaborated:

One of my co-worker refused to go and help the homosexual client. Or he's a gay whom he cannot work with him. Or a lesbian whom he cannot work with her. So the company will say okay, let's say that you're feeling less good to go there. So it's there's no clear policy or guidance that will give you that was it both the employers will respect you as well, your feelings,

In the same way, Erica stated: "There is **no guideline** specific." And she elucidated:

I think it's will be really helpful to have a guideline in that will help not only the staff, but also the members and family members who in any organization to know the rules and regulation of that particular places regarding spirituality and religious practice.

When I asked all participants whether the agency they had worked for had any biases toward any religions, they all answered that there were no such thing. However, Erica made a vital comment on talking about religions at work by stating “*So it's another taboo thing which was still facing right now.*” Similar to Erica, Jessica pointed out that service providers never asked about clients’ religion or spirituality:

Because if we not acknowledge that, maybe we never asked the questions. We will not even want to know that this is spiritual or religious person or not. I think we there is nothing in our world. Our counseling, like mental health counseling, we maybe we are not asking about all these questions we are not asking... Even informal.

It appears that the agencies the participants worked for do not provide any guidelines with which practitioners can appropriately address religious and spiritual needs of clients. Also, they are not interested in learning about these clients’ needs.

Other key findings

As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, Jessica’s husband shared his opinions on the topic of the study, particularly mental health services for immigrants and refugees. He made some focal points and I would like to share them here. I believe his perspective brings valuable insight into what service users want, which allows us to learn about how to improve our services for immigrant populations. The following are what Jessica and her husband shared:

Material needs vs. other needs of mind, emotion and spirit

Based on Jessica’s husband’s understanding, our needs are categorized as material and spiritual ones. He argued that before addressing spiritual needs of clients, service providers should give top priority to help clients in meeting material needs. He stated, “So first, your material needs are fulfilled and then you’re listen other things, yeah. So spirituality and all that you are okay, now we sit and we’ll discuss these things.”

I entirely agree that meeting material needs, such as food, housing, employment, is a priority task of social work practitioners. However, I think addressing their psychosocial and/or spiritual needs are as important as their material needs. As holistic approach is a theoretical framework for this study, I will elaborate about holistic approach in a subsequent chapter.

Mental illness and ones' insecurities

Another point Jessica's husband made is about mental health among immigrants, specifically that immigrants are traumatized by different systems in Canada. He believed that their mental health issues are mostly caused by many insecurities they are suffering from. He shared: "Come from that and into a different system and they're traumatized. So mental issues are always say there, they are mostly due to their insecurities." And he added "If their insecurities are met, first address first, and then you go towards their other issues. I think 50 % their issues will go away with that."

Mental health issues and stigma

Besides, Jessica's husband stated that there is a stigma attached to mental illness among immigrants. He described the reaction that clients have when they are told they have a mental illness, "Do you consider I'm mad, are you serious? Can you they will start fighting with you cannot even yes and you know that we are going to." Jessica mentioned that immigrants and refugees have a different understanding of mental health services. She added that they do not know that counselling services are available for them or do not think they need the services because they have religious leaders whom they can turn to when they need advice or emotional support. She suggested, "*You know about issues like spirituality if we can train their spiritual leaders, if we can train someone from their community or something it will be a great help.*"

What Jessica and her husband shared corresponds with the findings of the study conducted from the perspectives of immigrant service providers in Canada (Salami, Salma & Hegadoren, 2019). They argue that immigrants and refugees face barriers to accessing mental health services such as language barriers, culturally different perception of mental health, the stigma around mental health issues, and concern of negative impact associated with mental illness. Salami, Salma and Hegadoren (2019) suggest five strategies for enhancing mental health services for immigrant populations: fostering local services, reducing financial burden, providing training for the mental health service providers working with immigrants, collaborating among service providers and providing them with interpreter services.

Service providers' approaches to spiritual and religious dimensions of clients

Lastly, Jessica's husband advised that service providers can discuss spirituality with clients as he believes everyone has a spiritual side. However, they should not talk about religion due to any conflict that may arise from a conversation about religion. He said, "I think the secular way is the best way touching spiritual things is ok, but touching their religious things is not okay". I understand his point about the debate around their different religions, which can happen in any of our human interactions. As social work practitioners understanding the whole spectrum of a person, it may not be possible to avoid touching upon aspects of their religion. For this reason, we need agency guidelines for appropriately addressing religious and spiritual needs for their practitioners. How much in-depth the conversation on religions that clients and practitioners can have depends on the circumstances. For instance, a factor which must be considered is how comfortable clients or practitioners feel about such conversations. The conversation can start with a simple question about whether they are spiritual or follow any

religion. Asking this question may open up a completely new conversation which shifts from, for example, sadness to something that clients would be excited about sharing with practitioners, such as their hopes and dreams.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION/IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter, I will discuss some of the key findings pertaining to the theoretical framework and epistemological point of view of the study. I will then further discuss its implications for social work practice.

Highlights of the study in relation to key findings

Questioning the binary approach of reviewed studies

I will begin by sharing my lesson on thematic analysis. King (2004) as cited in Nowell, Norris, White and Moules (2017), states that a theme that does not seem important might be a focal point that sheds light on a research question. With respect to the first theme discussed in the findings, I did not consider the definitions of spirituality and religiosity as a theme until I made initial codes, and uncovered the major themes. My analysis led me to question the binary approach to conceptualizing these two concepts. The proponents of the inclusion of spirituality in social work practice often do not want to be associated with religions. It seems to me that these two concepts are however functioning as a unity, rather than a dualism. As research findings indicate, it seems impossible for people with a religion to separate spirituality, which is considered as a relationship to God.

The difficulty characterizing religion and spirituality and distinguishing between them corresponds with a study drawing on the literature on multiple disciplines (Niekerk, 2018). According to Niekerk (2018), although spirituality provides its proponents with a holistic approach and comprehensive perspective on life, the world and oneself allows them to practice without engaging in religions. However, people may still wish to be part of a community so that they can practice together with others who have similar interests in spirituality. Ironically, the structural aspect of religion is the part they did not like in the first place (Niekerk, 2018). For this

reason, Niekerk argues that religions are going to remain despite the trend toward the secularisation of sacredness. I conend that by nature we wish to feel a sense of belonging and organize within community in the form of religion or spirituality. Besides, it is hard to distinguish between religious and spiritual practice because elements of religion, such as rituals or prayers, community gathering and relationship with a Greater Being are also embedded in most spiritual practices.

On the other hand, there is a concern around the limitations of anti-oppressive practice (AOP) due to its regulatory components, which is often unable to accept and embrace the diversity of individuals, particularly religious differences of clients. Pon (2007) argues, that if we acknowledge and adopt virtues of faith, such as peace, forgiveness, and spirituality, this would help social work in overcoming the limitations of AOP.

Findings in relation to the theoretical framework

Holistic approach

It is important to take care of four aspects of our needs (i.e., mind, body, emotion and spirit) as these are interconnected and affect one another (Baskin, 2011). As opposed to the problem-focused approach that social work adopts, the strengths perspective that focuses on clients' strengths aims to find solutions by utilizing what they already have, such as clients' religions (Healy, 2014). In the words of Healy (2014), the strengths perspective is attuned to conversations on religion and spirituality and acknowledges that service providers should respond to clients' spiritual needs. As Jessica indicated, "Everybody in my practice, I saw mostly immigrants, they are already connected with some religion." Many immigrants have religions that can be utilized as a strength.

Critical Race Theory

As I mentioned in the theoretical framework section, contemporary social work tends to distance itself from religion while incorporating spirituality into social work practice. It is important to be aware of the interest convergence, which is a central tenet of Critical Race Theory (CRT) in our political context of current social work arena. For example, Jessica's clients have been participating in religious rituals and praying for mindfulness or meditation, which became westernized in Canada, but she claimed that it originated from East Asia where she came from. The following is an extract from Jessica's interview.

People are already using that. But they don't know exactly that how they can practice it better. Because they are they are using like for their own ritual for that.

*She added, "We learn about even the western concept like power of now. And also, the thoughtfulness, this is, these are, they **because they are so smart, they become westernized them, but it is from somewhere else, Yoga is from South Asia. Like everything is everywhere. But now it's good that they are we, we are already using everything.**" (Jessica)*

Although the supporters of mindful exercises claim that these exercises are secular, in order to receive full benefits from the exercises, they need to understand the meaning of these exercises, which is tied to the preaching of the religion. As Jessica pointed out, it is important to acknowledge that many spiritual practices originated from religious beliefs and cultures; therefore, religious ideas are embedded in mindfulness exercises, which became popular in Western culture. Convergence of interest, a key tenet of CRT, enabled me to conceptualize the experience of immigrants whose religious practice has been transformed into Western culture by secularizing mindfulness exercises of sacredness.

I consider the stories of three participants in this study to serve as counter-narratives against the dominant discourse of spirituality, but not religious social work. I believe that this

study is an action for social change by challenging the dominant discourse that overlooks our spiritual and religious dimensions in social work practice.

Findings in relation to epistemological/ontological perspectives and positivist paradigm

Researchers reflect their own philosophical assumptions into their qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These aspects of research are “ontology (the nature of reality), epistemology (what counts as knowledge and how knowledge claims are justified), axiology (the role of values in research) and methodology (the process of research)” (p. 19-20).

Also, Carter and Little (2007) suggest that there should be consistency within the epistemology, methodology and method in a good qualitative study. I will elaborate on how this study is integrated with these four philosophical assumptions, which were applied into the framework of epistemology, methodology, methods of the research process to produce the rich data to answer the research questions (Carter & Little, 2007).

According to Carter and Little (2007), epistemology is defined as theory of knowledge and it functions as a justification for the knowledge produced (Carter & Little, 2007). On the other hand, the methodology is viewed as a rationale of method and method also justifies activities such as sampling and data analysis (Kaplan as cited in Carter & Little, 2007). It is important to acknowledge what kind of epistemology a study adopts because the epistemology is manifested in all three elements of the study (epistemology, methodology and method) (Carter & Little, 2007). The interconnectedness of these elements guided the process of this study. I recognize that ones’ identities are complex due to social, cultural, political and historical contexts. Thus, I adopted the critical intersectional approach that grants anyone the right to create knowledge from their experiences (Hunter, 2002) as an alternative epistemology. For this study, this critical intersectional epistemological perspective led to the ontological view of

pluralism, claiming that reality (truth) is multiple (Kaplan as cited in Carter & Little, 2007). For a methodological belief, I applied inductive logic and employed a phenomenology approach which allows me as a researcher to explore the essence of individuals' experiences as related to the inclusion of spiritual practice as a phenomenon (Preston & Redgrift, 2017). For a reflection of the epistemological/ontological perspectives, my action for the method was to have a different sampling that consists of social work practitioners with culturally and religiously diverse backgrounds (Carter & Little, 2007).

Social work tends to adopt a positivist paradigm emphasizing scientific methods with which knowledge can be legitimated (Neuman, 2006). This standpoint has not been favourable toward spiritual and religious dimensions. I disagree with the positivist paradigm when it comes to the study of spirituality and religion. Thus, I employed the phenomenology approach for the methodology of this study because I value the meaning of people's experience as knowledge which is emphasized in a phenomenology approach.

The following findings illustrate how a different sampling of participants provides new perspectives on the topic of the study. The findings show a struggle among the research participants, which is an inner conflict between traditional belief and religious faith, which Robert experienced within his religious community due to cultural differences. Robert stated:

Within that community gathering, there are people with different spiritual beliefs in there. Right? But here we are in the same religion, but different spiritual beliefs. You can go to church and gather me and you, but the back of your mind. I think move your ancestors back of your mind. (Robert)

Also, Jessica's daughter experiences an identity crisis because she does not feel a sense of belonging to either Pakistan where her parents come from, or Canada where she was raised. She expressed her struggle by comparing how Indigenous people whose lands and sovereignty was taken away would feel:

When indigenous communities were separated from their land, it evoked a distance from their families and their culture. The difference was, they were forcefully removed so that someone else could live a better life on their land. I was removed from my land because my light had been mistreated to the point that my caregivers believed it could no longer sustain the life they plan for me. (Jessica's daughter)

Many immigrants and refugees experienced diaspora with/out force. After they moved into another country in which culture, language and systems are different from those of back home, they feel uprooted and do not feel belonging to both the new home country and country of origin. This struggle is linked to spiritual thoughts: who I am, where do I belong, what is the meaning of life?, etc. The experiences of Robert and Jessica's daughter resonate with many immigrants in Canada because some of them experienced colonization in the countries they came from. To unravel the complexity of one's identity, we might need to look at historical and political factors at play in the countries they came from, including processes of colonization.

Implications/recommendations for social work practice

Immigrants are more likely to be affected by mental health than those born in Canada due to migration stressors and systemic barriers to accessibility of services (George, Thomson, Chaze & Guruge, 2015). Also, there is unequal access to social services since language barriers and stigma associated with mental health challenges hinder many newcomers from seeking mental health and relevant family counselling services (Shakya, Khanlou, & Gonsalves, 2010). However, there is not sufficient culturally appropriate mental health care in some communities (Guruge & Butt, 2015). Therefore, it is hard for them to navigate the mental health care system when needed, which leads the disadvantaged and racialized to be further marginalized.

In order to effectively tackle the unprecedented demand for mental health services in our community, there is a need for constructing new discourses in mental health care by assigning new meaning to mainstream knowledge that views a mental health issues as an illness, which is

based on the biomedical model. As an alternative, we can employ a holistic approach to service provision by incorporating the spiritual aspect of clients. There is a compelling need for change in policies, research and practices on service provision addressing spiritual and religious needs of clients.

Alternative: Bottom-up approach

The following findings suggest different approaches to social services, including mental health services. Jessica argued that there are diverse needs among immigrant populations. She stated:

*First time that's why when you talk about me spirituality and all these things, adding like whatever people we even we are not thinking you are right, that is **very westernized, our social workers, we are not thinking that we're from which corner of the world people are coming to Canada and what are the best practice could be for them.** (Jessica)*

Jessica points out that social work practitioners' inadequacy of understanding of different cultures and religions are the barriers to providing comprehensive services for immigrants and refugees. She stated, *"We are blind about that. At least we acknowledge that. That's very important. What you are doing this work is really important. And you are adding this. Something is lacking."* She continued, *"Because we are not taking their perspective. We don't have any knowledge about their religion, about their spirituality."*

She pointed out that the western approach to mental health counselling has failed to meet the needs of immigrants with mental health challenges because it does not consider the perspectives of clients from diverse cultural backgrounds. This is supported by Denzin (2017), who argues that critical social studies need to interrogate how power and ideology intersect, thereby shaping a dominant discourse which legitimates a particular cultural context. Therefore, knowledge from people in racial minority communities tends to be ignored in our society (Denzin, 2017).

The study highlights the need for developing agency guidelines and curriculum that would help social work practitioners in addressing clients' spiritual and religious needs in social work practice. This research also has implications for funders and agencies, which suggest that we need different approaches to serving immigrants because they often have a different worldview which stems from their culturally and religiously diverse backgrounds. It is of paramount importance that service providers center the voices and experiences of immigrants and increase accessibility to services by conducting outreach to immigrant communities and raising public awareness of the importance of meeting spiritual and religious needs.

From the anti-oppressive perspective, it is crucial to unravel the ways that reinforce and reproduce historical exclusions and injustices by drawing on critical analyses of race, ability and sexual orientation or gender identity (Maiter & Joseph, 2017). When it comes to incorporating a religious dimension in social work, there are important concerns about the historical ways in which religion has played a significant role in reinforcing white supremacy along with racism and heterosexism. For example, there has been a tension between secular social work and Christianity due to the historical legacy of Christianity that committed violence upon people in LGBTQ and Indigenous communities in Canada (Todd & Coholic, 2007).

Furthermore, Carniol (2010) argues that Christianity is implicated historically in genocides of Indigenous and African people while serving as justification for committing violence and harm upon these populations. It is argued that over 90 million Aboriginal people died in the Americas between 1492 and 1600 and more than 40 million Africans were killed, enslaved, or lost to the transatlantic slave trade (Spivey, 2003). The perpetrators of these genocides were European settlers who were Christians (Carniol, 2010).

In social work academia, there might be a conflict among social work educators around Christian beliefs and values. Scholars with religious beliefs might be afraid of disclosing their faith and expressing their opinions on the topic in a secular social work environment. They might have a fear that by doing so puts them at risk of being considered as fundamentalist and questioned about their social work values and anti-oppressive practice. Pon (2007) suggests that educators are engaged in dialogue about religion and spirituality in social work despite the difficulty overcoming this fear. Given that University professors are leading scholars in the area of the topic and teach prospective professionals about ethical practice, they play a pivotal role in bringing a deeper understanding of the issues to the discussion table and developing the dialogue through lectures, research, and journal articles.

Todd and Coholic (2007) acknowledge that anti-oppressive social work educators face the challenge of responding to the growing attention to the spiritual aspect of clients and the need for advocacy of sexual and gender diversity at the same time. Opening up a conversation on religion and spirituality in social work classrooms can create opportunities for the class to learn about different aspects of such topics and explore the implications for social work practice.

Self-reflection

I employed the interpretive phenomenological approach viewing that human reality is shaped by their social, cultural and political contexts. As Preston and Redgrift (2017) suggested, I have carried out reflexivity throughout the research to see this study from new perspectives and recognize the limitations of my perspectives, instead of bracketing my thoughts or comments in the data. I acknowledge that the analysis is based on my understanding of spirituality and limited to the extent of what I know and how I incorporated my knowledge of the topic (Preston & Redgrift, 2017).

Limitation of the study and suggestions for further study

This study employed snowball sampling to recruit study participants. With the small size of sampling for the study, the findings are not representative of the whole population of social work practitioners with racially and religiously diverse backgrounds.

There is a limitation in this study due to the limited diversity of the sample. Although I managed to recruit a heterogeneous sample in terms of gender, religion and racial backgrounds, I did not seek sexual minority participants. There needs to be more research in this area. Further studies should have more diverse participants, including people from LGBTQ and Indigenous communities, and those who have a disability.

It is essential to understand that religion is a sensitive topic to discuss with people from gender and sexual minority groups since they have been interrogated and policed, and their image was distorted due to the dominant religious values. Religiosity, particularly Christianity, has also been used as a means to wipe out Aboriginal people and their culture. Researchers should be aware and prepared that this type of research might trigger prospective members of these communities due to the socio-historical nature of the topic.

The findings indicate that the concepts of higher being, religion, and spirit are interconnected and intertwined for the interviewees. In order to prevent the horrible things done in the name of faith, this study is calling for thorough and thoughtful discussions in the academic community to collectively figure out how to approach incorporating religious and spiritual aspects of clients in social work practice.

CONCLUSION

This study sought the best practices in social work by incorporating spiritual and religious aspects of clients. As we discussed, it is challenging to incorporate spirituality and religiosity in social work practice due to the dominant epistemological and ontological point of view on these aspects. Furthermore, in our neoliberal context, New Public Management (NPM) employs the rule of the market to reduce costs and eliminate ineffective and inappropriate uses of limited resources while focusing on economic efficiency, workforce flexibility, service delivery and performance measurement (Baines, 2011). This social and political environment often hinders social work practitioners from providing quality services for clients.

There is also a tension around the idea of considering the religious aspect of clients in social work practice due to the historical violence, genocide, and harm caused to people in the LGBTQ and Indigenous community in the name of religion (Todd & Coholic, 2007). Future studies in the area of social work, spirituality and religiosity must always hold in tension the implication of Christianity in genocidal violence against LGBTQ and Indigenous populations throughout the world. Efforts to incorporate spirituality and religiosity into social work practice must always guard against reproducing the harms perpetrated against LGBTQ and Indigenous communities, particularly in the case of Christianity.

However, there are some practitioners, similar to three research participants, who are willing to pursue the inner peace of clients by incorporating spiritual and religious dimensions in their social work practice, just as their religious preaching teaches them to do so. As I was unfolding their stories, I found that there are vibrant and prosperous contexts in the stories they shared, which cast light on the knowledge that was never known to many of us.

As this study explored the essence of the experience of immigrant social work practitioners, it appears that the challenge the participants and their clients shared is an identity crisis which is tied to religious or spiritual struggle. I hope that this study is a response to their struggle to search for a path to peace by suggesting that social work practitioners assist clients in exploring the avenue of spirituality or religion through service provision that takes into account clients' spiritual and religious aspects. Jessica's daughter, who is a second-generation immigrant described in a video her disconnection with both lands she is associated with and spiritual detachment to the lands. She referred to her feeling toward the mother's lands as an illness of the lost. Her narrative illustrates how many immigrants feel about their disconnection to their new home.

It is a great honour for me to learn and compile the lived experience of three participants through this study. I cannot thank them enough for sharing their lived experience and trusting me with how the essence of their stories would be unravelled in the final version of the study. While social work claims to be secular but adopts sacredness, the participant practitioners showcase how secular social work can also be sacred by incorporating their two identities as both social work practitioners and believers.

This study aimed to provide a deeper understanding of their social work experience and their insights into the topic of the study by joining newly emerging literature with growing attention to spirituality. I have not intended to suggest that the inclusion of religion or spiritual aspect of clients is beneficial to everyone. However, for those who are spiritual or religious, but marginalized due to their race, ethnicity and gender, I am hoping that this study can project their voice so that we can bring forward the prospect of incorporating spiritual and religious aspects of clients in social work practice. I also hope that this study can foster discussions on how to move

forward from historical wounds due to religious beliefs toward social justice in which no one is excluded.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A – RECRUITMENT FLYER



PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH IN INCORPORATING SPIRITUALITY AND RELIGIOSITY IN SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

Are You:

- One who identifies yourself as being spiritual whether that is an organized religion or not.
- One who has work experience as a social work practitioner?

(Note: Preference” for racially and religiously diverse social work practitioners)

If you answered yes to the above noted questions, you are invited to volunteer in this study. Your participation is confidential. You will be invited to a one-time face-to-face interview at a room where privacy is protected, at either Ryerson University or your home. The interview will last for approximately one and a half hours. You will be asked how you view spiritual and religious dimensions in social work practice and how you integrate these aspects into your social work practice.

If you are interested in participating in this study or for more information, please contact: Miryang Choi, School of Social Work at Ryerson University, 416-979-5000, Ext. 4786
Email: miryang1.choi@ryerson.ca. This study is part of the Master of Social Work degree requirements.

This research study has been reviewed and approved by the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board.

APPENDIX B – EMAIL, PHONE OR IN-PERSON SCRIPT

Hi

My name is Miryang Choi. I am a graduate student researcher at Ryerson University in the School of Social Work. I am contacting you to see if you might be interested in participating in a research study.

This research is being done as part of my Master's project and my supervisor's name is Gordon Pon, associate professor. The research is designed to explore how social work practitioners who have racially and religiously diverse backgrounds view spiritual and religious dimensions in social work practice and how they integrate these aspects into their practice.

To participate you need to

- identify yourself as being spiritual whether that is an organized religion or not
- have work experience as a social work practitioner

(Note: Preference" for racially and religiously diverse social work practitioners)

If you agree to volunteer, you will be invited to a one-time, face-to-face interview that will last for approximately one and a half hours. The interview takes place at a sound proof room where privacy is protected, at either Ryerson University or participant's residence.

The information collected for the study will be confidential and your interview will remain anonymous in the final research paper.

Your participation is completely voluntary. If you choose not to participate, it will not impact our relationship, your relationship with the agency you are working for or Ryerson University.

The research has been reviewed and approved by the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board.

If you are interested in more information about the study or would like to volunteer, please reply to this email or call 416-979-5000, Ext. 4786.

APPENDIX C – INTERVIEW GUIDE

Under four research questions, there are specific questions

Basic Demographic questions:

1. Tell me about yourself? Where were you born? When did you come to Canada? What languages do you speak? What is your racial background? What is your age range? How do you identify in terms of gender, sexual orientation, ability, etc.?
2. How long have you been practising as a social worker? What sectors have you worked in?

1) What do they mean by spirituality and religiosity?

- How do you define spirituality and religiosity? How are they different?

2) How is spirituality important to you as a social work practitioner?

- What brought you to this work?
- What role does your spirituality and faith play in your interventions?
- Is spirituality an important part of social work? Please explain.
- In your own life, how has your religion or spirituality affected to your spiritual growth? How has this affected your practice with your clients?
- What was/is the greatest spiritual influence in your life? How, if at all, did your culture and/or ethnicity influence your spirituality?

3) How can spirituality help them to serve their clients?

- How do you integrate spirituality and faith in your practice?
- Can you describe any experiences you might have when a client brought up the subject of spirituality or religion? How did you handle that? Have you ever brought up the subject of spirituality or religion yourself with a client? If yes, could you describe how the conversation went?
- How did you prepare to address a client's spiritual and religious concerns?
- What has been your experience working with clients who had strong feelings either for or against a particular religion? What strategies have you used that are helpful? What should practitioners be aware of in order to avoid encountering problems while incorporating of spirituality in working with clients?

4) Do they experience any obstacles caused by religious and spiritual customs that must be overcome to honor social work values and wisdom or to incorporate spiritual and religiosity in social work practice?

- Has your organization ever discussed or provided some guidelines for the inclusion of spirituality and religiosity in practice?
- Does your agency/employer/supervisor have any biases toward any religions? If so, how does this impact your practice, and how did you deal with it?
- What kinds of formal educational or training programs for incorporating spirituality and religiosity would you like to see?

- What else would you like people to know about spirituality/religiosity in social work?



APPENDIX D – STUDY CONSENT FORM

Ryerson University Consent Agreement

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Please read this consent form so that you understand what your participation will involve. Before you consent to participate, please ask any questions to be sure you understand what your participation will involve.

INCORPORATING SPIRITUALITY AND RELIGIOSITY IN SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

INVESTIGATORS:

This research study is being conducted by Gordon Pon, Supervisor and Miryang Choi, Principal investigator, from School of Social Work at Ryerson University.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Miryang Choi at miryang1.choi@ryerson.ca or 416-979-5000, Ext. 4786.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY:

The study is designed to explore how social work practitioners who have racially and religiously diverse backgrounds view spiritual and religious dimensions in social work practice and how they integrate those aspects into their practice. The study is recruiting two participants. Prospective participants must identify themselves as being spiritual whether that is an organized religion or not. Participants must have work experience as social work practitioners, preferably members of visible minority groups. The study is being completed by Miryang Choi, a graduate student and the results will contribute to partial completion of the Master of Social Work degree.

WHAT YOU WILL BE ASKED TO:

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following things:

Procedures:

- One-time, face-to-face interview will last for approximately one and a half hours and take place at a private room at Ryerson University for confidential and privacy purposes or you can choose the place that provides visual and aural protection of privacy
- You will be asked to answer open-ended questions; How is spirituality or religion important to you? How can those aspects help you to serve your clients?
- Your demographic data including your name, email address, phone No., gender, race, religion and duration of social work experience, will be collected.

- Research findings will be available to participants through the link to the Ryerson Digital Repository <https://digital.library.ryerson.ca/>), upon completion of the research paper.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS:

The potential benefits of the study could be to the general community by adding the perspectives of participants to the conversations on the subject of this study in the literature.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL RISKS TO YOU AS A PARTICIPANT:

Potential risks are very low. You might encounter any risks or discomforts as a result of participation. While responding to an interview question, you might reflect on unpleasant memories because of the personal nature of the questions asked.

Risk mitigation: These risks will be mitigated in the following ways:

- During the interview, if a participant begins to feel uncomfortable, he/she may skip answering a question or stop participation, either temporarily or permanently.
- You may choose to withdraw from the study and have your data removed. However, after May 1, 2019, your data will not be removed from the study because it would have already been integrated into the overall data analysis.
- I will provide a list of resources including counselling support services
- Your name will not appear in the transcription and final research paper. Instead, a pseudonym will be used in the final research paper.
- No identifying information will be contained in the final research paper.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

The completed study will not contain any personal information that might lead the potential readers to identify the research participants, agencies and clients.

- The study will use pseudonyms to refer participants
- The names and areas of the agencies participants worked for will not be described
- The names of the clients a participant might talk about will not be mentioned
- Participants' job title will not appear

All demographic data and audio/transcribed recordings will be stored securely in password protected files in the researcher's computer and will be only accessible to the researcher. All demographic data, the audio-recording of the interview, and transcribed recordings will be erased by the researcher after one (1) year from the data collection. If you are interested in reviewing the transcript and your portion of the data analysis, please mark the checkbox to indicate your interest in reviewing it at the end of the consent form. Then, you will have an opportunity to review and edit your interview transcripts for the final research paper to ensure that you are comfortable with the contents and appearance of your contribution to the final edition of the study.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL:

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If any question makes you uncomfortable, you can skip that question. You may stop participating at any time. If you choose to stop participating, you may also choose to not have your data included in the study. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not influence your future relations with Ryerson University or the investigators, Gordon Pon and Miryang Choi, involved in the research.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY:

If you have any questions about the research now, please ask. If you have questions later about the research, you may contact

Miryang Choi, primary investigator, at miryang1.choi@ryerson.ca or Gordon Pon, supervisor, at g2pon@ryerson.ca, 416-979-5000, Ext. 4786, School of Social Work, Ryerson University.

This study has been reviewed by the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board. If you have questions regarding your rights as a participant in this study, please contact:

Research Ethics Board
c/o Office of the Vice President, Research and Innovation
Ryerson University
350 Victoria Street
Toronto, ON M5B 2K3
416-979-5042
rebchair@ryerson.ca

INCORPORATING SPIRITUALITY AND RELIGIOSITY IN SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

CONFIRMATION OF AGREEMENT:

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this agreement and have had a chance to ask any questions you have about the study. Your signature also indicates that you agree to participate in the study and have been told that you can change your mind and withdraw your consent to participate at any time. You have been given a copy of this agreement. You have been told that by signing this consent agreement you are not giving up any of your legal rights.

Name of Participant (please print)

Signature of Participant

Date

I agree to be audio-recorded for the purposes of this study. I understand how these recordings will be stored and destroyed.

Signature of Participant

Date

- **Please mark the checkbox if you are interested in reviewing the transcript and your portion of the data analysis ()**

APPENDIX E – RESOURCE LIST

- **Across Boundaries.** <http://www.acrossboundaries.ca>, 416-787-3007.
- **Canadian Mental Health Association Toronto.** <https://toronto.cmha.ca>, 1-866-531-2600
- **Community Resource Connections of Toronto,** www.selfhelp.on.ca , 416-499-5969.
- **Distress Centres of Toronto.** <https://www.torontodistresscentre.com>, 416-408-4357
- **Family Service Toronto.** <https://familyservicetoronto.org>, 416-595-9230
- **Mental Health Services Information Ontario,**
<https://www.mhagb.ca/content/mental-health-service-information-ontario-mhsio>
1-866-531-2600.
- **Mood Disorders Association of Ontario.** <https://www.mooddorders.ca>. 1-866-363-6663.
- **Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care** for mental health and addiction,
<http://www.health.gov.on.ca>.
- **The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health.** <https://www.camh.ca>, 1 800 463 2338. To access CAMH clinical services. 416 535 8501, press 2.
- **Women’s Health in Women’s Hands.** <http://www.whiwh.com>, 416-593-7655.
- **Women’s Multicultural Resource and Counselling Centre.**
<http://www.wmrccdurham.org>, 905-427-7849.
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