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Stories of Re-Enchantment, Authenticity, and Hope**

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WOMEN SOCIAL ACTIVISTS OF ATLANTIC CANADA: STORIES OF RE-ENCHANTMENT, AUTHENTICITY, AND HOPE

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Abstract

In this paper, we offer our analysis of the profiles of 27 elder women social activists of Atlantic Canada, profiles created by Dr. Liz Burge. Our goal is to honour these women and to inform, and hopefully inspire, others involved in social activism. We hope our research will contribute to the growing field of inquiry in adult education into feminist approaches to social movement learning (SML). We found these social activists' engagements were powerfully shaped by their families' values, initial experiences of finding voice and "speaking up," and both formal and informal learning about effective approaches for political engagement. The stories speak to a social activism for which the personal is political and the boundaries between the private and public spheres are blurred. These women's profiles, we argue, resist the "malaise of modernity," specifically its glorification of individualism, disenchantment with the world, and retreat from political engagement. In their stories, we see a process of re-enchancement that involves a search for authenticity fueled by hope.

Résumé

Dans cet article, nous proposons une analyse des profils de 27 anciennes femmes activistes sociales du Canada atlantique, profils créés par Dr. Liz Burge. Nous avons pour objectif de rendre hommage à ces femmes-là ainsi que d'informer et d'inspirer ceux qui s'impliquent dans l'activisme social. Nous espérons que notre travail contribuera au domaine de recherches portant sur l'éducation des adultes dans les approches féministes de l'apprentissage du mouvement social (social movement learning). Nous trouvons que les engagements de ces activistes sociales sont fortement influencés par leurs valeurs familiales, leurs premières expériences de trouver la voix et de « s'affirmer », ainsi que leur apprentissage tant formel qu'informel des approches efficaces pour l'engagement politique. Ces histoires illustrent un activisme social pour lequel le personnel est politique et les frontières entre les sphères publique et privée sont floues. Selon nous, les profils de ces femmes résistent au « malaise de la

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modernité », notamment à la glorification de l'individualisme, au désenchantement vis-à-vis du monde et au retrait de l'engagement politique. Dans leurs histoires, nous assistons à un processus de ré-enchantement qui implique une recherche de l'authenticité alimentée par l'espoir.

Introduction

From 2007 to 2011, Dr. Elizabeth (Liz) Burge (n.d.)¹ interviewed 27 elder women social activists of Atlantic Canada and generated web profiles² based on these conversations. Motivated by her earlier work with seniors, Burge (2007) believed this group of elders had much wisdom to share and were at a time in their lives when they could reflect fruitfully on their work. She also noted an absence of information of the important work of Atlantic Canadian social activists who were over 65, and given her earlier work on intergenerational learning, Burge believed younger women were eager to learn from these elder activists. Just prior to the launching of these profiles, Burge invited Shauna Butterwick to reflect on these profiles and add her commentary to the website. Inspired by Burge's initiative and with her strong support, this discussion is based on a revisiting of these profiles as stories that can deepen our understanding of social movement learning (SML). To this project we bring our feminist perspectives, past experiences with social activism, ongoing interest in research into SML, and search for inspiration and hope at a time of deepening inequalities.

We see value, as does Frank (2002), in listening to stories about "things that matter;" that is, "sustained civic involvements in the instigation of collective social change" (p. 111). We share Frank's view that personal storytelling is a "remoralizing [of] what Weber identified as disenchanting modernity" (2002, p. 109) and concur with his assertion that "hearing the moral impulse in others' stories enables us to become part of their struggle to re-enchant a disenchanting world" (p. 116). The narratives of these elder activists, co-created with Burge, involved a process of making experiences legible and thus available to others. As Frank notes:

Storytelling is an occasion when people co-author responses to Tolstoy's great question of what shall we do and how shall we live; not permanent answers applicable for the rest of their lives, but the crucial if provisional answers that guide what to do next and how to live now. (p. 112)

Liz Burge interviewed and created profiles of a wide range of activists:³ Phyllis Artiss, Yvonne Atwell, Ann Bell, Sister Kathrine Bellamy, Maria Bernard, May Bouchard, Olive Bryanton, Ann Brennan, Shirley Chernin, Shannie Duff, Madeleine Gaudet, Joan Hicks, Elizabeth Lacey, Stella Lord, Mary Majka, Sister Angelina Martz, Carolyn McNulty, Sister Dorothy Moore, Sister Joan O'Keefe, Marian Perkins, Edith Perry, Betty Peterson, Nancy

1 Now retired, Burge was formerly a professor at the University of New Brunswick.

2 The full profiles can be found as a free e-book at <http://etc.lib.unb.ca/womenactivists>.

3 For more details about Burge's selection and recruitment approach, see the Research Questions and Methodology section of this article and the About section on the website of the project, <http://etc.lib.unb.ca/womenactivists>.

Riche, Sue Rickards, Viola Robinson, Kathy Sheldon, and Mary Lou Stirling.⁴ Between the 1950s and today, these women were involved with many advocacy issues, not all explicitly feminist, including affordable housing, public health, urban planning and historic restoration, services and rights of seniors, preservation of Aboriginal culture and language, preventing violence against women, identifying the economic and social costs of alcoholism and addiction, supporting francophone education, and preventing and responding to homelessness and other anti-poverty initiatives. The institutional and community sites of their activism varied and included religious service and multiple roles in the voluntary sector. Notable sites of activism were also found in women's equality-seeking organizations, including Councils for the Status of Women, Women's Institutes, the YWCA, the Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women, and Canadian Voice of Women for Peace. Some of these women's activism also took place in unions and political parties. For others, their activist vision and energies were focused on their professions (e.g., nursing and academia).

Burge hoped her project would stimulate others to undertake similar initiatives to tap into the wisdom of elder women activists. Building on Burge's invitation, in this article we offer an analysis of these stories with the goals of furthering Burge's desire to honour these women's contributions and contributing to feminist understandings of SML.

Related Literature

We believe these women's experiences offer further insights into the growing field of research into SML, particularly from a feminist perspective. Our paper is framed by both feminist studies of social activism and philosophical explorations, both of which, in different ways, speak to a key impetus in movements for social justice—that is, a disenchantment with modernity and its unrealized promise of freedom and equality. We begin with a brief overview of some of the feminist literature on SML that inspired our analysis and then continue with a discussion of “the malaise of modernity,” a term taken up, among others, by Charles Taylor (1991).

Feminist Approaches to Social Movement Learning

Hall and Turray (2006), in their review of research into SML in the field of adult education, found there were few studies in this area and called for more research. In our explorations of studies of women's SML, we found a rich field of inquiry undertaken by feminist scholars. We believe this area can make significant contributions to understanding what is involved in learning liberation, a central theme in adult education. We see this lack of inclusion of these studies as similar to what Dorothy Smith (1978, 1987) called “a peculiar eclipsing” (1978, p. 281), a process she observed in mainstream theorizing where women's contributions were ignored. This limited view of what counts as SML was lamented by Thompson (1983) and Butterwick (1998), who found women's learning needs, leadership, and practices tended to be ignored by the male-dominated field of adult education. Mayo and Thompson (1995) drew attention to how “we were already building up our own ideas and ways of working,

4 To the best of our knowledge, several interviewees have died: Sister Kathrine Bellamy, Maria Bernard, Dr. Mary Majka, and Nancy Riche. Canada is the poorer for their departure.

based on the importance attributed to personal knowledge by the women's liberation movement" (p. 127).

The matter of developing critical consciousness and the notion that the personal is political (Brownmiller, 1999; Hanisch, 2006) is central to the second-wave feminist movement in North America. Feminist scholars have explored consciousness raising as an example of radical democratic impetus given its non-hierarchical and inclusive approach (Cornell, 2000). Building on these consciousness-raising practices, feminist scholars have also explored coalition building and the need to recognize the differences and power inequalities among women (Keating, 2005; Mohanty, 1998; Reagon, 1998), as well as the importance of developing what Sandoval (2000) called differential consciousness, which is oriented to adaptation to different contexts.

Part of the process of eclipsing, to which Smith (1978) referred, is related to limitations of the lens and frameworks used as evidence of social activism and learning. This was a concern of Stall and Stoecker (1998), who noted how the "Alinsky model" of social activism, with its outcome- and power-oriented approaches, strong leadership, confrontation, and professionalism in the "public sphere," has framed much of what counts as social activism, with less recognition given to a women-centred model of community work, oriented to relationship building and collaboration. Rather than seeing these approaches as dichotomous, Stall and Stoecker argued that, in reality, the boundaries between them are blurred. The limitation of what counts as social activism was also a concern of Gouin (2009), who observed that "women engage in social transformation in ways that are rarely recognized in traditional conceptions of protest or revolution" (p. 159). Women's SML often occurs in kitchens and the private spaces of women's lives. Recognizing the multiple sites of social activism and SML is key to building knowledge of this phenomenon. As Fraser (1997) observed, narrow and singular visions of what counts as the public sphere and who participates in that sphere ignore the significance of the popular education and participatory grassroots activism of marginalized groups. In these spaces, which Fraser called the subaltern, significant oppositional discourses are generated, positions that challenge dominant conceptions of inequalities.

Feminist scholarship exploring SML in the field of adult education is growing and making major contributions to our knowledge of SML. Given the limitations of space, we cannot provide a comprehensive overview of this research, but we do want to bring some attention to the richness of these inquiries. The role of the arts and creative expression in political engagement has been a focus of several studies, and this area of inquiry is rapidly expanding (e.g. Butterwick & Lawrence, 2009; Clover, 2013; Clover, Stalker, & McGauley, 2004; West & Stalker, 2007). Feminist researchers have examined the creation of critical consciousness through feminist consciousness-raising groups (Butterwick, 1987) and the development of identity and moral agency (Parrish & Taylor, 2007; Sandlin & Walther, 2009). Earlier investigations focused on the role of feminist organizations in social movements (Ferree & Martin, 1995), and more recent studies have examined women's advocacy groups and their social structure (English, 2005) and the role of grassroots organizations in the development of political consciousness (Gouthro, 2012). The powerful role the Internet has played in creating virtual networks and feminist organizations' use of communication technologies are new areas of inquiry (Irving & English, 2010). Women's contributions to national liberation movements (Chovanec, 2009), environmental movements (Walter, 2007), and the women's housing movement in South Africa (Ismail, 2009) illustrate the

key role women's activism has played in these new social movements. Feminists have also drawn attention to the caring dimension of activism (Hart, 1984), to learning and activism that occur in the private sphere (Gouthro, 2009a, 2009b), and to the less desirable outcomes of SML, including burnout (Zielińska, Lowzan, & Prusinowska, 2011). The internal workings of social movements have also been explored, including the challenges within feminist coalition politics (Butterwick & Selman, 2006) and the importance of bringing an anti-colonial and anti-racism framework to consider movements for social action (Gouin, 2009).

Social Movement Learning and the Malaise of Modernity

Adding to the above studies and their orientation to women's activism and development of consciousness and resistance to patriarchal, colonial, and racist systems of oppression, we worked with authors whose explorations helped us with our interpretations of these women's profiles, particularly how their activism could be understood in relation to the larger politics of change, notably how their engagements contrasted with malaise and disenchantment. Taylor (1991) described the "malaises of modernity" as "features of our contemporary culture and society that people experience as a loss or a decline, even as our civilization 'develops'" (p. 1). Reichenbach (2002) spoke to how this malaise has led to a kind of "exhaustion" of late modernity—that is, an eroding belief in political action. Similarly, Hannah Arendt (1998) addressed the loss of the public realm as an aspect of what she calls "world alienation." When people withdraw from the public realm, it means that they believe that "the world will not last," that they have given up on the world (Arendt, 1998, p. 54).

To counter this alienation and exhaustion, we understand that engaging in social activism is partly a search for authenticity, or what Vannini (2007) described as "being true to one's self" (p. 65) and "the feeling that one's conduct is congruent with the meanings and values important to one's self" (p. 65). Such a search aligns with what Taylor (1991) called "the massive subjective turn of modern culture, a new form of inwardness, in which we come to think of ourselves as beings with inner depths" (p. 26). Reichenbach (1998), building on Taylor's work, defined the "master of self" as someone who believes in her capacity for agency and change and emancipation as both an inward journey and a struggle with forces outside the self. "The gap between the (modern) discourse of emancipation and the (modern) reality of injustice" (Reichenbach, 2002, p. 409) can be viewed as the impetus for many social movements. Living an authentic life, a form of resistance to the individualism and political disengagement, touches on the matter of hope. For Freire (1998), "Hope is an ontological need [that] demands an anchoring in practice" (p. 8). The aspiration of "doing the right thing" and contributing to "things that matter" is strongly related to the concept of hope, as expressed by Anne Lamott's (2007) quote: "Hope begins in the dark, the stubborn hope that if you just show up and to do the right thing, the dawn will come!"

These two areas of literature, feminist approaches to SML and philosophical discussions about the malaise of modernity and a search for authenticity, have guided our analysis of these women's profiles. This literature has sensitized our interpretation of these social activists' stories and we hope helps to contribute to a wider appreciation of their lives and work. Before discussing our findings, in the next section we outline our methodological approach.

Research Questions and Methodology

Our inquiry was organized around three key questions: (1) What were these women's motivations and inspirations? (2) What role did learning play in their social activism? and (3) How is social activism sustained? We brought these questions to bear on the profiles⁵ drafted by Liz Burge and edited by Gail Tayler, a professional editor in Ottawa, herself an activist.⁶ Burge selected women activists who were aged 65 and older, were currently living in Atlantic Canada (and had conducted a significant part of their activism in that area), and were publicly known as activists. She identified her participants by tapping into the networks she formed during her own activism in built heritage, aging, and sexism and by taking up suggestions from women's organizations such as Advisory Councils on the Status of Women. Burge used Whitmore, Wilson, and Calhoun's (2011) definition of activism: "Acting to bring about social, political, economic, or environmental change for a more just, sustainable and peaceful world" (p. 8).

Our analysis of Burge's profiles is informed by a narrative-interpretive approach. The term narrative, Hendry (2009) pointed out, "means 'to account' and is derived from the term *gno*, meaning to know" (p. 72). Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), quoting Mischler (1986), stated: "Narratives are one of the natural cognitive and linguistic forms through which individuals attempt to organize and express meaning and knowledge" (p. 153). Leggo (2005) pointed to the relation between narrative and identity: "We need to compose and tell our stories as creative ways of growing in humanness. We need to question our understanding of who we are in the world" (p. 115). Stories are not just about individuals, they are multivocal and grounded in culture, history, and politics, and they reflect interactions with others. Gouthro (2009a), who conducted life history interviews in her study about Canadian women social activists, pointed out that they "provide insights into linkages between individual experience and social/structural factors" (p. 20). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) believe that all human beings are storytellers and consider narrative inquiry as both a phenomenon and a research method.

In our analysis, we focused on the content rather than the form the narrative took (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashioc, & Zilber, 1998). We engaged in both analysis and interpretation, an important differentiation outlined by Wolcott (1994): "Analysis is a procedure that imposes order on the data themselves, no matter how unruly the data themselves" (p. 27); interpretation "transcends factual data and cautious analyses and begins to probe into what is to be made of them" (p. 27). We copied the profiles from the web and created Word documents that were paginated with added line numbers to aid in coding. We then read each profile, independently engaging in a line-by-line reading (Charmaz, 2006), and wrote summary reflections following each reading. We exchanged these reflections and then returned to the profiles and began an open coding of the texts (Saldaña, 2013).⁷ We created

5 Every woman had a chance to edit, revise, and add to her final publishable narrative.

6 In her interviews with the activists, Burge focused on social activism issues and beginnings, challenges and victories, lessons learned, and advice to offer. Burge's project was not focused on SML per se, and there were places in these profiles where we would have liked to explore the matter of learning in more detail.

7 Some of the initial in vivo codes included personal/family history, the role of personal relationships, community and private/public sphere, fields of action, political knowledge/learning, motivations, resistance, visions of justice, leadership, identity/authenticity, and hope.

narratives based on these codes, which we organized around the key questions, and linked these themes to concepts and ideas we had encountered in the literature. In the discussion below, quotes from these women's web-based profiles are identified by page and line number.

Findings

Motivations and Inspirations

Several overarching themes emerged from our analysis of the motivations and inspirations identified by these women that led to their engagement in social activism. Many indicated that their parents and family had been a strong inspiration and ethical foundation for their social activism. Speaking up was described by many as a significant shift from the private to the public realm, moments when they became actors in the wider public sphere. We also found a third theme in their profiles that is interrelated with the shift from private to public and that we interpret as a search for authenticity; making sense of one's own life by being part of something that goes "beyond the self" was a common refrain in these profiles. The failure to realize the promises of modernity, specifically individual freedom and equality, was, we argue, felt strongly by these women and was key to their motivations to become social activists.

From private beginnings to public engagements. As we considered these women's stories with respect to their motivations and inspirations, many spoke about how "the best way to live" was powerfully shaped by their families, who were the sites of inspiration and learning about their responsibilities to others and working for social change, a finding consistent with Parrish and Taylor (2007) and Gouthro (2009a). Sister Angelina Martz's activism began with the values instilled in her by her mother. She later entered a religious order and found a place to continue this commitment. Upon retirement, she became more involved in housing and environmental concerns. She recalled how during the Depression, those out of work often came to the family farm looking for food and shelter. "They were always treated with the greatest respect and given more than many would give" (p. 2, lines 2–3). Family, particularly her parents' Christian beliefs about the Golden Rule—"treating others as we wanted to be treated ourselves" (p. 3, lines 9–10)—was also an important foundation for Phyllis Artiss, who was a faculty member at Memorial University for over 40 years, where she carried out much of her social activism such as supporting Aboriginal students. Yvonne Atwell⁸ had learned from her mother that everyone should be treated equally (p. 3, line 28), but this philosophy was not evident as she considered the racial discrimination experienced by African Nova Scotians.

For many of these activists, "the personal is political" (Hanisch, 2006, p. 1) theme of feminist movements was a powerful starting point for their activism. As Stall and Stoecker (1998) noted, for these women, the boundaries between the private and the public sphere were blurred. We also see much evidence of a shift from the private to the public realm, or what C. Wright Mills (1959) in *The Sociological Imagination* called "translating private troubles into public issues." The women became involved in activism through their experiences of injustice in their everyday lives in mostly rural communities. Some started off as school teachers, others as clerks or volunteers in their community. Some got involved

8 Yvonne Atwell is one of the women portrayed in Gouthro (2009a).

in social activism through their connections to the church, others through their political activism. These profiles illustrate Fraser's (1997) standpoint, that the home and other sites of women's grassroots activism were important spaces for the development of oppositional discourses.

Speaking up and out. Several women noted that speaking out for the first time was a key moment when they spanned boundaries between the private and public sphere. For example, Sister Angelina Martz described her first public speaking event as a turning point in her activism: "I have something important to say and I must say it" (p. 11, line 16), and she prayed for strength as she spoke up for something that mattered. For the late Nancy Riche, who was a leading Canadian activist for workers' rights, her identity as a feminist proved to be foundational to her sense of political agency: "I might have lost a battle, but it was absolutely from that first day when I stood up and said, 'I'm a feminist,' that I thought it was important to put it out there all the time" (p. 7, lines 35–36). She recalled how she felt when she got quoted in an important meeting by a man: "I almost stood up and said, Hold it! I've just been quoted!" (p. 6, lines 8–9)

Marian Perkins, who was committed to supporting recovering alcoholics and their families as well as women prisoners, also referred to her first "speaking up" experience as the key moment that triggered her social activism. In Marian's case it was calling in anonymously on a radio program (p. 3, line 4). The late Maria Bernard, whose social activism was concerned with women's rights, particularly in francophone minority communities, reported how, on several occasions, speaking against what was expected of her (e.g., at meetings and conferences) was a turning point (p. 3, lines 24–25). Many others similarly defined their identity as social activists by "speaking" or "being the voice" for others. For the late Sister Kathrine Bellamy, who worked on housing, food banks, and other issues related to poverty, speaking for those who were not always able to raise their own voices was central to her activism. She spoke of being "just a voice for [people living in poverty]...just the informant" (p. 5, lines 6–7).

As these women asked questions and spoke out—stepping outside traditional roles for women—they often experienced challenges and resistance to their actions and thus witnessed discrimination in one way or another. For example, when Yvonne Atwell decided to run for public office, she recalled people around her being shocked. "People were not very nice to me, they made racist comments, sexist comments, like 'Who do you think you are?' and 'You don't know the issues'" (p. 5, lines 6–7). Traditional perspectives of women's proper place in the home or the domestic sphere were also evident in reactions to not only speaking up but the content of their speech. Several of these elder activists were often the only women present in public discussions of the issues with which they were concerned, and they were the lone voices challenging dominant perspectives.

According to Vannini (2007), "Turning points are essential for our understanding of authenticity across the lifetime" (p. 71). In the women's accounts, these turning points are often related to the experience of "speaking up," when their own feeling of self was recognized and confirmed by others. By speaking up, the women trespass the boundaries from the private to the public and become political actors. It was to a certain extent radical transgression given the patriarchal norms of that time. Hannah Arendt (1998) referred to Aristotle's term of *bios politikos* as the public and political realm in contrast to the private realm in the lives of human beings. The two activities that defined this political life,

according to Aristotle, were action and speech (p. 24–25): “Finding the right words at the right moment...is action” (p. 26).

A search for authenticity. Guignon (2004) defined authenticity as “a project of becoming the person you are” (p. 3), which implies the notion of finding and awakening the potential one has in oneself. But it is not only a self-related concept. Taylor (1991) defined it as “inwardly generated” (p. 47), but depending on the “dialogical relation with others” (p. 48), as “connected to a wider whole” (p. 91) and related to some kind of struggle with forces outside the self: “Authenticity will have to struggle against some externally imposed rules” (p. 63). Similarly, Frank (2002) sees authenticity as “a *dialogical* achievement” (emphasis in original, p. 112), one that “requires on-going dialogical recognition from others” (p. 113); it is about finding “identity in terms outside itself” (p. 115). In these profiles we see a search for authenticity as a kind of mastering of the self, which involves a dialogical relation with others and a strive toward emancipation. The women’s growing sense of a capacity for agency and change is framed by the narrative of emancipation: “[She] feels [she] lives an individual and personal life. [She] aims at emancipation by becoming authentic” (Reichenbach, 1998, p. 232).

A sense of disenchantment with modernity’s individualism was echoed in many women’s narratives. Sue Rickards described her growing awareness of the tension between notions such as “you get what you deserve” and “if you work hard, you’ll succeed” (p. 2, lines 34–35) and the reality she experienced in her work as a teacher in a high school in St. Lambert in Quebec. Rickards realized that although students might work as hard as they can, there are also structural and systemic factors at play in whether they succeed. As she observed: “You can work and work, but if you’re starting from a point way behind everybody else, you’re probably not going to succeed” (p. 3, lines 1–2).

In their resistance to the malaise of modernity, and in striving to answer the question “what shall we do and how shall we live?” these elder activists can be seen to be developing a sense of authenticity—that is, being true to oneself (Vannini, 2007). It emerges in almost all the women’s accounts through references to “the right thing to do” or “what is wrong,” references to “the inner voice” and the “moral anchor,” “finding the truth” or “being respected as a person.”

Many spoke about their desire to encourage other women to discover their true authenticity and “pursue some of the things that they want to do, and not to be tied down to the traditional roles that other people thought they should be filling” (Kathy Sheldon, whose community activism in Newfoundland involved building up women’s leadership skills, p. 9, lines 4–5). Yvonne Atwell saw her role as an activist in helping women “to critically examine the dynamics of their lives” (p. 7, lines 9–10) and “providing the opportunity for them to hear their own voice, and to be able to say ‘I can do this’” (p. 7, line 13). Sister Angelina Martz described her social activism as an experience that gave her “a sense of my own being that I didn’t have” (p. 11, line 18).

For Stella Lord, a sociologist and university professor who was involved in poverty-related activism, being true to oneself also involved creating meaning of our personally experienced injustice. “Like many other women at the time, I suppose I was also coming to terms with my own experience of inequality, my sense of identity, and my search for autonomy and meaning” (p. 3, lines 26–27). Building a coherence between one’s private and public lives was important for Ann Brennan, whose social activism was triggered by patriarchal attitudes toward women in the rural area where she lived. “We have to make

social change personally before we can make it publicly, become strong in our own personal centre" (p. 4, line 4). As Yvonne Atwell noted, when she looked back at her 40 years of community activism in the African Nova Scotian community and provincial politics, "being a social activist is a way of living every day" (p. 8, line 1).

In the women's stories, self-fulfillment was found in the struggle against forces that the women perceived as limitations to their lives and the lives of others, the injustices they experienced in their community. The women found authenticity when engaging with "things that matter" (Taylor, 1991, p. 40). In that way, authenticity is an expression of morality that can reconcile the individual with modernity, particularly the discourse of emancipation. According to Guignon (2004), one interpretation of authenticity "is to become a new person by becoming responsive to the call of something greater than yourself" (p. 8). Social activism for these women was a form of re-enchantment, a way of making sense of their own lives by being part of something that goes "beyond the self" (Frank, 2002, p. 115). As Betty Peterson noted, "I cannot imagine living in this world without working for social change" (p. 1, line 7).

The Role of Learning

As we considered these women's profiles with respect to their reflections on where, what, and how they learned their social activism, several themes emerged, including the importance of acquiring practical skills, learning about people and how to build connections, and learning how to critically analyze the root of problems. These areas of learning, which were acquired both formally and informally, echo Jesson and Newman's (2004, p. 261) three domains of activists' learning. We also find evidence of embodied learning.

Interpersonal skills and emotional learning. These activists spoke about building consensus and speaking from a political point of view as well as about interpersonal skills such as persistence, patience, empathy, and listening. Much of this learning occurred informally and was inseparable from learning on the job. For example, Betty Peterson recalled demonstrations as significant spaces for building community and linking with others. Her activism involved participation in the civil rights movement in the United States and later, after she moved to Halifax, her engagement with the Innu First Nation, which gave her the Innu name Kukuminash ("Old lady with a hug"). She recalled as one of her key experiences a demonstration march with thousands of people in New York, where the chants, speakers, and music contributed to a strong sense of belonging to a movement bigger than herself. Other powerful group experiences she referred to were singing together with her companions in jail when they were imprisoned during a protest. These moments resonated with her memories of her time with the Girl Scouts, from which she remembers the singing at the campfire and the "spiritual relationship with nature." Phyllis Artiss recalled the "totally amazing" (p. 7, line 27) experience of singing, dancing, marching, debating, sharing stories, eating together, and listening to inspiring speeches at the Women's Conference in Gander in 2000. Other women also referred to group experiences such as conferences, where they debated with many other women, often from different contexts and countries, as key moments in their activist lives.

These experiences speak to the importance of embodied and emotional learning in addition to cognitive or intellectual learning, which Ollis (2008, p. 316) observed in her study of activist learning: "[It] is not only cognitive but also embodied; it is learning often

associated with the emotions of passion, anger, desire and a commitment to social change.” Women’s knowledgeable as an embodied phenomenon has been taken up in various ways in feminist research (Butterwick & Selman, 2006; Grosz, 1994). Feminist philosopher Alison Jaggar (1989) challenged the mind–emotion binary evident in masculinist notions of rationality, calling attention to how emotions are important aspects of knowledgeable.

Indeed, our emotional responses to certain situations, as these women’s profiles illustrate, are clues to structural aspects of inequality and injustice. We saw evidence of this embodiment in activists’ expressions of frustrations as well as joy. Some of the women, such as Sister Joan O’Keefe, long-time coordinator of the Guardian Angel and Single Parent Centre in Halifax, referred to feelings of anger that spurred them in their activism. Anger can be a fuel, but as O’Keefe recommended, “get over feeling mad and act with deliberation, not just react from anger” (p. 8, line 14). As we have noted, for many of these women, speaking up was an emotional moment when they experienced anxiety but also a sense of agency and growing self-confidence. As Joan Hicks noted: “I don’t think most of us plan on becoming social activists. I think we get involved because something moves us to act” (p. 11, lines 2–3).

Practical and critical analysis skills. “My way of being a feminist and activist has been to learn skills” (p. 4, lines 26–27), said Mary Lou Stirling, a university teacher (and later professor) and activist for women’s rights. For Sister Joan O’Keefe, key skills included learning how to “hand deliver key letters to city councillors” (p. 5, lines 6–7). In addition to practical skills, many women emphasize the importance of critical analytical skills. Madeleine Gaudet, an activist for seniors’ affordable housing and later for improved working conditions for nurses, recalled how a basic labour relations training course was a major moment in her learning: “It was just as if I had been shot from a cannon!” (p. 3, lines 4–5). For Stella Lord, education helped her become savvier with the media and was a way to “gain a deeper understanding of the forces that were shaping our world and Canada” (p. 7, line 37). Obtaining a higher-education degree helped several of these women to “know their rights” (Yvonne Atwell, p. 2, line 38) and to learn a framework for critically analyzing and understanding the origins of problems as the precondition to change. Learning through experience as well as formal education was, for Edith Perry, crucial for undertaking “sharper digging into the root causes of injustice and inequality” (p. 5, lines 43–44). Viola Robinson, who advocated for the rights of Mi’kmaq people and Aboriginal and treaty rights in Nova Scotia and Canada, spoke about the importance of analyzing in order to “establish the issue precisely: is it discrimination? Racism? Inequality? Violence?” (p. 8, line 24). Similarly, Stella Lord outlined the development of her knowledge about the “underlying structures and legacies of capitalism, patriarchy, and colonialism” (p. 1, line 7).

Many women noted that they learned change is a slow process and difficult to achieve and involves not only self-education but education of the wider public. As Edith Perry reflected: “It’s more complicated and more difficult to change policy and how things are done because you have to educate yourself and everyone else around you” (p. 5, line 30). Perry was involved in politics, labour issues, and women’s rights in Prince Edward Island for most of her life and described how she learned to see more clearly over time as she looked at things in a “more analytical” way: “As you become a little more exposed to the outside world and a little more knowledgeable, you begin to put a finger on what’s wrong with this picture” (p. 3, lines 4–5). In Perry’s and others’ reflections we see evidence of Sandoval’s (2000) different forms of consciousness, moments when they evoked a kind of

oppositional consciousness and other times, particularly when they collaborated and built consensus, when their differential consciousness was operating.

As they learned skills for social change, many of the women came to a significant understanding of the difference between discourses of "helping" or "charity" and those of "justice" or "fairness." This difference has been explored by many, including Freire (1970) and Horton and Freire (1990). According to Sister Joan O'Keefe, "Charity is like a 'feel good'—if I help somebody, it's concrete; it gives me a warm feeling. Justice is the hard work" (p. 4, line 15). From Edith Perry's perspective, charity is an obstacle to change: "The system in Canada...is based on the charity model, not the social justice model" (p. 5, line 32–33). Mary Lou Stirling experienced discrimination in the academic environment at the University of New Brunswick. As a woman she felt the limitation of not having access to systems of knowledge that would have enabled her to defend herself against this injustice. She described this "tension between helping and fairness as 'a big paradox' that took her decades more to fully comprehend and resolve" (p. 4, line 16).

Sustaining Social Activism

What sustains social engagement is a key concern in studies of SML. Our analysis of these women's profiles pointed to the significance, for these women, of collaborating and building social relationships. Another key theme that emerged later in our reflections came at a time when we were speaking to each other about what was inspiring about these stories of activism. We realized these profiles were pointing to hope as key to moving forward.

Collaboration and relationships. The stories illustrate the significance of personal and social relationships and networks as key to sustaining engagement in social activism. Solidarity, collaboration, and being with people who share similar values and concerns gave a sense of comfort and meaning to these women: "Social activism...brings you together—connecting, learning, growing" (Yvonne Atwell, p. 5, line 17). Phyllis Artiss pointed to how she "developed a strong sense of community around our shared values and activities" (p. 6, lines 21–22).

Kathy Sheldon felt a strong attachment to friends and people who had encouraged and supported her: "The first thing I learned is how strong the ties and friendships are between women and how much support and encouragement we give one another" (p. 8, lines 8–9). Edith Perry said, "The number one point is you have to be part of a group" (p. 7, line 18). Ann Bell, who started her activism as a member of the nurses' union and later led the provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women, was convinced "that collaboration with like-minded colleagues is necessary to create change" (p. 9, line 39). Many evoked the principles of "compassion," "caring for others," and "trust." While aspects of collaboration, relatedness, and care are emphasized in the stories, they also point to how confrontation and conflict were central to social action. Kathy Sheldon told us about a major conflict she experienced in her life as an activist. Some of her own colleagues in the Women's Institute refused to work with women from other groups, as they denigrated them as "feminists" whose work reached "beyond the private domestic sphere into the public policy sphere" (p. 5, line 19). Kathy received "nasty" letters, and the conflict led to some women leaving the Women's Institute. This reinforces what English (2005) argued, that while a caring and collaborative approach is evident in women's activism, they are also working directly with conflict and at times using confrontation in their actions.

Hope. Some women found it difficult to remain engaged in social action. “No matter what you decide and do, it hardly ever reaches the people who need it the most” (p. 7, line 4), said Kathy Sheldon. Many stressed the importance of valuing the “small victories,” which prevents social activists from becoming frustrated. “You may fail, but you’ll learn from failure to go on and do things better” (Maria Bernard, p. 8, line 22). Sister Angelina Maartz believes that even when a cause seems hopeless, it is necessary to stand up and say “this is wrong, this has to change” (p. 2, line 30). Sister Dorothy Moore encouraged others “never to give up on themselves” (p. 8, line 3). She gained a sense of hope when she saw a child who could speak her native language: “Here is our future generation keeping us alive!” (p. 8, lines 12–13). Freire (2004) made an important distinction about being hopeful as mere stubbornness and hopefulness as “an existential, concrete imperative” (p. 8). We can find this imperative in statements such as the one by Marian Perkins: “You can expect the exhilaration and inner satisfaction of knowing you are doing the right thing” (p. 9, lines 22–23). In response to critics who challenge the importance of hope in struggles for justice, Freire (2004) described hope as necessary but not enough. “Alone, it does not win. But without it, my struggle will be weak and wobbly. We need critical hope the way a fish needs unpolluted water” (p. 2). Being hopeful is a direct confrontation to claims that exploitation based on race, gender, and class, which underpins capitalist globalization, is inevitable and natural. Faced with what seems to be a massive juggernaut of market-driven global change fueled by exploitation and injustices, it is difficult not to slide into a sense of hopelessness. As Freire (2004) outlined in his discussion of the dialectic between consciousness and material reality,

the dialectical view is incompatible with the notion that *tomorrow* is the pure repetition of today, or that *tomorrow* is something “predated”, or... a *given datum*...this tamed or domesticated view of the future...posits... the future as a repetition of the present...and as inexorable progress...a fatalistic “intelligence”...of history [has] no room for authentic hope. (emphasis in original, p. 101)

Freire (2004) pointed to the role of the progressive educator who, “through a serious, correct political analysis, is to unveil opportunities for hope, no matter what the obstacles may be” (p. 3). We see the learning of these women activists and the development of their skills of critical analysis as illustrating how these women’s challenges to various forms of oppression were full of hope. SML, as illustrated by these profiles, is thus about recognizing injustice and understanding its etiology, but it is equally as important that SML involves seeing the opportunities to change that challenges a “tamed” view of the future.

Implications and Conclusions

These web profiles provide a rich source of knowledge about women’s social activism, in particular, their SML. Gathering stories from elder activists is an urgent matter in light of

the assaults on social activist organizations currently under way.⁹ We strongly encourage similar projects be undertaken in other parts of Canada and, following Burge's example, that an intergenerational approach be built into these inquiries, bringing elder and younger activists together to share their stories. Much knowledge could be generated if these projects were part of a larger network of inquiries linked together and asking similar overarching questions about the what, how, where, and why of SML.

Our analysis of these 27 elder women activists' profiles contributes to the study of SML in several ways. First, we have drawn attention to how "speaking up" and turning "private troubles" into "public issues" were key moments when the boundaries between private and public were transgressed, and to how learning to transgress and resist involves analytic, interpersonal, and practical skills as well as emotional learning. A second key contribution of our inquiry speaks to what counts as evidence of social change. Social justice movements often emphasize changing policy and structures as key goals of social activism. The activists' forms of resistance interrupted traditional and patriarchal views of women's roles and assumptions about inequalities as being normal and natural. These were major transgressions that can be transformative for the individual and those who bear witness to such actions (Willis, 2012). These profiles helped us to see social and transformative change not just as something that is a future goal of social movements, but rather as occurring in the everyday processes of social movements (Carrillo, 2009).

Thirdly, our study points to the significance of building networks and relationships and engaging collectively as keys to social change. We are reminded of Margaret Mead's oft-quoted message: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."¹⁰ A fourth key finding we believe is important to studies of SML is the distinction these elder activists made between charity and social justice. As governments retreat from the social contract, social services funds are reduced, and social services are being downloaded onto civil society organizations, will there be a shift from these organizations' earlier social justice mandates toward a helping or charity model? These profiles can be inspiration to those working within these agencies, positioned outside of what are traditionally viewed as activist sites.

A final contribution of this study is our framing of SML as a search for authenticity and as a form of resistance to Taylor's "malaises of modernity" and its attendant disenchantment and how such resistance and political engagement must be grounded in hope. If we were not hopeful that things could change, then speaking up and taking action would seem futile. We see in these women's profiles a dialectic between hope and action, a relationship outlined by Freire (2004). If there is no sense of hope, no action would be taken. Being hopeful is a form of political intervention that can interrupt views such as those expressed by Wendy Brown (2005), who mourns the loss of "our dreams for a better world" (p. 112), and Hannah Arendt's (1998) "world alienation," which is reflected in Reichenbach's (2002)

9 For example, the Canada Revenue Agency has been denying charitable status to several social justice organizations. Similar shifts in government policy are also occurring in the United Kingdom (see <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/cra-auditing-church-based-advocacy-group-kairos/article19763308/> and <http://www.theguardian.com/law/2013/nov/17/human-dignity-trust-charity-commission>).

10 Please see the website of the Institute for Intercultural Studies, <http://www.interculturalstudies.org/faq.html#quote>, in lieu of a reference for this quote.

views on the “exhausted modernity,” in which the late modern person’s “heart is...no longer attached to the project of human betterment” (p. 410).

We close with an expression of gratitude to these 27 elder social activists for their time and thoughts and to Liz Burge for capturing this wisdom for the benefit of others. The profiles of these 27 elder women activists are a rich source of knowledge, and we encourage others to explore them for their research and pedagogical value. As Frank (2002) noted, gathering and examining stories about collective social change can “initiate a significant political intervention” (p. 116) and help us understand collective social change as an “ongoing struggle...toward a moral life” (p. 115). And so we give the last word to Stella Lord:

There is always a glimmer of something on the other side: you focus on these things, the world doesn’t end.

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